

# What Happens After Death



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

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Learn About What Happens After Death

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## Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

**Study Number:** DGW185

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**About the author:** My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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**My plea:** It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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What Happens After Death?

# Lesson 1: The Nature Of Man And The Certainty Of Death

There are many questions that folks have about what happens at and after death – and there are many different opinions and teachings that exist on this subject. Some say that when you die, you forever cease to exist. Some say that you are reincarnated after you die (and come back in some other life form). Some say that you have a soul that continues to exist after death. I am sure that this only represents a small portion of the various teachings and opinions on this subject.

With all of these differences in opinions on the subject, how can we possibly arrive at the right conclusion? Can we ever really be certain about the things that are awaiting us at and after death? Or, must we simply wait until we experience death ourselves?

Think about it for a moment. Those who are dead cannot tell us about what they have experienced or what they are experiencing. Now, this is not to say that there are not people who have been pronounced “dead” for a very short time and then restored to life. Some of these individuals have even found a level of fame by trying to share their experiences. However, recent news headlines demonstrate that you cannot always trust these stories. For instance, Kevin and Alex Malarkey wrote a book that was published by a major “Christian book” publisher (Tyndale House)

called, “The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven.” This best-selling book, which began to be published in 2010, tells a story about Alex and his claimed death and experiences in Heaven. However, Alex surprised many whenever he set the record straight, saying “I did not die. I did not go to Heaven.” Instead, he admitted that he lied in order to get attention. [‘Boy Who Came Back From Heaven’ actually didn’t; books recalled. (n.d.). Retrieved April 28, 2015, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/style-blog/wp/2015/01/15/boy-who-came-back-from-heaven-going-back-to-publisher/>].

So, not only can those who have experienced death not tell us about what they have experienced or are experiencing; but, those who are living cannot tell us about what we can expect to experience – beyond their own basic observations. Yet, these basic observations about death can only provide some basic insight into the process involved in experiencing death. They cannot tell us anything about what (if anything) happens after death.

How, then, can we know the answer to the question, “What happens after death?” Only God knows the full answer to this question! But, fortunately for us, God has revealed some things to us throughout the pages of the Bible (which contains the words of God, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Within the pages of the Bible, we have been given all of the answers about death and what happens after death that we need to know in order to help us live in a way that is approved of God. 2 Peter 1:3 indicates that God has given us all things we need to know that pertains to “life and godliness.” So, our focus should be upon what God’s word teaches us in response to the question, “What happens after death?”

There is certainly a great need to gain a proper understanding of what awaits us at and after death! If we are honest with ourselves and believe what the Bible teaches about this subject, we will desire to prepare our lives for death – recognizing that the ways in which we choose to live will have eternal implications for us! If, however, we choose to deny the teachings of Scripture on this subject, it will not change the reality of the things we will discuss!

This series of lessons, then, is aimed at helping you to gain an accurate understanding of what happens after death – and how the answer ought to impact your life! The purpose of this first lesson is

to help you reach two fundamental realizations that are necessary to this study: (1) We all have souls that will survive physical death and (2) We will all die.

## The Nature Of Man

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A proper understanding of the things which happen at and after death begins with a proper understanding of our nature. How has God created us? If we have only been created as physical beings, then we cease to exist whenever our physical lives end. However, if we have been created with another element to our existence, then we will continue to experience *something* after we die physically.

### Man is a dual-natured being

Upon examination of the Scriptures, we learn of the fact that man is a dual-natured being. There is a physical element to man's existence. And, there is a spiritual element to man's existence.

This fact that man is a dual-natured being is a most significant fact that separates him from all other physical things. All other things with physical elements to their existence (i.e. plants and animals) are *only* physical in nature. They have no spiritual element to their existence. However, mankind has been created in this very special way. We'll consider the evidence for this claim and the implications of this claim momentarily.

### Man's physical nature

Genesis 2:7 describes how God created man: "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 2:21-23 then describes how God made woman: "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.'"

Both of these passages demonstrate that God gave man and woman a physical element to their existence. Of course, this physical element to man's

existence can easily be understood by basic observation.

### Man's spiritual nature

The Scriptures do not *just* teach that mankind has been created by God with a physical existence. Instead, the Scriptures teach that God also gave mankind a spiritual element to his existence. Notice what is recorded in the Genesis 1 account of the creation of man: "Then God said, '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.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

Therefore, mankind has been created in the image of God! What image is that? What does this possibly help us to understand about the nature of man? Consider John 4:24 – and a statement Jesus makes about God's nature. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." "God is Spirit." He is not a physical being with a physical body (although Jesus did exist for a short time in human form). Therefore, whenever the Genesis record says that man has been made in the image of God, this cannot refer to a physical resemblance. Instead, it must refer to the fact that mankind has been created with a spiritual element to his existence!

In fact, as we will continue to see, the Scriptures plainly demonstrate the truth that mankind has been created with a spiritual element (a soul) that will survive physical death and will continue to exist beyond this physical life on earth. However, before moving on to consider some other passages that further demonstrate this fact, look back at the Genesis 1 record of creation and observe that *only* mankind has been created with this spiritual element to his existence! You simply never read about God creating any of the other physical things (i.e. plants and animals) with a spiritual element to their existence. It was only mankind who was created in the image of God – and was given dominion over all of the other physical things on this earth!

Well, having established that mankind has been created with this spiritual element to his existence, let's now plainly understand that this

spiritual element (soul) of man survives physical death. Consider the following passages as evidence.

**(1) Luke 20:37-38:** “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.’ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.”

In this text, Jesus points to the burning bush passage in Exodus 3 to answer the question identified in Luke 20:27-33. The Sadducees (a sect of Jews who denied the resurrection and the existence of the spirit, see also Acts 23:8) asked Jesus a question concerning the resurrection. Their question involved a complicated scenario concerning a series of seven brothers each taking the same woman as wife after a brother would die and bear no children. Then, they ask, “in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife.”

Jesus begins to answer their question by responding that the marriage is a physical relationship that only exists here on this earth. After the resurrection, there will be no more marriage or giving in marriage – nor is there any more death. Then, Jesus makes reference (in verses 37-38) to the burning bush passage to prove that the dead are raised. He said that there is evidence that the dead are raised in the statement the Lord made to Moses when He identified Himself as, “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Now, Jesus said, God is not the God of the dead; but of the living! Therefore, whenever God claims to *be* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob years after these individuals have experienced physical death, this is proof that these individuals (and everyone who has experienced physical death) still continue to exist!

**(2) Luke 16:22-23:** “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.”

This passage finds itself in the context of Jesus' teaching concerning two individuals – a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Jesus' teaching begins by describing how these two individuals lived very different physical lives. One man had all the things he desired to have; while the other man was full of sores and desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

However, Jesus' statement in verses 22 and 23 concerning these two individuals indicate that both men experienced physical death.

However, please notice that both of these individuals continued to exist after the point of their physical deaths. The beggar (Lazarus) was “carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom” and the rich man found himself “in torments in Hades.” The text, then, goes on to record a conversation between the rich man and Abraham and details the great torment that the rich man was experiencing after his physical death. Therefore, this passage (which we'll study in greater detail in another lesson) demonstrates the basic fact that there is something we will experience after death; that our souls do in fact survive physical deaths. The physical element was not the only part of their existence!

**(3) Luke 23:43:** “And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”

This passage comes in the context of Jesus' crucifixion. At the time of His crucifixion, Jesus was being crucified between two thieves. During this time, one of the two thieves demonstrated a penitent heart, rebuking the other thief who was blaspheming Jesus. He said, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we have received the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40-41). Then, this man continued and said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

Then, Jesus tells this man that he would be with Him in Paradise that day (verse 43). Now, from a physical perspective, all three of these men would die (as they were all hanging on their crosses, experiencing physical deaths). However, Jesus' statement indicates that both the thief and Jesus would continue to exist beyond their physical deaths! There was more to their existence than just the physical existence. For Jesus and this penitent thief, their physical deaths marked the point at which they would go to Paradise (we'll talk about this in greater detail in lesson 2).

**(4) James 2:26:** “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

In this text, James was writing concerning the necessity of works for salvation. He states that mentally accepting the fact that Jesus Christ is the

Son of God is not sufficient for salvation. In fact, James says that faith without works is dead – multiple times in this passage (James 2:14-26). He even demonstrates this fact by saying the “demons believe – and tremble” (verse 19), implying that the demons will not be saved because of their mental acceptance of Jesus Christ. Instead, James says that “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (verse 24).

While James is making these basic points relative to the necessity of works of obedience for salvation (not works of merit, as Paul talks about in Ephesians 2:8-9), he gives us some information relative to the survival of man’s soul past the point of physical death. Again, verse 26 says that faith without works is just as dead as the physical body is without the spirit! So, we can conclude that our bodies and spirits will one day be separated. When this happens, the physical body is identified by James as being “dead.” However, no such thing is said about the spirit whenever it leaves the physical body! In fact, others passages are helping us to see that the spirit (soul) of mankind survives this separation!

**(5) 2 Corinthians 5:1-8:** “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

Just prior to making these statements, Paul wrote concerning his great hope in that which is unseen and eternal (in 4:16-18). In that passage, he speaks of both the “outward man” and the “inward man.” The outward man was perishing due to the affliction he was experiencing and the natural aging process. However, his inward man was “being renewed day by day” as he was looking for the eternal things God has promised to reveal!

In this context, Paul makes some further observations to the Corinthians concerning his outward man and inward man (in 5:1-8). Paul plainly identifies a time when his physical existence (his “earthly house”) would be “destroyed.” He even references this physical existence as a “tent” (note that a tent is only a temporary structure). However, Paul does not begrudge the thought of this time when his physical existence would end. He does not say that physical death would be the end. Instead, he said that he groaned while in this “tent” – looking for the time when he could be further clothed with the heavenly body God has promised (see also 1 Corinthians 15:50-58)! Again, Paul is eagerly anticipating this time when he could be “absent from the body” and be “present with the Lord.” Clearly, Paul was looking forward to a continued spiritual existence after his physical death!

### **The importance of these truths**

Each one of these passages help us to understand that the physical element to our existence is not all that God has created us to have. Instead, these passages all demonstrate that mankind continues to exist *somewhere* after our lives on earth come to an end. But, what should these important truths mean for us today?

**(1) They have implications for how we live our physical lives.** We should know that this life is not all there is! We should know that we will all continue to exist *somewhere* after our earthly lives end. This, then, should cause us to evaluate whether there is any connection between the way in which we live our lives and where our souls will continue to exist. If so, we should desire to live in the way that will result in the best possible outcome. Therefore, the truths we have just established have the potential to completely transform the ways in which we choose to live our earthly lives!

**(2) They have implications for what happens to us after we die.** The truths we have been establishing also have great implications for us to build upon as we seek the answer to the question, “What happens after death?” We can already know that we will not cease to exist at the point of physical death. Therefore, we can build upon this realization and continue our search for the truth about what God says *will* happen to us after we die.

Having established these basic points and this essential foundation, I want to encourage you to

continue thinking about the question, “What happens after death?”

## The Certainty Of Death

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Now that we have established the fact that man is a dual-natured being while he lives on this earth – possessing both physical and spiritual elements to his existence, let’s investigate some Bible truths about the subject of death itself.

### All will die

We are constantly reminded of the fact that death is in the world – and that no one is exempt from it! We can look around us and observe that things are dying. Plants die. Trees die. Animals die. And, not only are all of these things dying; but, people are dying all around us. Take a look in the obituary section of your local newspaper and take a moment just to reflect on how many people who live in your community have died in the last couple of days! Our loved ones die. Our acquaintances die. Famous people die – from presidents to athletes to wealthy businessmen/women to actors and singers, etc.

In fact, when you really stop to think about it – we are all dying! We are all *right now* experiencing the aging process. And, as we age, we inch closer and closer to physical death. So, as we look around and observe the death that is going on all around us, we should be reminded of the fact that we are all dying!

We simply cannot escape the constant reminder that death is a common reality for all of mankind! But, the Bible tells us this is so. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 says, “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted.” Simply put: There is a time to die – for yourself and for everything and everyone around us.

Now, this is not necessarily a fact that we like to think about, but it is a reality. However, rather than attempting to live in denial of this fact, we are taught that we need to embrace its reality and that these reminders of physical death are actually very valuable for us – and better than being engaged in recreation! Ecclesiastes 7:2 says, “Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living

will take it to heart.” It is “better” not because it is more enjoyable; but, because it is more profitable to us in providing us with the reminder of our own impending physical deaths and the need to make the necessary preparations for that time!

So, the Scriptures clearly demonstrate that there is a time to die we must all simply embrace and prepare for. Hebrews 9:27 says, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” We each have appointments with death. However, we simply do not know when our appointments are. Still, we can know for certain that we will experience physical death at some time in the future – and that there will be a Judgment after this.

Therefore, we will go “the way of all the earth.” Two prominent Bible characters recognized and embraced the fact that they were going the same way of death as everyone who lives/has lived has gone/will go. In Joshua 23:14, Joshua said, “Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth.” In 1 Kings 2:2, David told his son, Solomon, “I go the way of all the earth.”

We will each go the “way of all the earth.” None of us will be able to take a different way! We will all experience physical death – regardless of our culture, national, educational, political, or financial backgrounds! An illustration of this point can be seen from Luke 16:19-22. Remember, from our earlier discussion, that this passage describes the fact that both the rich man (who lived a life of ease and comfort) and Lazarus (a poor beggar whose body was full of sores) died. The different way they lived their lives did not change the fact that they would experience death. This is because death is the common fate of all mankind!

### The duration of life

As you recognize and consider the reality of death, it would also be profitable to know what God teaches concerning the lengths of our lives. And, as you have likely observed during your own life, understand that there is no guaranteed length for your life. Some die when they are well advanced in years. Some die when they are very young. Some die of natural causes that result from the aging process when they are old. Some die suddenly as the result of fatal accidents. Therefore, the only guarantee concerning the length of our lives is that there is no guarantee!

Concerning the length of our physical lives, the Psalmist wrote, “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” (Psalm 90:10). So, a realistic life expectancy has been 70 years. However, sometimes a realistic life expectancy is longer or shorter than this stated 70 years. Either way, this is no guarantee from God for at least 70 years of life on earth! Many never live that long. Others live many years beyond 70 – and even beyond 80 years. Still, you should notice that at the end of these years is physical death – as our earthly lives are cut off and we “fly away.”

No matter how long we will live on this earth, we can know that it will not be long! Consider what James writes in James 4:13-16: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas 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. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”

This passage helps us to see that we should be careful about making plans for the future – because our lives might not last long enough to fulfill those plans! Rather, we should be making plans with this understanding – making our plans in full recognition of the will of the Lord! Only if it is according to the will of the Lord will we live and do “this or that.” We must realize that our lives are not permanent fixtures upon this earth. Instead, as James describes, our lives are more accurately compared to a “vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” To understand this picture, boil a pot of water and watch the steam rise – and then vanish quickly from sight. That is your life on this earth! You are only here for a very short time! In fact, the man who lived the longest life (according to records we have) was Methuselah, who lived 969 years before he died (Genesis 5:27). And, though this amount of years seems like a very long time to us, it is still very short in comparison to eternity!

## **What is death?**

We are typically able to distinguish when someone is dead or alive. But, what really is death? There are actually two elements involved in physical

death: (1) The separation of the soul and body, and (2) Vital functions of the body cease.

### **(1) The separation of the soul and body.**

While there are certainly physical elements to death (which we’ll consider in a few moments), the Bible also gives us even greater insight into the process of death. For instance, consider James 2:26 again: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Therefore, in addition to the physical things that happen at death, the Bible says that the spirit departs from the body.

Death, then, is a separation. Man experiences physical death whenever the physical part of his existence and the spiritual part of his existence separate. Man simply is not alive without the soul! This is further demonstrated in Luke 12:20. In the context of a parable about a rich man who put all of his focus and trust in physical things, Jesus said that God told him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” Thus, again you notice the connection between the soul of man and his physical life – and how that physical life ends whenever the soul is taken away.

Also consider the implications from Peter’s statement in 2 Peter 1:14. In verses 12-13, he speaks of the need to offer reminders to his Christian brothers as long as he was in his “tent” (his earthly body). Knowing, he says (in verse 14), “that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.” Just as we saw in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, Peter describes his earthly body as a temporary dwelling for his soul. But, there would be a time when this “tent” would be put off and he would be clothed with a permanent spiritual body (see also 1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

### **(2) Vital functions of the body cease.**

From all of this, we can conclude that death occurs whenever the spiritual element of man’s existence (his soul) separates from the physical body! Then, whenever this occurs, we learn that the functions of our physical bodies cease and the body begins to decay. Psalm 146:4 says, “His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish.” We will focus on the spiritual existence of an individual after death in the next couple of lessons. In these lessons, we will try to gain an accurate understanding of what happens to the soul of man after physical death. For a brief moment, however, let’s focus on what happens to the physical body after



physical death (that is, after the soul departs from the body).

When the soul departs from the body, we take our last breath. Consider the following passages.

- 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.”
- Genesis 25:17: “These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.”
- Genesis 35:29: “So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”
- Genesis 49:33: “And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.”
- Luke 23:46: “And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, “into Your hands I commit My spirit.”’ Having said this, He breathed His last.”
- Acts 5:5: “Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.”
- Acts 5:10: “Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.”

So, at death, the normal and vital functions of our physical bodies cease. The functions of our brains stop. The functions of our hearts stop. The functions of our lungs to breathe stop. The movements of our bodies stop. Then, after these vital functions stop, our bodies begin to decay. Again, Psalm 146:4 demonstrated that our spirits depart and our bodies return to the earth. After Adam and Eve sinned, God told Adam, “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” (Genesis 3:19). Our physical bodies, therefore, go through a natural decaying process after death (i.e. after our souls depart from our bodies).

**(3) Death, then, is likened to “sleep.”** In Luke 8:52, after Jairus’ daughter had died, Jesus said, “Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping.” Of course, Jesus was about to perform a miracle and restore her to life – as Jesus took her by the hand and called her, saying, “Little girl, arise” (Luke 8:54), and her “spirit returned and she arose immediately” (Luke 8:55). Therefore, Jesus used the term “sleep” in reference to her death because of its temporary nature and her impending resurrection from the dead. The same thing can be observed regarding Lazarus in John 11:11 when Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”

However, the same terminology is used generally regarding death – because (as we will see in the coming lessons) there is an impending resurrection from the dead that will be experienced by all (John 5:28-29)! For instance, Acts 7:60 says that Stephen “fell asleep” as he was being stoned. Then, Acts 8:1 says that Saul was “consenting to his death.” Furthermore, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 talks about those who have “fallen asleep” in Jesus Christ – and assures that they will take part in the Day of Jesus’ return.

Now, does the fact that death is likened to “sleep” mean that there is no conscious existence after death? Some folks use Ecclesiastes 9:4-5 to prove this is the case. The text says, “But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten.”

Do the dead know nothing at all – in the sense of having no consciousness? Consider verse 6: “Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun.” This verse helps us to understand that the discussion in verses 4-5 is relative to the things that take place “under the sun” (on this earth). Thus, the fate of those who are dead are sealed. They no longer have a part in that which takes place on the earth!

In addition, Luke 16:19-31 (which I referenced earlier in this lesson) is a passage that shows conscious existence after death (for both the

righteous and the wicked). Particularly, we are given greater detail concerning the rich man in torments. Though we will discuss the specifics of the passage in the next lesson. For now, simply notice how this passage discusses his conscious existence after death. The rich man could see (verse 23), speak (verse 24), feel pain (verse 25), and remember (verses 27-28). Clearly, Jesus teaches a conscious existence after death!

So, why is death likened to sleep? There are two things to consider. First, for the *righteous*, physical death brings rest. This can be seen with Lazarus in Abraham's bosom in Luke 16:25. And, notice what is said concerning those who die in the Lord in Revelation 14:13. "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: "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.'"

Second, death is likened to sleep because those who have died are awaiting the promised resurrection. In John 5:28-29, Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." So, those who have died are in a temporary state – between earthly life and eternity (just like sleep is a temporary condition). We'll talk more about the nature of this temporary state in our next lesson.

## Why do we have to die?

Before closing this lesson, let's consider some fundamental questions that we all ask: Why do I have to die? Why do my loved ones have to die? Then, as we answer these questions, let's make sure that we appeal to the Scriptures to find the answer – rather than becoming angry and blaming God for the presence of physical death in this world!

We are shown in the Scriptures that God did not create physical death whenever He created the world. In the beginning, when God had created man, He placed man in the Garden of Eden and gave mankind access to the tree of life (Genesis 2:8-9). This tree would give man the ability to live forever (Genesis 3:22).

So, God made all of the necessary provisions for man to live forever by taking of the Tree of Life. However, death entered the world whenever man

sinned against God. In Genesis 2:16-17, God gave man a law to follow. He commanded that he not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned, "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Whenever Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:1-6), they experienced spiritual death (separation from God) in that day. However, as God also pronounced physical punishments for their sin, He identified that man would die and his body would return to the dust of the earth (Genesis 3:19) and he would be separated from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22).

Thus, death entered the world at that time – and remains in the world today. Consider 1 Corinthians 15:21-22: "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." Physical death entered the world through Adam and continues to this day (and has claimed many as victims). However, there is victory over death that is promised through Jesus Christ. Later in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that death will be "swallowed up in victory" – the victory that is provided "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). However, in order to experience this victory, 1 Corinthians 15:58 says that we must be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"!

Therefore, as we constantly interact with reminders about death, let it constantly remind us of the consequences of sin. Death is not God's fault. It is man's fault. In fact, all of the negative things we experience in this world is not the result of God being cruel. Instead, it is the consequence of the rebellion that took place in the Garden of Eden. However, because God is a loving God, He has given each one of us the opportunity to find salvation from the sins we commit through Jesus Christ and be given eternal life in Heaven – and be granted access to the Tree of Life in that place (see Revelation 22:1-5). We'll talk more about what God has prepared for those who faithfully serve Him throughout their lives later in this study.

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## Conclusion

We have certainly not exhausted everything that could be considered about our subject today. However, I hope that what has been said is beneficial

to you. In addition, the points we have considered will serve as a good foundation for us to begin building over the next couple of lessons.

First, we have established that mankind is a dual-natured being who has a soul that survives physical death. Second, we have established that we will all experience death some day – and considered what it means to die physically and why physical death is something we must experience. In our next lesson, we will build on this foundation and discuss Hades (the temporary realm of the dead) and the return of Jesus Christ (and the things we are told will happen on that Day).

## Study Questions

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How can you know what happens after death?

### 1. The Nature Of Man

How is mankind different from all other physical creatures?

Does mankind have a physical aspect to his existence? Explain.

Does mankind have a spiritual aspect to his existence? Does the spiritual part of man survive physical death? List and explain passages to prove your answers.

What impact will these truths have on our lives?

### 2. The Certainty Of Death

How do you know that everything/everyone will die?

How long will you live on earth? What does James 4:13-16 help you understand about the duration of life?

What is death? Explain the two elements involved in experiencing physical death.

\*What will happen to the physical body?

\*Why is death likened to “sleep”?

\*Is there conscious existence after death?

Why does death exist in the world today?

**\*Summarize what you have learned in this study.**

What Happens After Death?

# Lesson 2: Hades And The Return Of Christ

revealed to us by God in His word! And, as we study these things, there will likely be some questions we have that have not been answered. In these areas, let's remember that God has revealed everything that is necessary for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) – and that the secret things belong to the Lord (Deuteronomy 29:29). Let us simply be determined to accept (by faith) the answers God has given us and determine to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11), speaking where He speaks and being silent where He is silent!

The purpose of this second lesson is to establish what the Bible teaches concerning (1) Hades and (2) The return of Jesus Christ.

## Hades

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In our first study, we established that mankind possess a soul that survives physical death. We established that this separates mankind from all the rest of God's earthly creation – as it is only mankind that has been made in the image of God. Then, we established that physical death is a certainty, we identified two things involved in physical death, and answered the question, “Why do we have to die?”

While we have discussed what happens to the physical body upon death, we have not yet focused much on what happens to the soul after death. Beginning in this lesson (having established the foundations in lesson 1 concerning the soul of man and death), we want to put our focus on the things we are taught will happen to the soul upon physical death.

This has been the subject of a great amount of speculation and false teaching. Some say that there is no conscious existence after death. Some say that Jesus Christ has already returned (in A.D. 70). Some say that there will be a place called “purgatory.” Some say that there will be a rapture. Some say that there will be a great battle called “Armageddon.” Some say that there will be an earthly 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ upon His return.

As we begin this second lesson, remember what we established at the beginning of lesson 1. Remember that the only way we can know about the spiritual realm and what happens to our souls after death is by studying the things that have been

In lesson 1, we established that death involves the cessation of vital functions of the body as well as the separation of the body and the spirit. The body, we discussed, will turn back to dust. But, what about the spirit/soul? We established that the soul of man survives physical death. But how?

### What is “Hades”?

The first thing the Scriptures help us to understand regarding the soul after it departs from the body concerns the subject of Hades. Unfortunately, there has been some unnecessary confusion on this subject because of the way translators of the King James Version translated the Greek word for Hades in a couple of passages. For instance, in Matthew 16:18 and Acts 2:27, the King James Version has the word for “Hades” as “Hell.”

However, as we will see through this study, whenever the Bible speaks concerning “Hades,” it is speaking of something entirely different than when it speaks concerning “Hell.” Therefore, the words cannot be used interchangeably. “Hell” (as we'll study in the next lesson) refers to an eternal place of punishment that is reserved for those who have been disobedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, “Hades” refers to the spiritual realm of the dead.

Hades is the place in which the souls of the dead are currently. Whenever the Scriptures talk of Hades, they frequently connect Hades and death with one another. 1 Corinthians 15:55 says, “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your

victory?” Revelation 20:14 pictures after the great final Judgment when “Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire.” As further evidence of the close connection between death and Hades, Acts 2:27, 31 demonstrates that Jesus Christ went into this Hadean realm upon being put to death on the cross. Verse 27 records a prophecy that God would not leave Jesus’ soul in Hades. Verse 31 demonstrates that David (who wrote the Psalm containing this prophecy) was speaking concerning “the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.” So, it was clearly this time after Jesus’ physical death and prior to His resurrection from the dead that He spent time in the Hadean realm.

Hades, though, is not an eternal realm. This can especially be seen from Revelation 20:14. Whenever Jesus Christ returns to end this world and the great resurrection and Judgment take place, there will no longer be a need for Death and Hades. Therefore, the picture is that Death and Hades will be cast into the great lake of fire. This place, then, is only a temporary realm for those who have died to exist prior to the return of Jesus Christ. These individuals are awaiting their eternal destinations which will be revealed to them on the Day of Judgment.

### **Hades described in Luke 16:19-31**

The greatest amount of information we have been given concerning this Hadean realm comes from what Jesus teaches in Luke 16:19-31: “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.’”

Notice, specifically, that this place is identified as being “Hades.” Verse 23 says that the rich man found himself “in torments in Hades” after he had died. Then, clearly the passage indicates that Lazarus was in the same realm – just in another section. This passage, then, fits with what we have already observed concerning the Hadean realm being the realm of the dead. Both of these individuals had experienced physical death. Now they found themselves in this Hadean realm.

This text indicates that there are two sections/parts to this Hadean realm: Abraham’s bosom (a place of comfort) and Torments (a place depicted by pain and fire). In between the two, the passage teaches that there is a great gulf that is “fixed.”

Does this passage record a parable of Jesus, as some claim that it does? A parable is an earthly story that conveys a greater spiritual message. Admittedly, it does begin in a very similar way to Jesus’ parables (compare Luke 16:19 and Luke 16:1). However, Jesus is exceptionally specific in this passage (contrary to His parables). If this passage records a parable, this is the only parable in which Jesus names anyone (i.e. Lazarus, Abraham). Yet, regardless of whether this passage records a parable or not, remember that Jesus used parables to convey spiritual truths. So, whether this passage is a parable or not does not change Jesus’ overall message. Surely Jesus is conveying a very specific message concerning what is awaiting individuals after death in this Hadean realm.

One of the facts you should be impressed with concerning this text is the consciousness that exists in the Hadean realm. So, just as we saw in lesson 1, physical death is not the end of our conscious existence. Instead, it was pointed out

(looking to Luke 16:19-31) that both the rich man and Lazarus continued to exist in the Hadean realm – one in comfort and one in torment. We noted that the rich man could see (verse 23), speak (verse 24), feel pain (verse 25), and remember (verses 27-28). All of these things demonstrate consciousness in the Hadean realm.

## Paradise

One of the two sections of this Hadean realm is identified as being “Paradise,” or “Abraham’s bosom.” Luke 16:22 records that the beggar (Lazarus) died and was carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom. Also notice a couple of points regarding Jesus – and see that He identified this place as “Paradise.” In Luke 23:43, Jesus promised one of the two thieves who were being crucified beside of Jesus, “today you will be with Me in Paradise.” Now, was this “Paradise” Heaven? Not according to Acts chapter 2. Recall that Acts 2:27, 31 makes reference to Jesus’ soul going to Hades between the time of His death and resurrection. Therefore, whenever Jesus promised that the thief would be in Paradise with Jesus that day, He was referencing the part of the Hadean realm He identified as “Abraham’s bosom” in Luke 16.

Both of these passage demonstrate that this is a portion of the Hadean realm that is full of comfort. Again, it is called “Paradise” by Jesus in Luke 23:43. Then, in Luke 16, Jesus demonstrates the comfort that is found in this section of Hades. While Jesus primarily focuses on the rich man and the torment he experiences in Luke 16, notice the contrasts between the torment that he is experiencing and the way Lazarus is being comforted (specifically in verse 25).

As we consider the great blessing of going to this place after death (in contrast to going to Torments), we should be encouraged to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God! Notice carefully that only those who die in the Lord will be blessed in this way. Revelation 14:13 says, “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “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.’” Clearly, this passage indicates that our works will follow us and we will rest from our labors.

Galatians 6:7-8 teaches the same principle: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he

who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” We will each reap according to what we have sown! Not only is this principle true concerning eternal life in Heaven and eternal punishment in Hell; but, it is also a fair conclusion regarding the Hadean realm. Remember, only those who die “in the Lord” are going to experience rest from their labors – because their works will follow after them. On the other hand, those who live contrary to the will of God (like the rich man had evidently been guilty of doing) will not be granted this great rest. Consider that Jesus did not tell the impenitent thief that he was going to be with Him in Paradise – only the one who believed in Him and turned away from his sins (Luke 23:43).

## Torments

This part of the Hadean realm is also identified in Luke 16. In verse 23, Jesus says (concerning the rich man), “And being in torments in Hades....” This man (and all who will go to this section of Hades after death) reaped according to what he had sown. Now, consider some things Jesus identifies in this passage about the torment those who are in this place experience.

**(1) It is a place of torment.** This man cried out to Father Abraham for mercy in verse 24, saying that he was tormented in the flame. This man was, therefore, in an extreme amount of anguish and pain. There was nothing comforting or pleasant about where he was.

**(2) It is a place of torment in fire.** Again, this man expresses extreme anguish over his torment in flame/fire. Furthermore, he expresses the desire for his tongue to be cooled. So, this is a place of great pain pictured by suffering in fire.

**(3) It is a place that is so miserable that even a small drop of water offers relief.** He cried out, “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” (vs. 24). Can you imagine being in so much pain and suffering from such heat that just one drop of water provides significant relief? This man just wanted a moment of relief in this way.

**(4) It is a place where no relief is given.** Not only was this man in so much agony that a drop of water appeared to offer relief; but, there would not be any relief given to him. Not even a seemingly

insignificant drop of water. He would be left to suffer in this place without any kind of relief being offered to him. Abraham responded to his request for relief by saying, “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” (vs. 25).

**(5) It is a place that offers no escape.** We have just seen that there is no momentary escape from the torment offered in this place (not even a drop of water placed on your tongue). In fact, there is no way of escape at all – period. Abraham told the rich man that there is a “great gulf fixed” so that those in one section of the Hadean realm cannot pass to the other section (vs. 26). The only escape from this place will be when those in Hades will be brought out of Hades for Judgment – and those who failed to obey God will then go to the place of everlasting punishment (as we’ll discuss in the next lesson).

**(6) It is such a horrible place that its occupants do not desire others to go there.** Notice that after the rich man discovered that he could not escape from torment himself, he turned his attention to those who were still living (see verses 27-31). Notice carefully that this man realized that there was a connection between how a person lives on earth and going into torments. He remembered his five brothers who were still living – and requested that someone go to them and warn them. However, this permission was not granted. Instead, they needed to listen to the laws God had revealed. Still, this request demonstrates his concern for others to live their lives in a way that they would not have to come to this place of torment!

### **A great gulf fixed**

Once again, notice that Abraham revealed that there was a “great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us” (verse 26). Therefore, Jesus is absolutely clear that there is no possibility of changing sides after death. At the moment of physical death, the eternal destiny of the soul is set. At that point of death an individual will simply begin to reap what he has sown (Galatians 6:7-8).

The Hadean realm is simply never taught (in Scripture) as being a place similar to the concept of “Purgatory.” An individual who dies in sin will not be tormented for just a short time in Hades – and then saved later! Additionally, living family members and

others cannot buy their dead loved ones’ souls from torment – and the living cannot be baptized for the dead and affect the condition of the soul in torment! These are only man-made ideas that present a false sense of comfort to those who believe in these doctrines. However, these ideas are entirely foreign to the Scriptures – and those who follow them will not be saved by them!

Furthermore, I also want to point out that there is no Biblical evidence that these departed souls return from the Hadean realm to this earth to complete their “unfinished business” or to “haunt” those who are living. Again notice that the rich man desired for someone to go back to warn his brothers, but this permission was not granted (verses 27-31). Those in Hades are entirely confined to the portion of Hades they find themselves in.

## **The Return Of Jesus Christ**

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Those who experience physical death prior to the return of Jesus Christ will go to this Hadean realm. They will consciously wait in this realm (either in torment or comfort) until the time of Jesus’ return – when they will be brought out of Hades and will be judged (Revelation 20:11-15). However, there will also be many who are living at the time of Jesus’ return. Therefore, the return of Jesus Christ is significant to both those who are living as well as to those who have died. Let’s consider what the Bible teaches us concerning this event.

### **The certainty of Christ’s coming**

Before we consider what the Bible teaches concerning the events that will transpire when the Lord Jesus returns, let’s simply observe the certainty of Christ’s coming. First, understand that the Bible frequently uses language concerning the coming of the Lord or the Day of the Lord to refer to His judgment upon nations. For instance, you can see this language used in Matthew 24:1-35 in reference to the judgment and destruction God would bring upon Jerusalem (which was accomplished in A.D. 70). This kind of language can also be observed in the book of Revelation concerning God’s judgment upon the Roman Empire.

So, you must be diligent to observe the context of each passage in order to understand what

is under consideration. These are not the events that we are preparing to discuss. None of these events accomplished what God promises for the time Jesus will return in the final Judgment! The Bible clearly indicates that this Day of the Lord will come at some specific point in the future and will result in very specific things (as we'll discuss in this section).

Now, let's spend just a moment considering a few passages that promise the return of Jesus Christ.

- John 14:1-6. As Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure from the earth, He told them not to let their hearts be troubled. He wanted them to believe in Him just as they believed in God. He promised them that there were many dwelling places in His Father's house, saying that He was going to prepare a place for them – and then He would come again and receive them to Himself so that they could be where He also was going. Then, in verse 6, Jesus indicated that He is the only way to this eternal life with the Father.
- Acts 1:9-11. This text records the Biblical account of Jesus' ascension into Heaven after He had lived on the earth for a time after His resurrection from the dead. However, as the apostles gazed into heaven, two men (probably two angels) who stood by them said, "This same Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."
- 2 Peter 3:10. The entire context of 2 Peter 3 is focused on assuring Christians that Jesus Christ will come. There had been those who were mocking the promised coming of Jesus Christ – saying that things were continuing just as they had always been. However, Peter assures everyone in this text that "the Day of the Lord will come" and everything God has promised will transpire at that time will happen.

## What will happen when Jesus returns

We are continuing to watch for this return of Jesus Christ – even today. However, we are still assured by God in the Scriptures of its coming. Yet, we need to gain an accurate understanding of the things that will transpire at that time so that we can be prepared for them. Let's consider what the Bible says will take place whenever Jesus Christ returns. As we do this, we will be relying heavily upon the following passages. Please take some time to read them for yourself now (I will be mentioning them again, but we will not read them all in their entirety): Matthew 25:1-46; John 5:28-29, Acts 1:9-11, 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, and 2 Peter 3:5-14.

**(1) Jesus will come in the clouds.** When Jesus ascended into Heaven, Acts 1:9 says that "a cloud received Him" out of the sight of those who were watching. Then, verse 11 identifies that Jesus will come in the same manner as these individuals saw Him go into Heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says that those Christians who are living when Jesus returns will be "caught up together" with those who were dead in Christ "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

**(2) The Lord will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.** The return of Jesus Christ will be an occasion everyone (both living and dead) will know about and will take part in. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, "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."

**(3) The dead will be raised.** Recall (from lesson 1) that death is likened to "sleep" (see Acts 7:60). We have also observed (in this lesson) that the Hadean realm is a temporary waiting place for those who have experienced physical death. The reason for both is because there will be a resurrection from the dead everyone will take part in. Jesus promises such in John 5:28-29. He says, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

**(4) The dead in Christ will rise first.** Certainly both those who have done good and those



who have done evil will take part in this resurrection from the dead. However, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 provides some additional information concerning those who have died “in Jesus.” The passage says that “God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (vs. 14). Then, in verses 15-16, He says that those who are alive and remain upon the earth whenever Jesus Christ returns will not “precede those who are asleep.” Instead, Paul says that the “dead in Christ will rise first.”

**(5) The living will meet the Lord in the air.**

I do not know how the resurrection of the dead will take place. I do not know where Hades is and where they will come from when Jesus returns. But, I do know that the Bible says that those who are living will be “caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). And, for those who are Christians, “we will always be with the Lord.”

**(6) The earth will be destroyed.** As Jesus returns and gathers all people (both the living and the dead), what will become of this earth we live on? 2 Peter 3:10-14 gives the answer. Verse 10 says, “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.” Note that some Greek manuscripts contain a different ending to verse 10 that say the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Both are true. As we will see in a moment, everything that mankind has done while living on earth will be judged. And, 2 Peter 3 goes on to further state that this world will be destroyed by fire. Verse 12 says that “the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.” Nothing that exists on this earth will remain (see also vs. 7)!

**(7) The resurrection and transformation into our spiritual bodies will take place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.** When Paul was writing to the Christians in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:50-54), he told them that they would “all be changed” because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” He said that this would happen “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” He said that “the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed,” saying that “this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on

immortality.” Then, he goes on to picture this tremendous moment of victory for those who are Christians (Note that this resurrection is a moment of great defeat for the one who is not a Christian). Matthew 25:1-13 speaks of those who were prepared for His coming as going in with Him to the “wedding” while those who were not prepared were shut out.

**(8) Judgment will take place.** The Scriptures speak clearly about the promise for a final Judgment in which Jesus Christ will Judge the world (see Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Acts 17:31; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). We’ll be considering this Judgment in greater detail in the next lesson. For now, I want you to understand that this will take place whenever Jesus Christ returns. Matthew 25:14-30 records a parable demonstrating that Jesus Christ will return to reward/punish individuals for how they have conducted their lives while He has been gone. Then, Matthew 25:31-46 goes on to describe this great Judgment scene and identifies when it will take place. Specifically notice that verses 31-33 say that when “the Son of Man comes in His glory...He will sit on the throne of His glory” and He will separate the people from one another as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats.

**(9) Vengeance will be taken upon those who are disobedient and eternal rest will be given to those who are faithful to Christ.** 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 makes it very clear that the things which will be experienced by individuals on this Day of Christ’s return will differ depending upon whether they were faithful and obedient to Jesus Christ during their lives or not. Those who have been faithful to Jesus Christ will be given rest “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.” However, at this same time, vengeance will be taken on “those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.” These individuals will “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

**(10) Death and Hades will be destroyed.** We have seen throughout the first two lessons of this study that neither death nor Hades are permanent. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 says that the “last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” Then, whenever Jesus comes (from the standpoint of those who have lived faithful to Him), Paul says that “Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades,

where is your victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)! Jesus Christ provides the victory over these for those who faithfully serve and obey Him (1 Corinthians 15:56-58)! Also, see Revelation 20:13-14 concerning how Death and Hades are pictured as being cast into the same lake that burns with fire and brimstone as all of God’s enemies are cast. This is a great scene of victory for God over this fierce enemy of man!

**(11) The Kingdom will be turned back to God.** Today, Jesus Christ reigns as King over His Kingdom (the church). However, 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 indicates that He will deliver His Kingdom to God (the Father) after all of the enemies have been defeated (the last of which will be death). Therefore, this too will transpire after Jesus Christ returns and the enemies of God are defeated!

Now, before moving on, I want to offer just a few concluding thoughts about these things which are promised to transpire when Jesus Christ returns. (1) This will not be a secret thing. Everyone will know that Jesus has come. (2) Everyone will be involved – both the righteous and the wicked. The righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. (3) There will no longer be any additional opportunity to make changes to your life. (4) Jesus Christ will not set foot on this earth. Instead, He will come in the cloud and all will meet Him for Judgment. (5) This earth will be destroyed and nothing on it will remain.

## **What will not happen when Jesus returns**

While we may not have every answer to every question concerning the return of Jesus Christ, God has given us sufficient information to reach the definitive conclusions we have been considering. In addition, we have enough information to identify some things that will not happen. Certainly, there are many things that are claimed regarding the return of Jesus Christ that we can know to be absolutely false.

**(1) Jesus will not set foot on this earth again.** There are some who claim that Jesus will establish His kingdom when He returns and reign over this kingdom for 1,000 years from Jerusalem. However, not only does the Bible teach that Jesus’ kingdom has already been established (compare Luke 9:27 and Colossians 1:13), but the Scriptures do not teach that Jesus will set foot on this earth again. Instead, as we have seen, whenever Jesus

returns, He will be in the clouds – and we will be called to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

**(2) The earth will not be rejuvenated.** Some claim that this earth will be rejuvenated to be a paradise (claiming that it will be restored back to the original condition God created in Genesis 1-2). However, rather than teaching that the earth will be rejuvenated for the righteous to live on, we have seen that the Scriptures teach that this world will be destroyed – and that there will not be anyone left on earth to live (see 2 Peter 3:1-14).

**(3) The righteous will not be “raptured.”** Some believe that the “rapture” will take place prior to Jesus’ return. They believe that all of the righteous will be removed from this earth. So, if two people are driving in a car together and the rapture happens (and one of those two people are part of Christ’s church), one of them will be taken suddenly and the other will be left behind. However, this is based on perversions of Scripture and man’s own suppositions. We have seen that all will take part in the resurrection and that this earth will be destroyed whenever Jesus Christ returns.

**(4) A period of tribulation and Armageddon will not take place.** Some believe that there will be a period of tribulation and a great battle between Christ’s army and Satan’s army (known as the Battle of Armageddon) prior to the end of the world. Much of this belief comes from a misinterpretation of the symbolism in the book of Revelation. Many people will interpret the signs and symbols used throughout the book of Revelation literally and interpret the book in such a way so as to apply to events still in the future. However, this method of interpreting the book of Revelation is full of error and causes the Bible to contradict itself. For instance, the passages we have seen throughout this section demonstrate that the Day of Judgment will come at the same time for everyone (both the righteous and the wicked) and that this world will be destroyed when Jesus comes. There is no time or opportunity for a period of tribulation or a battle called “Armageddon” on earth.

There are certainly many different false ideas man has invented concerning the return of Jesus Christ. However, all of these fail to diligently and accurately interpret the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15). Instead, these views cause Scriptures to contradict each other and result from misapplying passages. We have seen the plain teaching of Scripture concerning

the return of Jesus Christ – and we must simply hold fast to it!

## When will Jesus return?

We have seen that Jesus has promised to come – and the things we are told will happen whenever He does come. But, when will all of this take place? Have we even been given any idea when these things will be? Let's evaluate.

First, let's begin by simply observing that Jesus' return is still in the future. There are some who say that Jesus returned for the final time in A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed. However, while the judgment upon the nation of Israel did come in A.D. 70 (when God used the Romans to destroy the city of Jerusalem – as promised in Matthew 23:37-24:35), the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, simply does not fulfill the passages that we have considered previously! There is, indeed, a Day of the Lord still in the future – a final Day of Judgment for the entire world! This is what Jesus begins to discuss in Matthew 24:36 through chapter 25 (notice the clear transition in Matthew 24:36).

Second, there are many who teach that there are signs of Christ's final coming. Those who make this claim are often guilty of failing to rightly divide the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15). They frequently misuse Matthew 24:1-35 to teach that this identifies some "signs" which will take place just prior to Christ's coming. However, this passage actually identifies signs that Jesus said would take place prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Notice carefully that Jesus says these things would take place before that generation would pass away (Matthew 24:34-35). Then, it is not until verse 36 that Jesus begins talking about His return to bring about the final Judgment and destruction of the world. Also note that there are some who misinterpret the "last days" to refer to the time just prior to Jesus' return (i.e. 2 Timothy 3:1-9) – and conclude that the time is now near. However, the Bible teaches that the "last days" began in Acts chapter 2 (see Acts 2:16-17) and continues until the final return of Jesus Christ. This is truly the last period of time for mankind to live on this earth. But, we are not told how long this period of time (the Gospel Age) will last.

What does the Bible teach us concerning when this final coming will take place? Consider two basic facts.

**(1) It is unknown to everyone besides the Father.** Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36). When Jesus lived on this earth, He indicated that He did not even know when He would return – only the Father. Certainly, then, there is no one on this earth who has any knowledge of the specific time when Jesus will return!

**(2) It will be like a thief.** Read Matthew 24:37-44, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4, and 2 Peter 3:10 to see Jesus' return being compared to a thief. Most people will not be prepared for His coming – just as homeowners are usually caught unprepared for a thief. Therefore, most people will be conducting their lives according to their own desires rather than being found ready for Jesus' return. However, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 demonstrates that God's people will not be caught unprepared. Not because they have special information about the date and time of Jesus' return; but, because they are always watching and always preparing – as Jesus instructed in Matthew 24:44!

## Why has Jesus not yet come?

Why have so many years passed from the time Jesus promised His return to now, without returning? This was the reason some mocked, according to 2 Peter 3:4. However, Peter said that they forgot some things. (1) They forgot that God's word never fails, as evidenced by the destruction of the world in the days of Noah (2 Peter 3:5-6). It is by the same word of God that the heavens and earth are now reserved for fire (2 Peter 3:7). (2) They forgot that God's time is different than our time (2 Peter 3:8). (3) They forgot that God is not slack regarding His promise (2 Peter 3:9).

So, God has not forgotten and did not lie in promising the return of Christ. Instead, Peter says that God is being "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The reason God has not sent His Son to destroy this world and usher in the Judgment Day is because God wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) – and He is giving individuals the opportunity to repent. However, God's patience will end one day ("the Day of the Lord will come," 2 Peter 3:10). We must be ready for that great Day (Matthew 24:44; Matthew 25:1-13)!

## Conclusion

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I am sure that we have not exhausted everything that could be said about Hades and the return of Jesus Christ. However, I hope that the things that have been said have been beneficial to you. First, we have established that Hades is the temporary dwelling place of those who have died physically – both the righteous and the wicked (though they exist in different sections of Hades). Second, we have established that Jesus Christ will return – and what the Bible teaches will take place when this happens. We will continue to build upon our understanding of what happens after death in our next lesson. Specifically, we will focus on the final Judgment and eternity.

What was established in the first lesson?

## Study Questions

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### 1. Hades

What is “Hades”?

List some impressions from Luke 16:19-31. Is this a parable? Is there consciousness in Hades?

Describe “Paradise.”

Describe “Torments.”

What is the significance of the “great gulf” that is “fixed”?

### 2. The Return Of Christ

Will Christ return? How do you know?

What will happen when Jesus returns?

What will not happen when Jesus returns?

When will Jesus return? Has it already taken place?  
Are there any signs?

Why hasn't it happened yet?

**\*Summarize what you have learned in this study.**

What Happens After Death?

# Lesson 3: The Judgment And Eternity

In our first study, we established that mankind possess a soul that survives physical death. We established that this separates mankind from all the rest of God's earthly creation – as it is only mankind that has been made in the image of God. Then, we established that physical death is a certainty. We identified two things involved in physical death and answered the question, “Why do we have to die?”

In our second study, we established that Hades is the realm of the dead (where those who have died in the past are today – and where we will all be if we die prior to the return of Jesus Christ). We established that this realm of the dead consists of two parts – a place of comfort and a place of torment. Then, we established that Jesus Christ will return at a time unknown to mankind and discussed some things the Scriptures tell us will happen whenever Jesus returns. We have also concluded (based on 2 Peter 3:9) that Jesus has not yet returned because God is giving people the opportunity to repent of their sins.

This third lesson picks up where lesson 2 left off. One of the things that will take place whenever Jesus Christ returns is the final Judgment of all those who have ever lived. Then, after this great Judgment, eternity will begin. However, the Judgment Day and eternity have also been the focus of a great amount of speculation and false teaching (in addition to the things we discussed in lesson 2 regarding the return

of Jesus). Some say that there is no Hell (i.e. that a loving God could not condemn anyone to Hell). Some say that everyone will go to Heaven (at least everyone who is morally good and religious). At least one religious organization claims that only 144,000 will be permitted into Heaven.

Remember that the only things we know about what happens after death and the end of this world are those things which have been revealed to us by God in His written word! Therefore, let us determine to speak where the Bible speaks – and remain silent where the Bible is silent, speaking only as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11).

The purpose of this third lesson is to establish what the Bible teaches about (1) The final Judgment and (2) Eternity (both in Heaven and Hell).

## The Final Judgment

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In lesson 2, we concluded by observing what the Bible teaches about the return of Jesus Christ. Specifically, one of the points we saw from the Bible was that a final Judgment will take place whenever Jesus Christ does return. But, who will be judged? How will they be judged? What is at stake in this judgment? These are some of the questions I now want us to begin to answer.

### To take place after Jesus' return

Matthew 24:36 through Matthew 25 primarily deals with the return of Jesus Christ (note that prior to Matthew 24:36 the discussion is about the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred in A.D. 70). In Matthew 25, specifically, Jesus tells two parables at the beginning of the chapter. One parable is about the need to be prepared for the time when Jesus will return (the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in verses 1-13). The other parable is about the responsibility to be good managers over the things entrusted to our care while we live on this earth (the parable of the talents, verses 14-30). Then, in verses 31-46, Jesus turns His focus entirely to the final Judgment (although lessons about this final Judgment should also be applied from the two parables just mentioned).

Notice that the things Jesus describes in Matthew 25:31-46 (with reference to this final Judgment) are said to take place, “When the Son of

Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory” (Matthew 25:31). While the Scriptures do not reveal where this will take place, the Scriptures clearly place this great event between Christ’s return and eternity! Therefore, any teaching that would pervert the Bible’s teaching on the return of Christ (as noted in our previous lesson) or change the order of these events is false doctrine!

There is, though, one additional point that must be made before we move to consider additional aspects of this final Judgment. As we discussed in relation to the return of Jesus Christ, once Christ returns, there is no more opportunity to change your life! Therefore, the spiritual condition you are in when you die or when Jesus Christ returns is the condition you will be judged in – whether you are prepared for the Judgment or not! So, as we will discuss in our next lesson, you must be ready for your death and ready for the return of Jesus Christ at all times (Matthew 24:42-44).

### **Everyone will be involved**

Now, having established that this Judgment will take place whenever Jesus Christ returns, understand that everyone will be involved. Consider the following passages.

**(1) Matthew 25:31-46.** I encourage you to read Matthew 25:31-46 in its entirety (we will just be looking closely at a few verses and summarizing the rest). In verse 32, Jesus says, “All the nations will be gathered before Him.” No one is going to be left out of this Judgment! Just picture this mass of humanity, consisting of all who have ever lived – all being gathered before the Judgment seat of Jesus Christ! Verse 33 pictures each one of these individuals being divided into one of two categories (just as a shepherd divides His sheep from the goats), either on the right or left side of the Lord! Imagine: Everyone who has ever lived will be able to be placed into one of these two categories. These two categories have very different eternal destinations – and, **you** will be placed in one of these two categories!

Verses 34-40 then describe those who faithfully executed the Lord’s will while they lived on this earth (specifically relative to doing good to others) – and their eternal reward. Verses 41-45 describe those who have unfaithfully executed the Lord’s will while they lived on the earth (specifically relative to failing to do good to others) – and their

eternal punishment. Then, verse 46 summarizes what we have learned: “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Again, everyone will be in one of these two categories – including you!

**(2) Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10.** Notice the language of these two passages, particularly focusing on the fact that everyone will take part in this final Judgment. Romans 14:10 says that “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” Romans 14:11 says every knee will bow to God and every tongue will confess to God. Romans 14:12 says that “each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Then, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that “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.” Clearly, every one of us will stand before God and be judged! None of us will escape this Judgment. Everyone will confess Christ as Lord (whether he/she believed and obeyed Him on earth or not)!

**(3) Galatians 6:7-8.** Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Don’t be fooled (or, deceived) into thinking that you will escape the Judgment of God! You will reap what you have sown. If you have lived to please your fleshly desires, you will reap corruption/destruction. However, if you have lived your life according to God’s word (as revealed by the Spirit of God), you will reap everlasting life.

**(4) Revelation 20:11-15.** Take a moment to read this text in its entirety. The picture presented is one of the great mass of humanity (consisting of all who have ever lived) standing before the throne of God! What an awe-inspiring and fearful scene! What are they all doing before the throne of God? The passage simply identifies that they are all being judged “according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (v. 12).

### **Jesus Christ, the Judge**

The Scriptures are clear that the God will be the Judge of the world. Romans chapter 2 makes this perfectly clear. Romans 2:2-3 says that the “judgment of God is according to truth” and that

surely no man will “escape the judgment of God.” Then, Romans 2:5 references the Judgment Day as “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Verse 6 goes on to explain that God will simply “render to each one according to his deeds.”

However, I want you to specifically observe the fact that God will carry out this Judgment through Jesus Christ. Continuing in Romans 2, verse 16 says, “in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” Acts 17:31 says that God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” This is a clear reference to Jesus. Acts 10:42 (with a clear context of speaking about Jesus) says, “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.” I would also encourage you to go back and consider how Matthew 25:31-33 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 also make the point that it is Jesus Christ who will be the Judge of the world on this Last Day.

Now, consider some attributes of our Judge in order to develop a greater appreciation for how He is qualified and capable to judge the world. (1) He is the eternal and all-powerful Creator of the world (Genesis 1). (2) He is the Creator and Savior of mankind (Genesis 1:26; John 3:16) who wants all men to be saved eternally (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). (3) He is all-seeing and all-knowing (Proverbs 15:3; Hebrews 4:13) and has perfect knowledge of how we have all lived our lives (so, we can have confidence that He will not get any part of our judgments wrong). (4) He is entirely holy and calls mankind to be holy (Revelation 4:8; 1 Peter 1:15-16). (5) He is a righteous, fair, and an impartial Judge, simply judging each individual according to his/her works (Romans 2:5-11).

## **The criteria for the Judgment**

Now that we have seen some basics about this final judgment, let’s firmly establish what standard/criteria will be used to make the judgments that will be made on that Day. Surely, God will fairly judge individuals based on the law He had given them to live under. Romans 2:12-24 indicates that (prior to the time of the gospel), Jews would be

judged by the Law of Moses and the Gentiles would be judged by their natural law.

However, for us, now that we live under the gospel of Jesus Christ (note that this is the universal law God has given to govern all people today), we will be judged according to that standard. Look at what Jesus said in John 12:48: “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” However, we will not only be judged by the things said directly by Jesus Christ, but, by all of the things that are part of Christ’s new law (i.e. the entirety of the New Testament).

Think back to the Revelation 20:11-15 picture of the Judgment. On this great Day, the picture that is presented for us says, “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” (Revelation 20:12). So, you notice that all of the dead are judged “by the things which were written in the books.” Now, what books are these? It is fair to conclude that these are the books containing the law of God that has been revealed to mankind.

To understand that the criteria by which you and I will be judged will be more than *just* the words specifically spoken by Jesus Christ, consider a couple of passages. In 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul said that the things he wrote “are the commandments of the Lord.” Then, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul said, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” So, every word that is inspired of God will be the standard/criteria that will be used to judge the world on the Last Day! Specifically, those who are living today are living under the new law of Jesus Christ (revealed in the New Testament), as the old Law of Moses has been taken away (Colossians 2:14).

Now, in addition to understanding what the criteria/standard for judgment will be, please also consider what the criteria/standard for the Judgment will *not* be. (1) You will not be judged by the opinions of men. (2) You will not be judged by the doctrines/teachings of men (please heed the warning, then, in 2 Peter 2:1-3 about false teachers). (3) You

will not be judged solely by your own conscience (though the Bible does teach about the importance of the conscience). (4) You will not be judged by the decisions and actions of the majority. (5) You will not be judged by the Old Testament Law (because you live under the New Testament of Christ and the Old Testament has been taken away, see Colossians 2:14). (6) You will not be judged by the traditions of men (not even the religious traditions of men). (7) You will not be judged by any other standard besides God's word! This is why you must be diligent in searching the Scriptures on a daily basis in order to learn and apply God's teachings to your life (see Acts 17:11 and James 1:22-25) – and you must be diligent to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)!

### **What the Judgment will consist of**

As we have already seen, the standard that will be used in Judgment is God's word. But, what will be evaluated by God's word? Let's consider.

The Bible is clear that everything you have ever done will be judged (as is true with everyone who will be present for the Day of Judgment)! Look at Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil." Again, everything will be brought into Judgment – even the things that we thought were done in "secret." Notice that these "secret" things were not unknown to God! Similarly, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that "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" (see also Romans 14:10-12). Revelation 20:12 (again) says that the dead will be "judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." And, as we saw previously, "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

So, nothing that is done on this earth will escape God's attention or will be missed on the Day of Judgment. Consider Matthew 12:36 and 1 Corinthians 4:5 to even see that every idle (empty) word and all the motives of the heart will be subject to this Judgment. Matthew 12:36 says, "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment." 1 Corinthians 4:5 says, "Therefore judge nothing

before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

Now, using this foundation, let's establish some things which we must consider. First, consider the reality of God's grace and mercy. God's grace refers to His giving us what we do not deserve (shown in giving us eternal life in Heaven). God's mercy refers to His *not* giving us what we do deserve (shown in not sentencing us to eternity in Hell). Without God's grace and mercy we would all be entirely without hope on this great Day of Judgment! For, without His grace and mercy, we would all be hopelessly lost in our sins. Romans 6:23 simply states: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." I encourage you to read and consider Ephesians 2:1-10 and Titus 3:4-7 to see how we could never (as sinners) earn eternal salvation in Heaven. Rather, it is because of His grace and mercy that we have the opportunity to avoid the eternal condemnation in Hell we deserve due to our sins and be saved eternally in Heaven!

Second, having recognized the reality of God's grace and mercy (knowing that we are saved by God's grace and not by our own righteousness), we must also consider the necessity of obedience. Now, again, I want to emphasize the fact that we cannot earn (deserve, merit) our own salvations through our own good works. However, just as clearly as the Bible identifies the essential nature of God's grace and mercy, it also identifies the essential nature of our own works of obedience (note that works done in obedience to God's instructions are far different than works that are done to attempt to earn salvation for ourselves).

Works of obedience are said to be essential for salvation. Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus Christ became "the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." James 2:24 says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." Faith in God without works of obedience is said to be dead (read James 2:14-26 and Matthew 7:21-23 to see that true faith will include works of obedience, not exclude them). Therefore, the Bible warns that those who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)!



Realizing this, take a moment to consider what the gospel you will be judged by requires you to do in order to be saved (please read all of the passages I will cite along these points to see that these are truly the commandments of God, not the traditions, doctrines, or opinions of men). (1) You must hear God's word (Romans 10:17; Acts 18:8). (2) You must believe (John 8:24; Romans 10:9-10). (3) You must repent of your sins (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30). (4) You must confess Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37). (5) You must be baptized (immersed) in water (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Peter 3:20-21). Upon your obedience to these commandments, the Bible calls you a Christian and says that your sins are washed away/forgiven. Then, (6) God requires you to faithfully follow Jesus throughout your life by doing the things He expects you to do as a Christian (Revelation 2:10) – because it is possible to fall from God's grace (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 10:26-39).

Think about it for a moment. If God's grace and mercy saved everyone – without requiring obedience, then it would make no difference how an individual lived while he/she was alive on this earth (contrary to the passages we've considered – i.e. Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7-8; etc.). Furthermore, if God's grace and mercy saved everyone – without requiring obedience, then all (or the majority) would be saved. However, Jesus said that few will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14)! Therefore, we must live our lives in faithful obedience to God in order to be counted among the "few" who will be saved on the Day of Judgment!

## **Eternity will be based on the Judgment**

What is at stake in this great Judgment? The principles we have already established demonstrate that each individual's eternal destination is at stake! Again, consider Galatians 6:7-8: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

Clearly, the reaping is dependent upon the sowing. If you live your life to fulfill your own earthly desires, you will be punished eternally; but if you live your life according to God's instructions, you will be rewarded with eternal life in Heaven! The

fact that your eternal destination will be based on the Judgment has also been seen in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and demonstrated in Matthew 25:31-46.

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## **Eternity**

Now that we have observed what the Bible teaches us concerning the Day of Judgment and the connection between that Day and eternity, let's focus on what the Bible teaches concerning eternity. Since everyone who has lived on this earth will be subject to the Judgment we have studied, then everyone will also take part in eternity. Furthermore, the Bible only describes two possible eternal destinations: Heaven and Hell. Matthew 25:46 makes it clear that after all people are judged before the throne of God, those judged to have been unrighteous will "go away into everlasting punishment" but the righteous will go "into eternal life." Therefore, let's consider what the Bible helps us to understand about each of these eternal destinations.

### **What is eternity?**

First, let me say that we have been given just enough information about eternity for us to be fully persuaded as to where we desire to spend (and not to spend) our eternities. We do not, though, have all the answers to the many questions we have. We do, however, have enough information (expressed in terms that are familiar to us) to make proper decisions relative to our two possible eternal destinations.

"Eternity" is a difficult concept for us to fully understand. This is probably because of our constant awareness of time. Everything that we do is measured in a sense of time. However, eternity is not based upon time! Eternity refers to the never-ending period after life on this earth ends (after the return of Christ and the Judgment). Some have tried to help our minds grasp just how long eternity is by offering some illustrations. (1) Imagine a two-ton iron ball. Now, suppose that a butterfly flew by that ball once every year, brushing its wing against the large iron ball. When this has happened so many times that the ball has been worn out and turned to dust, eternity has just begun! (2) Suppose it was the job of just one ant to transfer all of the sand on the earth – and deposit it on the sun. This the ant did, traveling nearly

93 million miles in each direction, with each grain of sand. When this one ant is finished with this task, eternity has just begun!

While I realize that these illustrations are not based in reality, they do help us think about how long eternity really will be. That's certainly an important concept to grasp – because you will spend your eternity *somewhere*, either in Heaven or in Hell! And, as we discuss each of these two possible eternal destinations, please realize that Hell is just as eternal as Heaven is (go back and look at Matthew 25:46)!

## Eternity in Heaven

Let's begin our consideration of these two eternal destinations by considering the place you should desire to go – Heaven. As we do so, let's consider three points: (1) Heaven is real, (2) Description of Heaven, and (3) Who will go to Heaven.

**(1) Heaven is real!** If you accept the Bible as containing the true words of God, then there can be no doubt that Heaven is real. John 14:1-6 demonstrates that Jesus ascended into Heaven in order to “prepare a place” for His people. And, He says that if He would go to prepare a place that He “will come again” and receive His followers to Himself – so that His people will be able to be with Him. Furthermore, Jesus demonstrates that He is the only way “to the Father.”

Then, 1 Peter 1:3-9 clearly demonstrates that Heaven is real. Listen to the language of verses 3-5: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Then, as Peter goes on in this passage to describe this “living hope” God's people have that is “reserved in heaven,” notice this hope will be realized whenever Jesus Christ is revealed (when He returns, vs. 7). It is at this time that you will (if you have been faithful to God) receive “the end of your faith – the salvation of your” soul (vs. 9).

Heaven is real! The Bible describes Heaven as being a real place in which real people will spend their eternities. In fact, we might say that Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people!

**(2) Heaven described.** Now, given the fact that Heaven is a real place and that you have the opportunity to live eternally in this place, take a few moments to consider how Heaven is described in the Bible.

It is described as being eternal life. Matthew 25:46 says that the righteous will go away into “eternal life” following the Judgment. It is, therefore, the never-ending inheritance of the children of God. Matthew 25:34 says that the King (Jesus) will say to those on His right hand (the righteous on the Day of Judgment), “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” And, as we have already seen, 1 Peter 1:3-5 describes Heaven as being the “inheritance” of God's people that is “incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away.” Therefore, this inheritance can accurately be described as being “eternal life” because it is in a place where there is full fellowship with God, the Giver and Sustainer of life!

It is described as being a beautiful place. Take some time to read the entirety of Revelation 21:1-22:5. Heaven is described in magnificent terms throughout this passage. However, please remember that Heaven is a spiritual place (remember that we will be transformed and have spiritual bodies because our flesh and blood cannot go to this place, according to 1 Corinthians 15:50-58). Therefore, the terms that are used to describe this place are used to present ideas to our human minds that ought to create a great desire to spend eternity in this place. Even still, this place is far above anything that is known to us on this earth! In fact, it can be accurately pointed out that the most precious things to us here on this earth are only described as being building materials in Heaven (i.e. gold, precious stones, pearls, etc.)!

It is described as being a place without pain, sorrow, or death. Revelation 21:4 says, “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.” What a great point of comfort this provides to us as we live on this earth! This world is full of pain, sorrow, and death (as we discussed in lesson 1). However, all of these things will be absent from Heaven! Furthermore, this passage was intended to bring great comfort to those who were persecuted for the cause of Christ! Although they would be called to suffer temporarily on this earth, they would be

rewarded eternally – and all of their suffering would end!

It is described as being a place without evil. Revelation 21:27 says, “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.” How often we encounter things that are evil here on this earth! Not only is Satan at work in this world, but, we also interact with wicked and immoral people in this world. However, there will be nothing and nobody evil in Heaven! Since God is completely holy and separate from all that is evil (1 John 1:5), anything connected with sin will be left out of Heaven (Note: That is why we must have our sins washed away through the blood of Christ).

It is described as being an eternal home with God. Although there are many desirable aspects of Heaven that ought to cause us to want to spend eternity there, the most desirable aspect of all is the fact that God is and will be in Heaven throughout eternity! Passages like Revelation 21:22-23 and Revelation 22:1-5 picture the fact that those who will go to Heaven will forever be in the presence of God! Therefore, spending an eternity in Heaven is an opportunity to be in the presence of God eternally and to see Him as He is.

**(3) Who will go to Heaven?** Now that we have considered how the Scriptures describe Heaven and why we should desire to go to Heaven, let's consider who will take part in these joys.

First, those who have not sinned will go to Heaven. Sin is what will keep folks out of Heaven (Romans 6:23) – because sin separates the sinner from the holy God (Isaiah 59:1-2). However, young children have not had the opportunity to sin. Contrary to popular teaching, the Bible demonstrates that we do not inherit sin from others when we are born (i.e. Ezekiel 18:20). Therefore, if a child dies while still innocent of the law of God, he/she will go to Heaven! In addition, some do not have the mental ability to sin (i.e. some who are mentally handicapped). These individuals also do not possess the ability to sin. Therefore, if they die in that situation, they will go to Heaven!

Second, those who are obedient to God will go to Heaven. As we have already seen (regarding God's grace and mercy), God has given mankind the opportunity to be forgiven of sin. This forgiveness is only possible through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23)!

However, as we discussed previously, this forgiveness and salvation will only be given to those who are obedient to God (see Matthew 7:21-23; Hebrews 5:9; Revelation 22:14). Go back, then, and review God's plan of salvation that we discussed earlier in this lesson (hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, be baptized, and remain faithful). If you have sinned, you must be obedient to this plan of salvation in order to go to Heaven!

## **Eternity in Hell**

Now, let's continue our consideration of these two eternal destinations by considering the place you should desire to avoid at all costs – Hell. As we do so, let's consider three points: (1) Hell is real, (2) Description of Hell, and (3) Who will go to Hell.

**(1) Hell is real!** If you accept the Bible as being true, then there can be no doubt that Hell is real. Clearly, the Bible speaks of a punishment for those who refuse to do the will of God. Matthew 7:13-14 speaks of the majority of people living in a way that will lead to destruction – while there are only a few who will live in a way that will result in eternal life. Matthew 25:30 says that the one who does not serve God properly will be cast into a place of “outer darkness.” Matthew 25:46 says that those who are unrighteous will “go away into everlasting punishment.” John 3:36 says that those who do not believe in Jesus will “not see life” and will have the “wrath of God” abide on them. Certainly, this is only a sample of the many Bible passages that demonstrate the punishment the wicked will endure.

Now, not only should we realize that the Bible speaks clearly concerning a future eternal punishment for the unrighteous, but that this punishment will be in the place identified as “Hell.” The Greek word that is translated “hell” in the New Testament is the word “Gehenna” (geenna). The word originally referred to the valley of Hinnom (just south of Jerusalem), where filth and dead animals were cast out of the city and would be burned. However, this word is figuratively applied to the future punishment of the wicked.

Consider a couple of passages in which we can see the word being used in this way. Matthew 5:22 says, “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.” Matthew 5:29 says, “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 10:28 says, “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.” Clearly, Jesus was speaking about a future punishment in this place. However, this would certainly not be the literal valley of Hinnom (south of Jerusalem) – since this world will be destroyed when Jesus returns. Instead, it is being used figuratively in reference to an eternal place of punishment for the enemies of God.

Hell is real! The Bible describes Hell as being a real place in which real people will spend their eternities. In fact, we might say that Hell is a prepared place for unprepared people!

**(2) Hell described.** Now, given the fact that Hell is a real place and it is possible for you to live eternally in this place, take a few moments to consider how Hell is described in the Bible.

It is described as eternal punishment. Matthew 25:46 says that the unrighteous will “go away into everlasting punishment.” First, notice that this is punishment. If this was the only thing we knew about “Hell,” it should be enough to deter us from desiring to go there! Second, it is eternal. Though some claim that Hell involves total annihilation, the Bible says that Hell is just as long as Heaven is. Again, Matthew 25:46 says that it is “everlasting punishment” – in contrast with “eternal life.” They are both never-ending! Hell is never-ending punishment.

It is a place depicted by fire. Matthew 25:41 describes that Jesus will tell the unrighteous to “Depart” from Him “into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” on the Day of Judgment. Revelation 21:8 identifies that those who live lives of unrighteousness will all “have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Furthermore, Mark 9:43-48 pictures this place of punishment as being a place where “the fire...shall never be quenched” and their worm “does not die.” Now, as you consider these pictures, remember that this language is used to convey ideas to our human minds. I firmly believe that this is the worse language that can be used to describe what the punishment in Hell will be like.

However, I believe that words cannot fully express the true horror and agony of Hell (just like words cannot fully express the joy and beauty of Heaven). Heaven is a place of comfort, beauty, and spiritual life. Hell is a place depicted by all that is painful and indicates torment and spiritual death. Just imagine being dropped into the middle of a burning lake – with no way of escape and no end to the suffering!

It is a place depicted by darkness and the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:30 says, “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In Heaven, Revelation 21:22-23 says that God illuminates the city. However, Hell is described as being complete darkness. It is entirely absent of any source of light. Furthermore, the intensity of the pain is also visualized in Matthew 25:30 by the weeping and gnashing of teeth! Then, remember that this pain is never-ending.

It is a place of eternal separation from God. Listen to the words Jesus will say to the unrighteous on the Day of Judgment: “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’” (Matthew 25:41). 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 says that the punishment those who fail to obey God will be given will be “from” (away from) “the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” Revelation 21:8 calls the punishment in Hell the “second death.” We have seen that those in Heaven will spend eternity with God. However, Hell will be an entirely God-less place. He will not be there in any form. Just imagine what an existence completely separated from God will be like. This eternal separation from God is why Hell is called the “second death” (physical death being the “first death”).

**(3) Who will go to Hell?** Now that we have considered how the Scriptures describe Hell and why we should desire not to go to Hell, let’s consider who will take part in these punishments.

First, those who have sinned and have never been forgiven of their sins will go to Hell. Remember, the wages of sin is spiritual death (separation from God, see Romans 6:23; Titus 1:14-15; Revelation 21:8). This is what sin pays! The Bible clearly identifies that those who participate in sin (and are not forgiven of their sin) will spend eternity in Hell and will miss out on Heaven (read Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians

5:19-21; Revelation 21:8). Again, God has given mankind the opportunity to be forgiven of sin. However, each individual must determine to believe and obey God (obeying His plan of salvation – hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, be immersed in water, and remain faithful).

Second, those who have once become Christians but have not remained faithful to God will go to Hell. The Bible teaches that the one who becomes a Christian and is forgiven of his/her sins can fall from God’s grace by committing sin (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 10:26-39). This individual, then, needs to repent of his/her sins, confess the sins to God, and ask God for forgiveness (Acts 8:14-24; 1 John 1:8-2:2). Therefore, God tells His people to be faithful to Him unto death (Revelation 2:10)! This involves continual obedience to God throughout life!

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## Conclusion

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We have not exhausted all that could be said about the final Judgment and eternity in Heaven and Hell. However, I hope the things we have studied have been beneficial to you. First, we have established that there will be a final Judgment in which you will take part and be judged for all that you have done, said, thought, left undone, left unsaid, etc. – according to the words contained in the Bible. Second, we have established that everyone who has ever lived/will ever live will one day spend eternity either in Heaven or in Hell (including yourself)!

I would encourage you to read what the Bible says in Romans 2:5-11 in summary to the things we have studied in this lesson and seriously consider your soul’s condition: “But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘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; 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, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.”

In our next (and final) lesson, we will discuss the need to be ready for the things we have discussed up to this point in our study. We will be attempting to make application of all the truths we have established relative the Bible’s teachings about the things that will happen at and after our physical deaths.

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## Study Questions

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What was established in the first two lessons?

### 1. The Final Judgment

When will the final Judgment take place?

Who will be involved in this Judgment?

Who will be the Judge? What are some attributes of Him?

What will the criteria for Judgment be? What will the criteria for Judgment *not* be?

What will the Judgment consist of?

What is the connection between the Judgment and eternity?

### 2. Eternity

What is eternity?

Discuss the following about eternity in Heaven.

\*Is Heaven real?

\*How is Heaven described?

\*Who will go to Heaven?

Discuss the following about eternity in Hell.

\*Is Hell real?

\*How is Hell described?

\*Who will go to Hell?

**\*Summarize what you have learned in this study.**

## What Happens After Death?

# Lesson 4: Be Ready!

What happens after death? Consider some of what we have established up to this point in our study. (1) Mankind possesses a soul that survives physical death. That is, this soul will live on after we experience physical death. (2) Physical death is a certainty. Though you don't know when your physical death will take place, you can be assured that you will die. (3) Hades is the realm of the dead. It is the place where those who have died are today and it is where you will be if you die prior to the return of Jesus Christ. This Hadean realm consists of a part of comfort and a part of torment. (4) Jesus Christ will return. His return is still in the future and we do not know when this Day will come. When He comes, everyone (both living and dead) will be involved and this world will be destroyed. (5) You will be judged by God. God will judge the world by Jesus Christ when He returns, according to the things that are written in the Bible (God's word). (6) You will spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell. Where you spend your eternity will be revealed on the Day of Judgment. Heaven will be a place of tremendous comfort and joy in the presence of God. Hell will be an unimaginable place of torment and punishment away from God's presence.

This is what the Bible teaches about death and what will happen after death. Certainly, though, these are not just facts for us to understand. Instead, these are pressing realities that require great reflection and application. You *will* experience these things (as we have discussed). You will not escape physical death, the return of Christ, the Judgment, and eternity! Therefore, you need to be ready for these things so that you will spend eternity in Heaven.

Think about it for a moment. We want to be ready for all other major events in our lives. It is called being "prepared." Being prepared means that we exercise foresight to anticipate things that are probable or impending in order to take necessary precautions or make necessary arrangements.

Consider a few examples. (1) Retirement. We want to be prepared for retirement because we recognize that there is a time coming in our lives when we will either be unable to work or will choose not to work. Therefore, in order to be prepared for this time, we go to great lengths to store up money for the future. (2) New child. Those who are expecting a new child desire to be prepared for their child's birth because they recognize that there are certain things they want to have in place for when the child is born. Therefore, in order to be prepared for this time, parents go to great lengths to prepare the necessary clothing, diapers, the baby's room, make arrangements for traveling, etc. (3) Safety in a storm. Preparedness is stressed prior to an expected storm because taking the proper steps to be prepared for a natural disaster can save lives. Therefore, in order to be prepared for a storm, many people will gather non-perishable food items and water, find the proper shelter from the storm, prepare a piece of property (i.e. boarding up windows), etc.

I'm sure we could think of an even greater number of examples about how we think about preparedness than these! But, why is it that these sorts of preparations are often seen as being so pressing, while preparing the soul for the things that await after death are put off (even though they could happen at any moment – even today)? It is likely due to being carnally minded. That is, we *see* the sorts of things that we have just talked about. We are constantly reminded of them and understand them from a physical perspective. However, since the soul is unseen and we have never (yet) experienced physical death and the things that come after death, they often do not seem real or serious to us.

Our challenge, therefore, is to live with a focus on the life that is to come rather than focusing on the life here on this earth. Constantly put yourself in remembrance of the things that are going to happen at death – and beyond! That's why Solomon (one of the wisest men to ever live) said that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting in Ecclesiastes 7:2. We might phrase it this way: It is better to go a funeral than to

a party. Why is that? Solomon says it is because it will remind the living that this is what will happen to them all some day! Therefore, we need to be very diligent to observe these reminders of death and take them to heart, knowing that it will happen to each one of us some day – and we need to be ready!

The purpose of this fourth (and final) lesson in the study, “What Happens After Death?,” is to encourage you to recognize the truths we have established through this study and help you understand and determine to do what God says you need to do in order to be ready.

## Few Will Be Ready

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You have heard the warnings God has given throughout the pages of Scripture about death and what happens after death – as well as the wonderful blessings He has prepared for those who do His will. However, regardless of all the information God has given and the warnings He has offered, few will actually be ready.

### Jesus taught that few will be saved

Look at Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:13-14: “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.”

This passage highlights the two options folks have in life regarding how they will live. The broad way is the way of the world. It is the way of living to please your own desires rather than God’s desires. The narrow way is the way of God. It is the way of living to please God rather than your own desires.

This passage also highlights the simple fact of the matter that most will walk on the broad way. The broad way is the easy way. It is the path we will walk on whenever we follow our own earthly desires. It is the path that does not require self-discipline or determination. However, the narrow way is difficult. It takes great effort, focus, and determination. It is the path that involves great self-denial and dedication to God. Very few people, therefore, will choose this path.

Finally, this passage highlights the end of both roads (where they lead). The broad way (the easy way) is said to lead to eternal destruction. This path leads to the place of eternal punishment we studied about in lesson 3 (Hell). This is the place of punishment that burns with fire and brimstone (as described in Revelation 21:8). However, the narrow way (the difficult way) is said to lead to eternal life. This path leads to the place of everlasting joy and comfort we also studied about in lesson 3 (Heaven). This is the place that is described in Revelation 21:1-22:5 and the same place God dwells.

### This means that few will be prepared!

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:13-14 simply helps us to understand that the number of people who will be prepared for their earthly lives to end will be quite small (in comparison to the number who have lived on earth).

Most people will choose to live life for themselves. Most will put their focus on the things of this earth and fail to live their lives completely dedicated to God. They will be focused on achieving earthly measures of “success.” They will be focused on accumulating the riches of this world. They will be focused on experiencing the pleasures this life offers them. They will be focused on the hustle-and-bustle of this life. They will be focused on the daily things that pertain to this life.

And, even many who are “religious” (even professing “Christians”) will be lost eternally in Hell because they will not completely dedicate themselves to the Lord. Shortly after Jesus taught that few will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14), He said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23). Therefore, many of these individuals will die believing that they were “Christians” and (perhaps) while they were even living morally good lives (in comparison to the world). However, these individuals will have failed to be obedient to God and fully dedicate their lives to Him – practicing a *form* of (so-called) “Christianity,” but not practicing true, New Testament Christianity.



Few people will live their lives in a way that will result in being prepared for eternity. But, this is nothing new. Throughout the Bible, you should notice that there were few who listened to God and heeded His warnings! For instance, few people listened to and heeded God's warnings in the time leading up to the flood that covered the earth (only Noah and his family listened – eight souls in total). Few people listened to God's law among the nation of Israel and heeded His warnings about disobedience.

Nothing has changed. Few will listen to God's law today and heed His warnings about disobedience! Most will not want to live their lives according to His standards. Most will be too occupied by the things of life to think about the things that will happen after death. Many will not even want to recognize the things we have discussed in this study as being true! However, a few will give their lives to live according to God's standard in preparation for the things we have been studying about.

## The Importance Of Being Ready

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Few will be ready. But, why should you even desire to be among the few who will be ready? Hopefully you have a good understanding of these things by this point in our study. However, let's spend some time underscoring the importance of being ready – before we talk about how you can be ready.

### Because of the things we've established

Why do you need to be ready? Think back over everything we have discussed in this study. It is all applicable to your need to be ready. Consider the points we've established again – with a focus on how they apply to your need to be prepared.

(1) You have a soul that will survive your physical death. There is a part of your existence (the spiritual part) that will continue to exist *somewhere* after your life on earth is over. (2) You will die. Your earthly life will come to an end (and it won't last very long). (3) If you die before the return of Jesus Christ, your soul will be taken to Hades. In Hades, you will

either go to a place of torment or comfort, depending on how you have lived your life on this earth. (4) You will take part in Jesus' return. Whether you are alive on this earth or you have already died, you will be involved in Jesus' return. (5) You will be judged by God (through Christ) according to the things written in the Bible (God's word). Your life will be evaluated as to whether you have been obedient to God's instructions or not. (6) You will either spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell. Where you will spend your eternity will be determined in Judgment, according to how you have lived your earthly life compared to the teachings of God's word.

These things that we have been discussing throughout this study are very serious and have eternal implications! Therefore, every one of these points needs to be seriously considered and preparations need to be made accordingly.

### Because Jesus tells you to be ready

Why do you need to be ready? Jesus Christ, who possesses perfect knowledge, tells you that you need to be ready! Particularly, in Matthew 24:36 through chapter 25, Jesus taught concerning His return, the Judgment, and eternity. And, as He teaches concerning these things, He tells us about our need to be prepared for them!

(1) Matthew 24:36-44. In verse 36, Jesus says that no one knows the "day and hour" of His return (not even the angels of heaven), only the Father knows. Then, He compares how His return will be similar to the days of Noah. He says that most people were conducting their lives as usual when the flood came to destroy the world of those who were unprepared. Likewise, Jesus' coming will be at a time when most people are focused on their own earthly lives and have made no preparations for His return, though there will be few prepared. In verses 42-44, Jesus says, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

(2) Matthew 24:45-51. In this passage, Jesus compares His return to the return of a master. He talks of a master who set his servant as ruler of his household. Then, he compares the servant who will be prepared for the master's return and will be found

doing the master's will with the servant who was unprepared for the master's return and is found neglecting his given responsibilities. Jesus says that the servant who is "faithful and wise" and found doing what the master desires will be blessed. However, the evil servant who sees that his master is delayed and is found unprepared for the master's return will be punished. This illustration is used to identify the fact that some will be caught unprepared for Jesus' return and they will be punished to the place where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verse 51).

(3) Matthew 25:1-13. Jesus goes on in this passage to teach a parable about being prepared. The setting is given as ten virgins who are waiting for the bridegroom to come and marry his bride. Five of these virgins are said to have been wise (having taken oil for their lamps) and five of them are identified as being foolish (not having brought oil for their lamps). And, while the bridegroom delayed, "they all slumbered and slept" (verse 5). Then, at midnight, the bridegroom was announced as coming – and the five virgins who were unprepared were forced to go at that time to buy oil for their lamps. However, while they were gone, the bridegroom came and took the five wise and prepared virgins with him to the wedding – and the door to the wedding was shut. When the five foolish virgins returned, they pleaded for entrance to the wedding, but it was not granted to them. Then, in verse 13, Jesus demonstrates how that His point in this parable is for people to be ready for His return: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

(4) Matthew 25:14-30. After the parable about the ten virgins, Jesus teaches another parable that indicates the need to be ready. In this parable, Jesus teaches concerning three individuals who were given a certain amount of their master's possessions (i.e. talents). Note that a talent was a particular weight of gold or silver. One man was entrusted with five talents, another two talents, and another one talent – each one according to his ability. Then, after a long time, the master returned and "settled accounts with them" (verse 19). He required each servant to present him with what he had done with the amount he had been given. The "five talent man" had gained five additional talents. The "two talent man" had gained two additional talents. However, the "one talent man" had hidden his talent in the ground and had failed to make any gain. The five and two talent

men were rewarded for the good way they managed the master's possessions. However, the one talent man was punished because of the way he had wasted the master's possession. Likewise, Jesus' point in the parable is that we have each been entrusted with certain things (i.e. our health, time, abilities, opportunities, relationships, etc.) and we must use them during our earthly lives in His service. If we faithfully serve Him, He will reward us when He returns. However, if we waste our lives by not faithfully serving Him, He will punish us when He returns.

Think about it! Jesus knows what is going to happen when your life is over. He knows about Hades and He knows about Heaven and Hell! Therefore, if Jesus warns you to be ready (as we have seen demonstrated), shouldn't you heed His warning? He knows how bad the punishment will be for those who have failed to obey Him. He knows how great the reward will be for those who have faithfully served Him. He knows both of these so well that He willingly left Heaven to come to earth and die so that you could be saved from the punishment of Hell and spend eternity in Heaven!

### **Because all earthly things will perish**

Why do you need to be ready? You need to be ready because of the implications from the things we studied about what will happen to everything on this earth. Recall how that we have studied about your own earthly life coming to an end and about this world being destroyed when Jesus returns. Why does it matter that everything on earth will be destroyed? Because that's what so many people live their lives for! So, the fact that these things are only temporary ought to serve as a wakeup call!

(1) 2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12. Verse 7 says that this world is "reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" – when it will be destroyed by this fire. This is demonstrated in verse 10 when Peter says that "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" whenever Jesus returns. Then, verse 12 continues to demonstrate that "the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat" at this time. So, when Christ returns, everything left on this earth will be burned up! Therefore, your earthly body (if there's anything left of it by that time), the money, the houses, the

sources of earthly pleasure, etc. will all be burned up whenever Christ returns!

(2) Matthew 6:19-21. In this text, Jesus warns against storing up treasures on this earth. He demonstrates that earthly treasures are only temporary. He says that moths and rust can destroy them. He says that thieves can steal them away. However, treasures stored up in Heaven are not temporary. They are eternal – not subject to destruction, decay, or being stolen. Therefore, you must realize that anything you value on this earth is only temporary! You can put all of your focus on fulfilling your earthly desires (storing up earthly treasures) or you can put all of your focus on doing God’s will (storing up Heavenly treasures). You have this choice – but only one will be worthwhile and will be beneficial to you spiritually!

(3) Luke 12:13-21. Here is a passage that demonstrates the previous point. First, Jesus warns that life is not about the things you possess (verse 15). Essentially, Jesus says that life on this earth is really not about life on this earth – it is about making preparations for the life that is yet to come! Then, Jesus tells a parable about an individual who made all sorts of preparations for his earthly wealth, pleasure, and comfort. But, He left God out of his planning. When his life was over, his soul was unprepared – and his earthly treasures (which he had worked so hard to accumulate and prepare) would simply be given to someone else! They would not benefit him at all now that his earthly life was over. Jesus says that this story is a warning to everyone who is living – who is laying up treasure upon the earth and is not rich toward God!

No matter how valuable some earthly treasure is to you during your earthly life, you need to realize that it is only temporary! At best it will last you the whole time you live on this earth. Instead of finding yourself bankrupt after your earthly life ends, you need to make a spiritual investment of yourself to store up treasures in Heaven so that you can be rich toward God! Please take some time to diligently reflect upon the truths we’ve just established and consider every physical thing that you enjoy “soon to be burned”! Allow this thinking to help you recognize your true need to store up Heavenly treasures rather than earthly ones.

## **Because if you miss Heaven, you miss it all!**

Why do you need to be ready? We have already seen that your readiness impacts where you will spend eternity. Now, realize that if you are not ready and you miss Heaven, you have truly missed it all!

In Matthew 16:26, Jesus said, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” All of the self-denial and sacrifice to live as a Christian will be well worth it whenever the faithful get to Heaven! However, Jesus says that the consequence of losing your soul (being unprepared and cast into Hell) is not worth it – even if you can possess and enjoy *everything* the world has to offer (i.e. all of its pleasures and treasures)!

What will you give in exchange for your soul? Is there anything you are willing to sell your soul for? Is there something on this earth that appeals to you so much that you would be willing to spend eternity in Hell for it? Some temporary earthly pleasure? Some temporary wealth? Some temporary ease of living? If so, you had better listen up! Jesus says that nothing and no one is worth losing your soul for! Remember, He is the one who should know – He is the one who gave His own life on the cross in order to save you from the consequences of dying in your sin (Romans 5:6-11; Romans 6:23)!

If you live your life in pursuit of earthly things, you will almost certainly experience some temporary pleasure and enjoyment. However, as we have seen, these things will certainly not be beneficial to you beyond your earthly life. Instead, you need to recognize the true blessing of having the opportunity to live eternally in Heaven – and recognize that nothing and no one is so valuable that you should sacrifice that opportunity for them! If you are spending your life chasing after earthly things, one day you will certainly recognize that you wasted your life and missed that the most important thing about this life is preparing yourself for the great Day of Judgment and eternity!

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## **How To Be Ready**

Few will be ready and be saved eternally. However, you must certainly act upon the knowledge

you have gained from the Bible about what happens after death so that you can be among the few who will be ready. But, how can you be ready?

## **How can you be ready?**

What do you need to do in order to be “ready”? I sincerely hope that you recognize the need to be prepared for the things that will happen after death. But, what can you do to make sure that you are prepared? Let’s now begin to discuss some very basic and essential things that the Bible requires of you.

First, please understand that the only way you can be ready and be saved from your sins is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Without Him, you would be hopelessly lost in your sins. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Sin (violating the laws of God) produces spiritual death (separation from God). Dying in this condition of being separated from God results in eternal separation from God by being condemned to Hell (the “second death,” Revelation 21:8). This is what we have all earned by sinning against God.

However, although we have all earned this eternal spiritual torment in Hell by sinning, God has provided all mankind the opportunity to be saved. This He did through sending Jesus Christ as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Notice the language of John 3:16: “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.” Therefore, God has given you this opportunity to “not perish but have everlasting life.” This is truly something that you could not earn! However, because of the love of God, He has given you this opportunity to entirely trust in Him and be saved from the consequences of your sins.

Thanks be to God for giving us all the opportunity to be saved from our sins! Again, this is an opportunity none of us deserve; but, that we should all desire to make the most of! Yet, in order to be saved, God requires that we be obedient to His commandments. Whenever you obey God in this way, you will not earn your salvation. Instead, you will simply do what God has required you to do for salvation (meeting the conditions He has placed upon such). Read the following passages to observe the fact that God does require you to be obedient to Him in order to be saved: Matthew 7:21-23; 2

Thessalonians 1:7-9; Hebrews 5:9; James 1:22-25; James 2:14-26.

While we will not be able to discuss every aspect of living for the Lord in this lesson (as that will take life-long devotion to studying and applying the teachings of God’s word), please understand that the things we will now begin to discuss represent the plan of salvation you can read about throughout the pages of the Scriptures. Specifically, we will be considering what you must do in order to become a Christian and then emphasize that you must continue to live a life of faithful service to God.

## **Hear God’s word**

The first “step” to becoming a Christian and having your sins forgiven (so that you can have an eternal home in Heaven) is to hear what God’s word teaches. This, then, is the first step in being “ready.”

Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Acts 18:8 demonstrates this truth – showing that the Corinthians first heard the teaching of God’s word before they believed and obeyed it. It says, “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”

Certainly, you cannot know what you must do in order to be saved and take any action so as to be saved unless you first learn about what God wants from your life! Now, God does not require you to have a perfect knowledge about His word before you can be saved. However, you do need to know who He is, what He has done for you, and what He has required you to do to be saved!

Therefore, you should imitate the example of the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures every day to know whether they were being taught correctly or not. Acts 17:11 says the following about them: “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” Consider the importance of diligently searching the Scriptures in light of all the false doctrine that is being taught in the name of Jesus Christ. Read the following passages to see some of what the Bible says about false teaching: Matthew 7:15-20; Galatians 1:6-12; 2 Peter 2:1-3. Therefore, you need to hear what God’s word teaches (and cannot just take someone

else's word for things) so that you can be obedient to His instructions!

## Believe

Once again, Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Now, Hebrews 11:6 says that "without faith it is impossible to please" God. Certainly, you must truly believe in God and in Jesus Christ!

In John 8:24, Jesus said, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." You cannot please God unless you fully trust that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be – the Son of God!

Now, please recognize at this point that many people and religious organizations will claim that belief in Christ is all that God requires for you to be saved. This is false. For instance, in Matthew 7:21-23 (quoted earlier in the lesson), Jesus said that there would be many people on the Day of Judgment who would claim that they had believed in Jesus. However, Jesus said that they would be eternally condemned to Hell because they were unwilling to be obedient to the Father's will. Furthermore, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 demonstrates that those who are not obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ will be punished with everlasting destruction.

Then, James 2:14-26 is even further evidence that simply accepting the truth about Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation. I invite you to read the entirety of this passage. Three times in this passage, James demonstrates that "faith without works is dead" (verse 20). Then, James demonstrates that even the demons accept the truth about God and tremble, but they will not be saved because they do not obey Him (verse 19). Finally, consider the plain statement made by James in verse 24: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." So, salvation is clearly "not by faith only." It does require works. The works that are required are works of *obedience*, not works of *merit*.

## Repent of your sins

Not only does God indicate that hearing His word and believing in Jesus Christ are essential for salvation, but, God also requires that you repent of your sins.

In Luke 13:3, Jesus said, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Again, in verse 5, He says, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Acts 3:19 says, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." To individuals who desired to know what they needed to do to be saved, Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Then, when Paul preached to idolaters in the city of Athens, he said that God "now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

To repent is to change your mind regarding your past sins. When you repent, you look upon your past sins with abhorrence, as you recognize that your sins have separated you from God. Repentance (according to 2 Corinthians 7:9-10) is produced by experiencing godly sorrow over the wrongs you have committed against God. Therefore, you repent whenever you determine no longer to live in those same sinful ways and determine to live your life for God in the future.

## Confess Jesus Christ

Another requirement God has placed upon salvation is that you must confess Jesus Christ. Again, as we continue to see, it is not enough just to mentally accept the truth about Jesus Christ; but, you must also confess Him publicly.

In Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus said, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." Romans 10:9-10 says, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

What does God require you to confess? Some say that that you must confess your sins. However, this is *not* the confession God requires. Instead, God requires that you confess "the Lord Jesus." This is demonstrated in Acts 8:37. In this passage (read Acts 8:26-40), a man from Ethiopia learns the gospel of Jesus Christ and wants to be obedient to it. He sees some water as they are traveling and wants to comply with God's instructions to be baptized. He asked, "What hinders me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Then, Philip (the one who had been teaching

the man) said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And, the man of Ethiopia answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). Then, the man was baptized for the remission of his sins (Acts 8:38-39).

## Be baptized

The final “step” (or, requirement) God has given you to obey to become a Christian and be forgiven of your sins is baptism (immersion in water). While there are many people today who will tell you that baptism is *not* essential for salvation, God says that it *is* necessary for salvation!

Consider the following passages that demonstrate the fact that baptism is necessary for salvation. Mark 16:16 says, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Acts 2:38 says, “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 22:16 says, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Galatians 3:26-27 says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” 1 Peter 3:20-21 says, “who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

So, the Bible clearly teaches that baptism comes *before* the point of salvation – not after! Baptism is demonstrated by these passages to be necessary for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), to be in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), and to be saved (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21). Therefore, without being obedient to God’s command to be baptized, you will not have your sins forgiven, be in Christ, or be saved!

Now, please recognize that true Bible baptism can only be accomplished by the immersion in water. Sprinkling or pouring water over someone’s head is *not* sufficient to fulfill God’s command to be baptized (though many religious organizations practice such things as acceptable

substitutes for immersion). Along with the fact that the original word for “baptism” means “immersion,” the Bible demonstrates the action involved in baptism in Matthew 3:16 and Acts 8:38-39 clearly is the action of immersion (notice how they went down and came up from the water). Then, the Bible also identifies baptism as a burial. Romans 6:4 says that we are “buried” with Christ through baptism. Similarly, Colossians 2:12 says, “buried with Him in baptism....” Clearly, baptism is a full immersion in water.

Then, please understand that baptism that is done in any other way or for any other purpose besides the way and purpose given in the Bible is *not* true Bible baptism! For instance, many people have been “baptized” in the past by having water sprinkled or poured on their heads. Or, many people have been baptized (perhaps even fully immersed in water), but they believed they were saved prior to being baptized. Instead, true Bible baptism is the only baptism that results in salvation – and it is at this point you become a Christian!

## Be faithful

Upon your obedience to the commandments we have been considering, you become a Christian, are forgiven of your sins, and are added to Christ’s church. Read how those who were obedient to the gospel’s plan of salvation were added to Christ’s church in Acts 2:37-47. It was only after individuals were baptized into Christ Jesus for the remission of their sins that they could go on their way rejoicing (see Acts 8:38-39; Acts 16:34).

Then, once you have become a Christian, God instructs you to be faithful unto death. To a group of Christians who were about to be severely persecuted, Jesus instructed: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). You see, Christians are *not* “once saved always saved.” Rather, the Bible teaches that those who have been saved can sin so as to be lost from God’s grace (see Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 10:26-39). God expects faithfulness throughout your life (as Revelation 2:10 and many other Bible passages demonstrate). This faithfulness to God is accomplished whenever you trust and obey God whole-heartedly!

Part of being a Christian involves walking in a newness of life (as evident from Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 3:1-17). The Christian simply must not

go back to living the kind of life that he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian (read the entirety of Romans 6). Also, consider the following passages to see the kind of commitment that God expects you to make: Luke 9:23-26; Luke 14:25-33; Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 2:20. All of these passages demonstrate that there must be a complete dedication to God and fulfilling His purposes throughout your life!

Then, as a Christian, you have become a member of Christ's one true church (the church of Christ) – see Acts 2:41, 47. It is important, then, to join a local church that teaches and practices only that which you can read about in the Bible! Most churches simply fail to practice and teach only what the New Testament authorizes. To be involved with any of these churches is to fail to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 1:9-11) and is to be in fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11)! Instead, you need to search out or start a church that only believes, practices, and teaches what you can read about in the New Testament.

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## Conclusion

We have still not exhausted everything that could be said about being ready. However, I hope that the things we *have* established have been beneficial to you. First, we have established that few will be ready and, therefore, few will be saved. Second, we established why it is important to be ready. Third, we established some basics concerning how you can be ready.

I hope that you will be ready for your life on this earth to end. Now, I encourage you to consider your true purpose in life. It is *not* to fulfill your own earthly desires. Rather, it is to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). I encourage you to view yourself as a stranger and a pilgrim on this earth (1 Peter 2:11-12). That is, don't view this earth as your home. Instead, view it only as your temporary dwelling place until your earthly life is over. In doing this, you will be better prepared to deny yourself of fleshly desires and focus on your spiritual needs.

Please take time at the conclusion of this lesson to reflect on all of the Bible truths we have established through this study. Make diligent application of them to your life. And, determine to

do whatever you need to do in order to be ready for the end of your earthly life! Are you ready for what happens after death?

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## Study Questions

What was established in the first three lessons?

What are some areas you make careful preparations in?

### 1. Few Will Be Ready

How many, according to Jesus, will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14)?

What does this fact tell you about the spiritual preparedness of most people?

### 2. The Importance Of Being Ready

How do the things we've discussed in the other 3 lessons of this series impact the need to be prepared?

What does Jesus teach about the need to be ready? Why is this significant?

Why is the fact that all earthly things will perish significant? How does it impact your need to be ready?

What does Jesus teach in Matthew 16:26? What impact does this teaching have upon the need to be ready? Is there anything/anyone you will sell your soul for?

### **3. How To Be Ready**

How has God given you the opportunity to be saved?  
What does He require of you?

What is the importance of hearing God's Word?

What is the importance of faith? Is faith only enough to be saved?

What is repentance? Why is it important?

What confession must be made?

Is baptism necessary for salvation? What is baptism?  
Have you been baptized in this way and for this purpose?

What is involved in remaining faithful to God? Why is it necessary? What should you look for in a church?

**\*Summarize what you have learned in this study.  
Do you have any questions/comments?**