

The State of Man at Death

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No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.
– John 6:44

Introduction

Some people in the Bible are remembered for their good deeds, while others are remembered for their rebellion. King Saul, the first king of Israel, is remembered for his rebellion against God. His life is an object lesson showing how quickly self-centeredness can lead to a ruined life.

The Bible says that Saul died a tragic death – he took his own life when he was 61 years old. In an attack on Shunem about 1000 B.C., the Philistines critically injured Saul. Rather than let his enemies gloat in victory, he fell upon his own sword and died. (1 Samuel 31:4) Many Christians believe that King Saul went directly to hell that afternoon. According to the doctrine of an eternally burning hell, King Saul and millions of people like him are writhing and jumping about in the flames of hell fire this very minute.

Advocates of an eternal hell claim that once God sends a person to hell, there is [no escape and no relief](#). The torment is said to be painful and torturous beyond words!

According to the scenario above, King Saul has been on fire for about 3,000 years. He must be discouraged beyond words since there is no second chance – no way out of hell. His cries for relief are no doubt drowned out by the roar of hell's furnaces.

Think about it. If there is a burning hell where sinners, young and old, writhe in eternal torment, it must be the most awful place in the whole universe! There is no way out, no hope, no end. I can just imagine how the hostages of hell curse God and cry out for immediate release from their misery every time the devil turns up the thermostat.

Many Christians believe this scenario to be true, or something similar to it and they use the parable Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus to prove it. (Luke 16:19-31) Unfortunately, many non-Christians refuse to believe in God because they find this doctrine about God's justice to be repugnant.

About 15 years ago, George Gallup surveyed American Christians regarding their views on Heaven and hell. Almost 87% of the individuals surveyed believed they were going to Heaven and 91% said they knew someone in hell or someone who was going there. In recent years, the cruelty of hell has been lessened by some theologians. Consequently, recent surveys reveal that larger numbers of Christians do not believe that hell is a literal place where the souls of wicked people writhe in eternal flames.

So, is there a hell? Where is it? What is it like? When does a person go to hell?

Nobody is Burning in Hell Yet

The idea of an eternally burning hell is based on the idea that man's soul is immortal or not subject to death. Therefore, man's soul continues to live an intellectual life after it leaves the body. For this reason Christians often speak of deceased friends saying, "They have gone on to be with the Lord."

This comment raises a good question. Do you think Abel and everyone else who has died "in the Lord" are in Heaven, playing harps and eating the delicious fruit that grows on the Tree of Life? Do you think Cain, the first murderer, King Saul, and everyone who has died in rebellion against God are writhing in eternal hell?

For the following reasons I am convinced that King Saul is not in hell and Abel is not in Heaven:

1. First and foremost, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. (Romans 5:9; 1 Corinthians 15:3) If the penalty for sin is an endless burning in hell, then Jesus did not pay the penalty for sin. Jesus was resurrected on the third day! (Acts 10:40) We also know that Jesus returned to Heaven forty days after His death. (Acts 1:3) So, why would God require human beings to burn *forever* for their sins when He required far less of man's Sin Bearer? (2 Corinthians 5:21) The Bible indicates the Father does not impose more on fallen man than He put upon Jesus.
2. God is fair. (Psalm 89:14) God does not torture people forever just because they lived in rebellion for a few years. Eternal punishment for 70 years of rebellion is not fair. A judicial system is fair if it upholds the principle that punishment is commensurate with the crime. (Matthew 7:1,2) Does God do less? No! Should King Saul be tortured with fire for billions of years when he only lived a mere 61 years? No. In fact, the Bible says that God will not torture the wicked for eternity, but instead reduce the wicked to ashes. (Malachi 4:3)
3. God is love and the new Earth will be a wonderful place to live. (1 John 4:8; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Revelation 21:1-4) However, it would be impossible for the saints to remain content and happy with God's government and justice if they had to observe their loved ones in the flames of hell day after day.
4. The Bible teaches there will be two resurrections. (John 5:28,29; Revelation 20:4,5) The first resurrection occurs at the Second Coming. At that time, the righteous will be resurrected and they will meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17) The second resurrection occurs at the end of the 1,000 years. At that time the wicked will be resurrected and they will face their Maker as He announces their sentence. Why are there two resurrections if people are already in Heaven or hell? Why would God resurrect the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years (who are alleged to be in hell already), for the purpose of putting them back into an earthly body and then throwing them into a blazing fire again? (Revelation 20:7-15)

Things Do Not Add Up

Is it possible that the Bible teaches that good people do not go to Heaven when they die and wicked people do not go to hell the day they die? Consider the following:

The Bible teaches there is a resurrection for the righteous and a resurrection for the wicked. If the righteous go immediately to Heaven when they die, why does Jesus say that the righteous are resurrected *at the last day*? **"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."**

(John 6:40, 44; 12:48) Some scholars claim that God's purpose for resurrecting the righteous at the last day is to reclaim an earthly body. This argument does not make any sense. If the soul is a living entity that can exist outside the body, why is a body necessary? For example, if Abel has been in Heaven for almost 6,000 years, why would he want or need a body now? Besides, the Bible says that flesh and blood cannot inherit eternal life! (1 Corinthians 15:50) Even more, what about those individuals who suffer with physical deformities while they are alive? Would their soul want to return to a deformed and degenerate body again? Certainly not. If a body actually returns to dust after death as the Bible indicates (Psalm 104:29; Ecclesiastes 3:20), then why would Jesus wait until the Second Coming to gather some dirt to create a new body for the deceased? He could certainly create a new body at any time.

The Bible teaches there is an appointed time for the people of Earth to be judged. (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 17:31; John 12:48) If people go to Heaven or hell at the time of death, God would have to judge them at the time of death. This is not what the Bible teaches and contrary to what many people believe. Neither Abel, the first man to die about 6,000 years ago, nor King Saul, who died on the battlefield 3,000 years ago, were sent to their eternal destinations at the time of their death.

Even more compelling are the Bible verses that confirm that the dead know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5) and that they are in a state of "sleep." (John 11:2-15) God foreknew the devil would use man's curiosity about death to trap people with his sophisticated lies. (2 Chronicles 33:6) Therefore, God expressly forbade man from trying to communicate with people who had died. God said, **"Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead."** (Deuteronomy 18:10,11)

Revelation 20:15 reveals that God will put an end to sin at the end of the millennium and everyone not found in the Book of Life will be burned up. Here is the problem as I see it. Eternal life in Heaven or in hell requires immortality; however, God grants immortality only to the saints at the Second Coming. (See 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.) The wicked never receive immortality. Therefore, the souls of the wicked are not immortal. In fact, the Bible clearly says, **"the soul who sins is the one who will die."** (Ezekiel 18:4) Think about it. If wicked people were

immortal and suffered in hell forever, the presence of sinners and rebellion within the universe would last throughout eternity!

Conditional Mortality

To understand man's condition in death we must begin with the book of Genesis. When God created Adam and Eve, He granted them *conditional* immortality. They could live indefinitely as long as they had access to the Tree of Life.

But, when they sinned, God separated them from the Tree of Life so they would eventually die. **"And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.' So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."** (Genesis 3:22-24)

At the very beginning of life Jesus warned Adam saying, ". . . **You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.**" (Genesis 2:16,17) This text does not mean that the body would die and the soul would live on. No! This text means that man would cease to exist. This issue is at the heart of the lie which the devil wanted Eve to believe.

Remember, Satan said to Eve, **"You will not surely die . . ."** (Genesis 3:4). Satan led Eve to believe that if she ate of the forbidden fruit that she would become immortal like God. If she had immortality, she could not be subject to death! What a clever deception!

God did not insert an everlasting soul in Adam's body. Instead, Adam *became* a living soul when God created him. **"The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man *became* a living being."** (Genesis 2:7, italics mine.) In other words, God united Adam's body of dust with His own breath of life and Adam became a living being.

When Adam died at the age of 930 years, his soul ceased to exist because the human soul cannot live as a separate entity outside the body. The soul of man results from a combination of two parts – a human body and the breath of life. Here is an illustration that might help to illustrate this concept. A light bulb comes to "life" when the power of electricity is applied to it. Light occurs when the light bulb is combined with electricity.

If the power is removed, there is no light. Likewise, if there is no breath of life in the body, there is no soul. A man's soul is mortal which means it is subject to death. God alone is immortal and not subject to death. When Jesus died for humanity, He had to lay His immortality aside! (John 10:17,19) When the Father resurrected Jesus, the Father restored immortality to Him. (Revelation 1:18)

But notice what God said about man at the time of Noah's flood, "**Then the Lord said, My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his [remaining] days will be a hundred and twenty years.**" (Genesis 6:3, insertion mine.)

Each time the word immortal is used in the Bible, it pertains to God, not man. "**Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen . . . God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen**" (1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15,16)

Paul expounds on this point by writing that God will grant the gift of immortality to the saints at the Second Coming! "**When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'**" (1 Corinthians 15:54)

If the righteous receive immortality at the Second Coming, it is obvious that they do not have immortality before that time!

Therefore, no one has knowledge or intelligence before he or she is born and there is no knowledge or intelligence in death. Death is a state of nonexistence. Many people, of course, disagree with this view and Christians offer certain texts to demonstrate otherwise. Let us examine these texts and see what the Bible actually says:

Spirit Returns to God

"**And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit [ruach] returns to God who gave it.**" (Ecclesiastes 12:7, insertion mine.) Some people use this text to prove that the spirit of man returns to God when he dies. Although this text does not say so, the alleged implication is that something intelligent returns to God at the time of death. Advocates of the external soul reason that when the body and the spirit are separated, the spirit (or "ruach") returns to God who gave it.

The Hebrew word "ruach" means wind or breath. Notice how this word is translated a few verses earlier: "**As you do not know the path of the wind [ruach], or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.**" (Ecclesiastes 11:5) The ruach of the righteous, as well as the ruach of the wicked, returns to God at death! The text is clear on this point: The "breath of life" is a gift from God to all people at birth and the "breath of life" [ruach] returns to God who gave it when we die, regardless of our moral behavior!

Job's use of the word "ruach" helps clarify the meaning even further. He says, "**As long as I have life within me, the breath [ruach] of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak deceit.**" (Job 27:3,4 [KJV]) An unrefined translation of Job's comment might read, "As long as I have life within me and the breath from God in my nose, my lips will not speak lies." Neither Solomon nor Job used the word "ruach" to mean a conscious spirit roaming the heavens.

King David also knew that death brought an end to consciousness. He said, "**Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit [nephesh] departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.**" (Psalms 146:3,4) The Hebrew word "nephesh" also means breath.

This word is used many times in the Bible to describe the breath of living creatures. Notice: "**And the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath [nephesh] of life, and man became a living being.**" (Genesis 2:7)

Concerning the flood, the Bible says, "**Everything on dry land that had the breath [nephesh] of life in its nostrils died.**" (Genesis 7:22, insertion mine.)

King David believed the dead were in their graves and not in Heaven praising the Lord. He said, "**It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to silence; it is we [the living] who extol the Lord**" (Psalm 115:17,18, insertion mine.) The Apostle Peter also confirmed this point. On the day of Pentecost he spoke about King David saying, "**Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day . . . For David did not ascend to heaven**" (Acts 2:29,34)

Solomon leaves no room for doubt regarding this topic. He explains the state of man in death very clearly. He said that the dead are unaware of anything that occurs on Earth. He wrote, "**For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.**" (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6)

Jesus called *Death*, "Sleep"

Many Christians do not correctly understand man's condition in death. Thirteen times in the New Testament, death is called *sleep*. There are two reasons for this:

1. First, death is actually like a sleep. (See John 11:11-14.) There is no awareness in death (or during a good night's sleep).
2. Second, the first death is temporary (just as sleep is temporary), whereas the second death lasts forever.

When Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha died, Jesus referred to Lazarus' death as sleep. (John 11.) Why did Jesus refer to Lazarus as being asleep? For an obvious reason – the death that Lazarus experienced was *temporary*, just like sleep is temporary. When we sleep deeply, we are unaware of our surroundings. However, sleep does not last forever.

Think of the "resurrection" as a powerful awakening. Every person who lives and dies will live again and God will awaken from their sleep everyone who dies in one of two resurrections. The Bible indicates there are two resurrections – one for the saints and the other for the wicked.

The first resurrection occurs at the Second Coming. This means there will be a judgment of human beings *prior* to the Second Coming, because Jesus will decide who is righteous and who is not before He comes. Therefore, those judged to be righteous will be resurrected at the Second Coming. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

The people judged to be wicked will be resurrected at the end of the millennium. (Revelation 20:5)

This is a critical point: Natural death (the first death) is not the *penalty* for sin. Natural death comes as a consequence of being separated from the Tree of Life. The penalty for sin, however, is death by execution and God will implement the penalty for sin at the end of the millennium. (Revelation 20:14,15)

Once the distinction between these two deaths is understood, it becomes clear why no one could be burning in hell right now. The second death by execution has not been implemented! The *penalty* for sin has not been imposed on anyone except Jesus and that happened when He died on Calvary. When Jesus died on the cross, He suffered the penalty for our sins, namely, death by execution.

Did Jesus Preach to the Spirits in Hell?

The following text is sometimes offered as a proof text showing that Jesus preached to the souls of dead people after He died on the cross. 1 Peter 3:18-20 says, "**For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built . . .**" Did Jesus preach to the spirits of the antediluvians after He died on the cross?

If Jesus did this, what did He offer them? Did Jesus grant them a pardon for their rebellion or did He shake a divine finger at them and say, "Eternal hell is the reward you deserve – you vile unbelievers?" Is it possible to escape from hell after being sent there? Did Jesus release any hostages from hell? If so, where is the evidence? Since hell is believed to be the worst possible torture chamber ever devised, would repentance come from a contrite heart or would a charbroiled sinner say anything in order to get relief from anguish? Although most Christians believe the soul remains alive after death, they generally reject the second chance theory for salvation *after* death, believing that matters pertaining to our eternal reward are determined during our present life on Earth.

So, what does Peter say in this text? Peter teaches that Jesus was brought to life by the *same* Holy Spirit that attempted to bring the antediluvians to their senses before the flood. Notice what the Lord told Noah in Genesis 6:3, "**My Spirit will not contend with man forever.**" I think most people would agree that it is possible for a person to be physically alive but spiritually dead. (Romans 8:10) Peter says that Jesus was physically put to death in the body, but made alive by the *same* Spirit that tried to save the antediluvians. Because of decadence and rebellion against

God, the antediluvians were dead to the Spirit. Since they were not willing to allow the Spirit to lead them onto the ark, they drowned when the flood came.

The context of 1 Peter 3 and 4 shows that Peter is not saying that Jesus preached to imprisoned antediluvians during the time He was dead. In fact, in the verses that follow Peter flips the topic 180 degrees by saying that people who are "alive in the Spirit" are dead to debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and idolatry – the very conditions that caused the antediluvian's destruction. Peter concludes by saying, "**They** [those dead to the Holy Spirit] **think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead** [to spiritual matters], **so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but** [change their ways and] **live according to God in regard to the spirit.**" (1 Peter 4:4-6, insertions mine.)

Rich Man - Poor Man

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus told the story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. Many people today use this story to confirm the doctrine of an eternally burning hell. Here is the story:

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

When telling this parable, Jesus addressed two theological issues which the Sadducees and Pharisees often debated. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection (they were "sad you see"), but the Pharisees believed in a resurrection and any mention of this topic would start a hotly contested debate. Paul used this contentious subject to cleverly distract his accusers so he could escape with his life! (See Acts 23:8,9.) The doctrine of prosperity was a second

theological issue hotly debated between these two sects of Jews.

The Sadducees believed that wealth and prosperity were physical signs of God's approval and poverty was a terrible curse for wrong doing. (People today still debate this doctrine.) In other words, poor people were gross sinners because the absence of prosperity proved they were under God's condemnation. (See Deuteronomy 28.)

Jesus' use of this parable about a rich man and a poor man allowed Him to cleverly merge these two issues together. Jesus' purpose was to present a larger truth that is found at the end of the story. In the parable, the rich man represents the self-centered, richly-blessed nation of Israel. God had given them every blessing and instead of sharing God's blessings, they appropriated the blessings of God to themselves. The beggar, Lazarus, represents the impoverished Gentiles, who had received only a few spiritual crumbs from the bountiful table of the Jews.

Notice how Jesus reversed the rewards in the next life. The beggar (the Gentile) goes to Heaven, but the rich man (the Jew) is sent to hell. From hell the rich man cries out for relief to Abraham, the exalted grandfather of Israel who was residing in Heaven. Abraham explains that justice is being served and the time had come for the poor to be blessed and the rich to suffer.

When the rich man realizes his fate, he wants to warn his brothers about hell, but Abraham refuses to release Lazarus (the Gentile) from Heaven to help them. Abraham rebukes the rich man (the Jew) in hell saying, "**Your brothers have Moses and the Prophets [the Scriptures]; let them listen to them.**" But, the rich man pleads, "**If someone [like Lazarus is resurrected] from the dead [and he] goes to them [the Jews], they will repent.**" (Luke 16:29,30)

By using theological issues that were common points of contention, Jesus had the crowd's full attention with this story. Knowing that the Pharisees and Sadducees were ready to start debating His words, Jesus concluded the story in a way that left no debate! Jesus said, "**If they [the Jews] do not listen to Moses and the Prophets [the Scriptures, Luke 24:27], they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.**" In one sentence Jesus obliquely predicted His rejection.

This was (and is) a point that many people fail to grasp. Unless the Holy Spirit dwells within the human heart, it is impossible for religious people to change their minds about truth. Even after Jesus arose from the dead and appeared before more than 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:6), the Jewish nation refused to admit that He was alive.

This story is an illustration masterfully told. The specifics of this parable do not harmonize with a host of other Scriptures on this topic, therefore it is fair to conclude that the objective of this parable is an illustration concerning Israel's rejection of Jesus. Jesus often spoke figuratively and this story is no exception. Jesus said, "**Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.**" (John 16:25)

Do Dead Souls Talk Back?

The concept of dead people living in Heaven or hell after they die opens a door for communication with the dead. God expressly forbids any communication with the dead. (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10,11; Isaiah 8:19) The reason is simple. The state of man in death is as a sleep; man knows nothing. (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6)

Therefore, God forbids any communication with spirits or with the spirits of the deceased because demons can masquerade as deceased people. When a person communicates first hand with a loved one that is deceased, the power of deception is as good as it gets.

Demons know us well. Because they observe and study our behavior, demons can speak about personal matters that are surprisingly accurate and true. Their sole objective is to lead us into rebellion against God.

A few years ago, a lady I know began communicating with her deceased mother through a medium. At first, she was skeptical that communication with her deceased mother was even possible. However, depressed and lonely for her mother's company, she decided to give it a try.

During the seance she asked a question that only her mother could correctly answer. When the voice speaking through the medium gave the correct answer, she was overwhelmed with the thought that she was truly in her mother's presence. Do not be like Eve and underestimate the power of demonic deception. I have found that once a person communicates with a deceased loved one, Scripture no longer seems convincing. The delusion is that powerful! People who communicate with spirits or "channel" for spirits have real encounters.

The experience is just as real as two people speaking to each other. King Saul visited the witch of Endor and he had a real encounter with a demon that pretended to be Samuel! So, beware of demons. They can and do talk back! (See 1 Samuel 28 and Matthew 8:28-34.)

Sometimes, the following text is used as Bible proof that communicating with the dead is possible. At first glance, this text seems to indicate that the souls of martyrs talk with God and He responds. **"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed."** (Revelation 6:9-11)

Bible writers occasionally use a literary device called personification to make a point. Personification is a literary technique for giving something inanimate a lifelike quality, so that the object speaks and acts as though it were alive. For example, when Cain killed Abel, God spoke to Cain saying, ". . . **What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.**" (Genesis 4:10)

Abel's blood did not literally "cry out" to God for justice. Instead, God used this form of personification to emphasize that Abel's death required justice. God demanded an answer from Cain for what he had done. The shedding of innocent blood always "cries out" for justice and eventually, God's vengeance will be served and restitution will be extracted for every wrongful death. (Jeremiah 19)

John also uses personification to convey the largest possible story with the fewest words. In Revelation 6:9-11 the blood of innocent martyrs "cries out" to God for justice, asking Him to end the senseless martyrdom occurring during the Great Tribulation. God responds by telling the martyrs to be patient.

Jesus knows what He is doing. He has a larger purpose in mind and His plan must be accomplished first. He assures the martyrs of salvation and tells them to wait for His plan to be fulfilled. The martyrs are given white robes which indicate they are sealed with the righteousness of Christ. (Compare Revelation 2:10, 3:5; John 6:39; Matthew 16:25; Revelation 22:12.)

When the martyrdom of the fifth seal actually begins, the words of Revelation 6 will become very comforting to the saints. Even as the saints cry out to God for help, He has already assured them with the message written in Revelation 6:9-11.

This text also reveals that there is a greater purpose that needs to be accomplished before martyrdom comes to an end. As people witness the faithfulness of the martyrs, there will be some who will finally surrender their rebellion against God. Christian history proves that no argument is more powerful or persuasive than the blood of martyrs who willingly lay down their lives for the cause of Christ.

What About Forever and Ever?

Here is another difficult Bible text: ". . . **If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.**" (Revelation 14:9-11)

This text does not mean the wicked are burning forever and ever. Revelation 20:9 states that the wicked are "devoured" at the end of the millennium. The purpose of hell fire is not eternal torment. I believe God has chosen to use fire at the end of the 1,000 years for three reasons: restitution, penalty and purification! The wicked will suffer proportionately to the deeds they refused to make right (restitution). The wicked will be put to death by fire (the penalty for sin is death by execution).

Sin and its horrible consequences will be destroyed in the lake of fire and the cancer of sin will

cease to exist (purification). **"Whatever they plot against the Lord he will bring to an end; trouble [sin] will not come a second time."** (Nahum 1:9, insertion mine.) After Jesus purifies Earth with fire, He will create a new Heaven and a new Earth.

John says, **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea."** (Revelation 21:1) The smoke rising from the destruction of the wicked and the purification of the world ascends upward forever and ever – *just like ordinary smoke does today.*

What About Night and Day?

Let us go back to Revelation 14:10,11 and notice something else. The wicked: **". . . will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."** The issue we need to understand in this text concerns the lack of rest – day or night.

Look again at the verse: **"There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."** (Revelation 14:11) Some people use these words to indicate the wicked writhe in the flames of hell day and night for ever and ever. These words, however, are not describing the experience of the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years. These words are describing the experience of the wicked *during* the Great Tribulation!

This verse reveals the intensity of the work the Holy Spirit does during the Great Tribulation. When the 144,000 powerfully present the gospel to everyone, people who refuse the gospel will ultimately have no choice but to submit to the devil (the Antichrist). Those who submit to the demands of the devil will not only violate their conscience; they will emotionally wrestle with every effort the Holy Spirit puts forth. The Holy Spirit will vigorously disturb every soul who persists in rebellion in an attempt to persuade them to submit to God's authority. (Joel 2:28-32)

This is why Revelation 14:11 says, **"There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."** Guilt-ridden and stubborn in their rebellion against God, they will not have peace day or night because the Holy Spirit will not give up on them until God's offer of salvation is terminated at the seventh trumpet. (See Revelation 10:7; 11:15-19; John 16:8-11.)

Eventually, they will no longer hear the Holy Spirit prompting their conscience and the wicked will cooperate with the Antichrist's forces to kill and torture the saints.

What About the Thief on the Cross?

"Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.' " (Luke 23:42,43) The Bible indicates that Jesus did not go to Heaven the day He died. Instead, He

ascended to the Father on Sunday morning. (John 20:17)

The original Greek in the New Testament does not use commas, and the punctuation inserted by translators to make reading easier can be misleading. One simple misplaced comma can make the words of Jesus appear to mean something He did not say. Notice how a comma can change the meaning in the following sentence: "**I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise.**" This punctuation appears to be correct since it is supported by the weight of biblical evidence.

Tormented Day and Night Forever

We will examine one last text in Revelation: "**And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.**" (Revelation 20:10)

If we separate this verse from all other Scripture, it would be easy to conclude that God will throw people into the lake of fire at the end of the millennium and torment them day and night forever and ever. If we ignore the presence of numerous texts and exclusively use this text, the concept of an eternally burning hell could be defended.

However, sincere Bible students know that fundamental doctrines require broad support from many Bible writers. More importantly, there has to be harmony from the sum of *all the parts*. Let the entire Bible speak and then weigh the evidence!

If we reconcile all that the Bible has to say on the subject of death and the resurrections, we will find a harmonious solution to John's statement in Revelation 20:10. John says that the wicked will be tormented day and night, forever and ever, which means they will be tormented as long as they exist.

Apparently, the burning process (the restitution process) takes longer for some people than others. In other words, people who have been extremely wicked will suffer longer according to their deeds. This means that Satan will burn the longest! (Exodus 22:9; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 14:10)

Remember, the saints will determine the amount of restitution! Jesus told his disciples: "**. . . I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**" (Matthew 19:28) "**Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we will judge angels?**" (1 Corinthians 6:2,3)

You may be surprised to learn that the biblical use of the word "forever" does not necessarily mean throughout endless ages of eternity. Consider how the word "forever" is used in this text, "[King] **Achish trusted David and said to himself, 'He has become so odious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant forever.'**" (1 Samuel 27:12)

This verse does not mean that David was to be a servant to King Achish for eternity. Instead, Achish wanted David to be his servant for as long as he lived. In a similar way, the marriage vow ends at death – "until death do us part" – because forever can only be possible as long as both people in the marriage exist.

The torment of justice described in Revelation 20:10 lasts until God's vengeance is satisfied. When sin and sinners are finally destroyed, death and sorrow will be history. **"When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' "** (1 Corinthians 15:54,55)

Without the Resurrections – We Are Dust

For me, the book of Revelation clarifies the subject of death as it describes the judgment process. Since the subject of death involves a number of prophetic issues that are not covered in this book, perhaps a "big picture" scenario might be helpful. The following is a brief overview of how death, the judgment of the dead and living, the two resurrections and the destruction of the wicked with fire harmonizes with Bible prophecy:

The judgment of mankind has two phases: The judgment of the dead and the judgment of the living. The judgment of the dead involves a close review of each person's history as recorded by angels. (Malachi 3:16) Jesus makes a determination on each person for eternal life or eternal death on the basis of this record. (Daniel 7:9,10; John 5:22, 2 Corinthians 5:10)

The first person to be judged was Abel because he was the first to die. During the Great Tribulation, the living will make choices which will indicate their faith or lack of faith in Jesus. The "mark of the beast test" will ultimately separate the wicked living from the righteous living. (Revelation 3:10)

Our eternal destiny will have been determined by the time Jesus returns to Earth at the Second Coming. (Revelation 22:12) This may seem obvious, but it is a crucial point. When Jesus returns, people like Abel, who are a part of the righteous dead, will be called to life (resurrected) and they will rise up out of their graves to meet Jesus in the air. (John 6:39,40) This is the first resurrection. Then, Paul says the righteous living will join with the righteous dead to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17)

The wicked who have died through the ages, like Cain, are not resurrected at the Second Coming. In fact, the Bible states that Jesus slays the wicked who are alive on Earth at the time of His appearing. (Revelation 19:15-21) The net effect is that the wicked, from Cain to those living at the time of the Second Coming, sleep on until the 1,000 years in Revelation 20 have ended.

During the millennium, Earth will be left desolate because Jesus takes the saints to the Holy City which is in Heaven for "The Feast of Ingathering!" The devil remains on Earth with no one to deceive during the millennium. Meanwhile, the saints are in Heaven and they will review the

records of the wicked. They will satisfy themselves that the eternal decision which Jesus made on every person was fair and appropriate. The saints will also judge the wicked by determining the appropriate restitution that each wicked person must suffer after they are resurrected. (1 Corinthians 6:2,3)

At the end of the 1,000 years, the Holy City will descend to Earth with the saints inside. After the Holy City rests on Earth, Jesus will resurrect the wicked. This is the second resurrection. Every wicked person who ever lived on Earth will see the reality of God.

Think about it; every person will meet his or her Maker! Everyone who has ever lived will see the Holy City, the saints, the devil and his angels. With one last blast of lies and fury, Satan incites a great multitude of wicked people to attack the City of God (Revelation 20:7-8), but Jesus suspends the attack with the same authority He calmed the angry Sea of Galilee. Jesus turns the tumult of battle into silence so that He can present the facts to the wicked. Jesus will reveal to each wicked person why He could not save him or her.

He will also declare the verdict of the saints indicating how much restitution will be extracted before death in the lake of fire. After the truth has been presented and the wicked see how fair and just Jesus has been, every wicked person will bow before Jesus Christ admitting that God is fair and His judgment is righteous. (Isaiah 45:23,24; Romans 14:11,12; Philippians 12:10)

As the realization sets in about the outcome of their life decisions, the wicked become overwrought by their sense of loss, fear and loathing disgust. In an effort to avoid the suffering God has imposed upon them, they try to kill themselves. God initiates the executive phase of judgment by calling fire down from Heaven and ultimately, God burns up the wicked and every trace of sin is gone. (Revelation 20:9,15)

Missing Heaven Will be Hell

This chapter may not fully resolve the question of an eternally burning hell for the reader. However, the weight of evidence throughout the Bible must be considered if we are to properly understand what God is doing. One thing is certain, God is love. Because His love is great and everlasting, we want to spend eternity with Him. His government is fair and His mercy is overwhelming! God's truths are too wonderful to describe and His peace too deep to explain. Missing Heaven after realizing all that God offers – will be hell.

In summary, ponder the following statements:

1. The wages of sin is eternal death, not eternal life in the torture of hell.
2. There are two deaths, the first is temporary and it is called "sleep," the second death occurs at the end of the 1,000 years and is eternal.
3. There are two resurrections, the first one is for the righteous and occurs at the Second Coming. The second resurrection is for the wicked and occurs at the end of the 1,000 years.

- 4.** A soul is formed when the body and the breath of life are united. A soul ceases to exist when the breath of life is separated from the body. Regardless of behavior, the spirit or breath of life returns to God when a person dies.
- 5.** The soul of man is not an immortal entity. The soul that sins will die.
- 6.** The parable of the rich man and the beggar is an object lesson. The object lesson of the parable is stated in the parable.
- 7.** God forbids any communication with the dead because such communication is with demons. The dead know nothing.
- 8.** God is fair. His punishment is commensurate with the crime. Jesus did not suffer eternal torture in hell and neither will the wicked. Eternal torture is not fair.
- 9.** God has appointed a time for the judgment of human beings. With the exception of a few people taken to Heaven "on a credit card" (Enoch, Elijah, Moses, the 24 elders, etc.), human beings do not receive their eternal reward at the time of death. We must wait until either the resurrection at the Second Coming or the resurrection at the end of the 1,000 years.
- 10.** No one can be in hell at this time because the second death (the penalty for sin) is not implemented until the end of the 1,000 years.