

PROPHETIC STUDY SERIES

A photograph of a cemetery with rows of white headstones on a grassy hill. The sky is overcast and grey. Bare trees are visible in the background. The text "DOES LIFE END AT DEATH?" is overlaid in large, red, serif font.

# DOES LIFE END AT DEATH?

**WAKE UP AMERICA SEMINARS**  
Proclaiming Revelation's Story

To The Reader:

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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding.

There are fourteen questions in this booklet which we hope you will take a moment to answer as you consider this timely message. The author's answers are listed at the end of the booklet. May God bless your study of this fascinating topic!

Larry Wilson

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Wake Up America Seminars, Inc.  
P.O. Box 273  
Bellbrook, OH 45305

# Does Life End at Death?

**“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**

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 leads to a ruined life. The Bible says Saul died a tragic death; he took his own life. In an attack on Shunem about 1000 B.C., the Philistines injured Saul critically. Rather than let his enemies gloat in victory, Saul fell on his own sword and died when he was 61 years old. (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 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 excruciating and torturous beyond comprehension.

According to this scenario, King Saul has been on fire for about 3,000 years. He must be devastated since there is no second chance. His cries for relief are no doubt drowned out by the roar of hell's furnace. Think about it. If there were a burning hell where sinners writhe in

eternal torment, it would be the most horrific place in the whole universe. There is no way out, no hope, no end. 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 or something similar, and use the parable Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus to substantiate their understanding. (Luke 16:19-31) Unfortunately, many non-Christians refuse to believe in God because they find this doctrine about His justice to be repugnant.

In 2004, George Gallup surveyed American Christians regarding their views on Heaven and hell. About 89% of those who regularly attend church believed they were going to Heaven; yet 92% of those who attend church weekly said they knew someone in hell or who was going there. Ten years later, the Pew Research Center again surveyed Americans regarding their views on Heaven and hell. In this survey, only 70% of Christians believe in hell. This more recent survey shows fewer Christians believe hell is a literal place, likely because some well-meaning theologians have diminished the cruelty of hell. 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 man's soul is immortal; 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 as, “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 all others who have died in rebellion against God are writhing in eternal hell?

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

1. First and foremost, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. (Romans 5:9; 1 Corinthians 15:3) If the penalty for sin were endlessly burning in hell, then Jesus did not pay it; Jesus was resurrected on the third day! (Acts 10:40) Also, 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 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 a few years. Eternal punishment for 70 years of rebellion is not fair. A judicial system is equitable if it upholds the principle that punishment is commensurate with the crime. (Matthew 7:1-2) God does not do less! King Saul should not be tortured with

fire for billions of years when he only lived a mere 61 years. In fact, the Bible says that God will not torture the wicked for eternity, but, instead, will reduce the wicked to ashes. (Malachi 4:3)

3. God is love and the new Earth will be a wonderful place in which 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, Jesus will resurrect the righteous 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 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, who are allegedly in hell already, at the end of the 1,000 years just to give them an earthly body and return them to a blazing fire? (Revelation 20:7-15)

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**Question #1:** (True or False) Man is required to have more punishment for sin than Jesus, because Jesus lived a perfect life.

**Question #2:** The first resurrection is at the \_\_\_\_\_ Coming and the second resurrection is at the end of the \_\_\_\_\_.

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## **What the Bible Teaches About Life and Death**

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

1. The Bible teaches there is going to be 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 sense. If the soul were a living entity who can exist outside the body, why is a body necessary? For example, if Abel has been in Heaven for almost six thousand 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? Obviously, their soul would not want to return to a deformed and degenerate body. 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.

2. The Bible teaches all people of Earth will be judged at an appointed time. (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. Contrary to what many 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 when they died.
3. Even more compelling are the Bible verses which confirm the dead know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5) and 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)

4. Revelation 20:15 reveals that God will terminate sin at the end of the millennium and everyone not found in the Book of Life will be burned up. The problem, as I see it, is eternal life in Heaven or in hell requires immortality. However, God grants immortality only to the saints at the Second Coming. (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.

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**Question #3:** If souls of righteous go to Heaven immediately upon death, there would be no need for a \_\_\_\_\_.

**Question #4:** The dead are in a state of \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Conditional Mortality**

We must begin with the book of Genesis to understand man's condition in death. 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 that Tree 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! 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 the forbidden fruit,

she would become immortal like God, and 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 exists as a result of combining two parts – a human body and the breath of life. This illustration might help you visualize the 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 10:17-18) When the Father resurrected Jesus, the Father restored immortality to Him. (Revelation 1:18) However, 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”** (I 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, they obviously cannot have immortality before that time! Therefore, no one has knowledge or intelligence before they are born, and there is no knowledge or intelligence in death.

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**Question #5:** (True or False) The Father took Jesus’ immortality away at the cross and gave it back to Jesus at His resurrection.

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**

Some people use the following text to prove that the spirit of man returns to God when he dies. **“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) Although this text does not say so, these individuals allege that something intelligent returns to God at the time of death. Advocates of the external soul reason that when the body and spirit are separated, the spirit (or “ruach”) returns to God who gave it. The Hebrew word “ruach” means wind or breath. Notice how the 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, insertion mine) 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 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 wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit.”** (Job 27:3-4, insertion mine) 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, insertion mine)

The Hebrew word “nephesh” also means breath. This word is used many times in the Bible to describe the breath of living creatures. Notice: **“The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath [nephesh] of life, and the man became a living being.”** (Genesis 2:7, insertion mine) 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 by saying 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)

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**Question #6:** God gives the \_\_\_\_\_ of life at birth and returns to Him when we die, regardless of our \_\_\_\_\_.

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**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: First, death is actually like sleep. (John 11:11-14) There is no awareness in death (or during a good night’s sleep). 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 his death as sleep. Jesus referred to Lazarus

as being asleep because the death he 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.

Each person who lives and dies will live again because God will awaken everyone from their sleep in one of two resurrections. The Bible indicates there are two resurrections: one for the saints and another 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. Jesus will decide who is righteous and who is not before He comes. He will resurrect those judged to be righteous at the Second Coming. (1 Thesalonians 4:16) Those 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 without hope of resurrection. 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, without hope of resurrection.

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**Question #7:** Natural death comes from being separated from the \_\_\_\_\_. The second death is death by execution, the \_\_\_\_\_ for sin.

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### **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 so, 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 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 matters pertaining to our eternal reward are determined during our present life on Earth. 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. They were dead to the Spirit because of their decadence and rebellion against God. 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 antediluvians’ 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**

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.'"  
(Luke 16:19-31)

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 ter-

rible 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. (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 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 patriarch 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, “ **‘They [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, insertions mine)

With this story, Jesus had the crowd’s full attention by using theological issues that were common points of contention. 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.”** (Luke 16:31, insertions mine) Jesus indirectly predicted His rejection in one sentence.

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 acknowledge He was alive. The story is an object lesson masterfully told. Because the specifics of this parable do not harmonize with many other Scriptures on this topic, 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)

**Question #8:** (True or False) The objective of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus was to illustrate Israel's rejection of Jesus.

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## **Do Dead Souls Communicate?**

The concept of dead people living in Heaven or hell after they die, opens a door for communication with the dead because demons can masquerade as deceased people. This is why God expressly forbids any communication with the dead. (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10-11; Isaiah 8:19) The state of man in death is as a sleep; man knows nothing. (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6) 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; and 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 séance, 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! (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, the following 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

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” 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 and wait for His plan to be fulfilled. He assures them that Jesus knows what He is doing, that He has a larger purpose in mind, and His plans will be accomplished.

The martyrs are then 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 a greater purpose needs to be accomplished before martyrdom ends. As people witness the faithfulness of the martyrs, some 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.

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**Question #9:** \_\_\_\_\_ can masquerade as deceased people.  
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### **What About Forever and Ever?**

Another difficult Bible text is: **“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) and then be put to death by fire (the penalty for sin is death by execution).

God will destroy sin and its horrible consequences 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) However, 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 Day and Night?**

Let’s 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. They 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 each 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 consciences and the wicked will cooperate with the Antichrist's forces to kill and/or torture the saints.

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**Question 10:** The purpose of hell fire is not  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**Question 11:** The Holy Spirit will disturb each soul who persists in \_\_\_\_\_ attempting to persuade them to submit to God's \_\_\_\_\_.

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**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 seem 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 para-

dise.” This punctuation appears to be correct since it is supported by the weight of biblical evidence.

### **Did Jesus Visit Hell After He Died on the Cross?**

Before moving on to other conflicts, I want to make this critical point: The Bible is a lot like the human body in that it has different systems operating in perfect harmony. Many specialties in medicine exist today because each system of the body is intricate and complicated. The Bible works the same way. A wise physician knows that every system in the body is related to all of the others, and no system can receive treatment in isolation because it will surely affect the others. Similarly, wise Bible students know if only certain Bible verses are used or isolated from other Bible topics, the inevitable result will be internal conflict.

Because the topic of eternal reward is complex, it leads to diversity and confusion. I like to think of eternal reward as an umbrella topic because it includes many subtopics such as: God’s character, justice, mercy, grace, and law; His judgment of mankind, man’s fallen nature, the state of man in death, the atonement provided by Jesus, the rescue of God’s people, and the annihilation of the wicked. So, no position on eternal reward can be considered trustworthy until all of the sub-topics operate in perfect harmony.

About A.D. 65, the apostle Peter wrote two letters to Christian converts suffering in Asia Minor because of their faith in Jesus. His first letter is important in this

study because Peter's choice of words in 1 Peter 3 and 4 are sometimes used to support the idea that when Jesus died on the cross, He went into Hell and offered salvation to those who had been there since the days of Noah. After you read my commentary, read all of 1 Peter 3 and 4 in your Bible so you can consider Peter's thoughts without interruption. My comments are in [brackets]:

**“For Christ died for [your] sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you [near] to God. He [Jesus] was put to death in the body but [on the third day He was] made alive by the [Holy] Spirit [Romans 8:11], through whom also He [Jesus] went and preached [for 120 years through His servant Noah – Genesis 6:3] to the spirits [the people who were living then\*] in [a] prison [of godlessness and rebellion**

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\* **Note:** In Bible times, the word “spirit” was used in different ways. A spirit could be an invisible demon (1 Timothy 4:1), an angel from God (Hebrews 1:14), or a human being. (1 Corinthians 14:32, Hebrews 12:9) However, the Greek word for spirit is pneumas, which means wind. The ancients generally thought of spirits in two ways. If a spirit had no body, it was a ghost; (Acts 23:8) if a spirit had a body, it was a human or an angel in human form. (Hebrews 13:2, 2 Corinthians 7:13) If Peter's expression “spirits in prison” is understood from the perspective that Jesus preached through Noah to the antediluvians, textual conflict dissolves.

- Isaiah 42:6,7] **who disobeyed** [blasphemed the Holy Spirit] **long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through** [from] **water, and this water** [that cleansed the Earth of rebellion and godless people] **symbolizes baptism that now saves you also** – [I’m speaking] **not** [of] **the removal of dirt from the body but** [of your faith and your public affirmation to follow Jesus and] **the pledge of** [allegiance that you have made to Jesus, and that of maintaining] **a good conscience toward God. It** [is your submission to God’s Spirit through faith that] **saves you** [and this gift of salvation has been made possible] **by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has** [come out of the tomb and] **gone into Heaven and is at God’s right hand** – **with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him.** (1 Peter 3:18-22, insertions mine)

**“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body** [from evil people], **arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body** [from evil people] **is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do** – **living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation** [immoral and careless liv-

ing], and they heap abuse on you [because they hate righteousness]. **But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.** [Dear brothers, God is not willing that any should perish.] **For this is the reason the gospel was preached** [among you and] **even to those who are now** [physically alive but spiritually] **dead, so that** [upon hearing the gospel] **they might be** [awakened and] **judged** [condemned within their hearts by their sins. All of us have sinned] **according to men in regard to the body, but** [men who repent and] **live according to God in regard to the Spirit** [will be saved.] **The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray** [for God's sustaining power and grace every day]." (1 Peter 4:1-7, insertions mine)

Does Peter mean to say Jesus offered people in Hell a second chance? If so, what sinner would choose to remain there? The Bible teaches there is no second chance for salvation after death. (Hebrews 3:7-8; 9:7,28) We determine our eternal destiny in this life. Again we see that if apparent conflicts are not properly resolved, they will put the Bible in a state of internal conflict. Given the many subtopics involved with eternal reward, Peter's words can be resolved this way. Peter is not advocating the idea that while His body was resting in the tomb, Jesus's spirit went to Hell and offered evil ghosts (who had been captives since the days of Noah) eternal life. After reading all of 1 Peter, it is clear that Peter is advocating

a glorious and powerful truth. He had seen the manifestation and power of the Holy Spirit in his own life many times. He saw the Holy Spirit bring a young man to life (Luke 7), bring Dorcas to life (Acts 9), and put a husband and wife to death. (Acts 5) Therefore, Peter exalted the ministry of the Holy Spirit in 1 Peter 3 and 4 by reminding his readers that (a) rejecting the Holy Spirit leads to death, which explains why so few were saved from Noah's flood; and (b) the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead can give a spiritually dead person a new life in Christ! Peter's thoughts are focused on the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit. When his words are put within this framework, the textual conflict dissolves.

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**Question 12:** The Holy Spirit can give a  
 \_\_\_\_\_ dead person new life in Christ!  
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### **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 and defend 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. However, sincere Bible students know that fundamental doctrines require broad support from many Bible writers; and 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 resurrections, we will find a harmonious solution to John's statement in Revelation 20:10. John says 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 (restitution) takes longer for some people than others. In other words, people who have been extremely wicked will suffer longer according to their deeds. Satan will certainly burn the longest! (Exodus 22:9; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 14:10)

Remember when Jesus told his disciples the saints will determine the amount of restitution! He said, **"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 "for-

ever” 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, insertion mine)

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 no more. **“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)

To finish this section on an eternally-burning-hell, consider Jesus’ words: **“Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”** (Matthew 12:32) The Greek word for *age* is *aion* and it is translated *world* in the KJV. Given the nature of the Greek language, I understand Jesus meant that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven during this period or the period to come.

**Question 13:** The word forever in the Bible does not necessarily mean throughout endless \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

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### **Without the Resurrections – We Are Dust**

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, 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, harmonize 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 about 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) Abel was the first person to be judged 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 living wicked from the living righteous. (Revelation 3:10)

Our eternal destiny will have been determined by the time Jesus returns to Earth at the Second Coming. (Rev-

elation 22:12) This may seem obvious, but it is a crucial point. When Jesus returns, people, like Abel, who are among the righteous dead, will be called to life (resurrected); they will be given immortal bodies and come out of their graves to meet Jesus, rising into the air prior to the righteous living. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) This is the first resurrection. 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, the devil remains on a desolate Earth with no one to deceive; Jesus has taken the saints to the Holy City, which is in Heaven, for the “Feast of Ingathering!” While in Heaven, the Saints will be reviewing the records of the wicked to determine the appropriate restitution each wicked person must suffer after they are resurrected. (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). They will satisfy themselves that the eternal decision Jesus made about each person was fair and appropriate.

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; each 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 the 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 He can present the facts to the wicked. Jesus then reveals 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 permanent death in the lake of fire.

After Jesus presents the truth to each person and the wicked see how fair and just Jesus has been, each 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 2:10-11) 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)

The Bible indicates fire will fall from the sky and devour the wicked (Revelation 20:9) and they will be re-

duced to ashes. (Malachi 4:3) Because the fire will burn for a period of time to purify Earth of sin's curse, *aionios* is the appropriate word in Matthew 18:8. Instead of translating the word to mean eternal or everlasting fire, this phrase would be better translated to mean, 'It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the fire that will annihilate the wicked at the end of the age.' Of course, translators are not concerned with internal conflicts between Bible texts; their work is to translate each Greek sentence into an English equivalent. Resolving textual conflicts is another task altogether, reserved for Bible students who love God's Word.

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 Question 14: God executes the executive phase of judgment, calls fire down from Heaven, burns up the \_\_\_\_\_ and removes every trace of \_\_\_\_\_.  
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### **Missing Heaven Will be Hell**

This booklet may not fully resolve the question of an eternally-burning-hell. However, the weight of evidence throughout the Bible must be considered if we are to properly understand what God is doing. One fact is certain: God is love. His government is fair and His mercy is overwhelming! Because His love is great and everlasting, we should want to spend eternity with Him. Even though His truths are too wonderful to de-

scribe and His peace too deep to explain, you can understand why 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 death 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 resurrection 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.
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### **Answers to Questions:**

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. False                  | 8. True                  |
| 2. Second, 1,000 years    | 9. Demons                |
| 3. resurrection           | 10. eternal torment      |
| 4. sleep                  | 11. rebellion, authority |
| 5. True                   | 12. spiritually          |
| 6. breath, moral behavior | 13. ages, eternity       |
| 7. Tree of Life, penalty  | 14. wicked, sin          |

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A photograph of a cemetery with numerous white headstones arranged in rows. Several tall, dark evergreen trees stand prominently in the background against a cloudy, overcast sky. The ground is covered with grass and some fallen leaves.

# DOES LIFE END AT DEATH?

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