

The Afterlife

Part 1

SESSION 17



Life Change Objectives

- To give you a deep understanding and gratitude for God's rescue from the certainty of an eternity without him.
- To change the way you think about yourself and others: from a focus on the here and now to a focus on eternity.

All of us wonder about the end of our lives: how much time we have left, under what circumstances we will die, and just exactly what death will be like. The Bible gives us some clear truths about the end of our lives that we all need to understand. These truths affect the way we live today and the way we see the future.

In this session we'll look at what the Bible says about hell. We'll cover heaven in the next session (bad news first, then end on the good news!).

The most frequently asked questions about hell include:

- Is there really a literal hell?
- Why was hell created?
- Who will be in hell?
- What happens to people in hell?
- Where do people go *now* when they die?
- How can I be sure that I won't go to hell?

Is Hell a Real Place?

Jesus taught that hell is a real place of judgment. (In fact, there are more verses in which he taught about hell than about heaven.)

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

—Matthew 25:46

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life . . . for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

—John 5:24, 28–29 (NKJV)

The Bible speaks of a time of judgment that all human beings will have to go through. It is referred to in several verses as being a time of “separating” or “sorting” the righteous from the unrighteous.

Verse	Metaphor
Matthew 13:47-51	A dragnet catching fish
Matthew 25:31-46	Shepherd sorting sheep and goats
Matthew 13:24-30	Harvester pulling weeds and wheat

Who is the one who judges and does the separating? _____, the only righteous one.

For he has set a day for justly judging the world by the man he has appointed, and has pointed him out by bringing him back to life again.

—Acts 17:31 (LB)

Why Was Hell Created?

- Hell was not created originally for any human being, but for _____.

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

—Matthew 25:41

These are the angels who followed Satan when he tried to lead a rebellion against God in heaven. They are also called demons.

- Contrary to popular opinion, Satan is not yet confined to hell. He now resides _____.

Four times in the Gospels, Jesus called Satan the “prince of this world.”

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

—John 12:31

- One day (according to the book of Revelation), God is going to cast Satan, death, and Hades into the _____ (another name for hell).

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

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

—Revelation 20:14

Who Will Be in Hell?

Hell was created for Satan and the demons, but they, sadly, will not be the only ones in hell for eternity.

The facts of life and eternity that we must all eventually face are:

- We were all headed for an eternity without God in hell.

All have sinned and are not good enough for God's glory.

—Romans 3:23 (NCV)

- Jesus came to rescue us from this certainty of separation from God.

He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.

—1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NLT)

Only Jesus can rescue us because only he can offer us forgiveness for the sin that is the reason we would spend eternity in hell.

- Those who trust Jesus *are* rescued!

Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save everyone who comes to God through him. He lives forever to plead with God on their behalf.

—Hebrews 7:25 (NLT)

- Those who do not trust Jesus are *not* rescued from hell and separation from God.

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

—1 John 5:11–12



Key Personal Perspective

What about the people I love?

After we ourselves have been rescued from hell by trusting in the grace and love of Jesus, our minds immediately turn to those we love. The thought of their spending eternity separated from God is almost too painful for us to bear.

If they're still living, _____!

Let those you love know the Good News that God can rescue them too. Many who initially reject God's invitation to life and forgiveness through Jesus end up accepting him. (The apostle Paul was one of those.)

If they've already died, _____.

Remember that God is the ultimate judge of eternity; you are not. Instead of getting caught up in worrying about changing what you cannot change, leave it with God. Let your concern motivate you to share with those who are still living the hope that Jesus gives. And make sure that those you love have no doubt about your faith in Christ and the fact that you know you are going to heaven when you die.

What Happens to People in Hell?

The Bible clearly teaches that hell is a place of never-ending torment, torture, and anguish.

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

—Matthew 25:46

Emotional/relational torment

But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

—Matthew 8:12

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

—Matthew 10:28 (GNT)

Physical torment

So if your hand makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand than to keep both hands and go off to hell, to the fire that never goes out. And if your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot than to keep both feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out! It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell. There “the worms that eat them never die, and the fire that burns them is never put out.”

—Mark 9:43–48 (GNT)

Spiritual torment

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

—Matthew 25:41

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

—2 Thessalonians 1:9

Where Do People Go Now When They Die?

According to New Testament teaching, believers go immediately into the presence of God to await resurrection of the body and the eternal joy of heaven. Unbelievers go to Hades for punishment and to await the resurrection of the body and final punishment in hell.

This simple statement brings up a *lot* of questions! These include the growth in New Testament and Old Testament teaching concerning the afterlife, the intermediate state between now and Jesus’ final judgment, and the future resurrection of the body. Because a great deal of false teaching and unfounded fears grow out of a misunderstanding of these truths, we’ll take an in-depth look at them.

The progressive revelation of the afterlife in the Bible

1. In much of the Old Testament, the afterlife was seen as shadowy and unknown.

Sheol

The Hebrew word *Sheol* is used sixty-six times in the Old Testament. The Old Testament consistently refers to the body as going to the grave, and the soul of man as going to Sheol. The earliest thought of Sheol indicates there was no distinction made in the minds of people between the morally good and the bad; all went to Sheol (Gen. 25:8; 37:35). As time went on, people began to believe that Sheol had sections; there is a contrast between the “lowest part” and the “highest part.” While not clearly stated, it seems like the wicked are in the lowest part, while the righteous are in the highest part (Deut. 32:22).



A Closer Look

While the Old Testament saints did not have a clear and precise understanding of what happens after death, this lack of understanding did not keep them from enjoying eternal rewards. They may not have known they were going into God’s presence, but they certainly did go there.

2. During the intertestamental period (the 400 years between the final events of the Old Testament and the first events of the New Testament) the Jewish concept of Sheol had progressed to the stage where it was believed that Sheol had two distinct compartments.

One section was a place of torment for the wicked, called _____.

The other was a place of conscious bliss, often called _____ or _____.

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and like-

wise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.” And he said, “Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” But he said, “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!” But he said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

—Luke 16:19–31 (NASB)



A Closer Look

Jesus’ story in Luke 16 teaches us two hard-to-hear truths:

1. There is _____ from torment.
2. There are no _____.

3. After Christ’s resurrection, the New Testament teaches that believers who die enter immediately into the presence of Christ and that unbelievers enter immediately into a place of punishment and separation from God.

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ.

—Philippians 1:23

The intermediate state and the resurrection of the body

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

—2 Corinthians 5:6–8

The “intermediate state” is the phrase used by theologians to describe the state that those who die are in between now and the time that Jesus comes again.

Why the difference? Because while our souls go immediately to be with God or to suffer in Hades, our bodies have not yet been resurrected as Jesus’ body was resurrected.

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

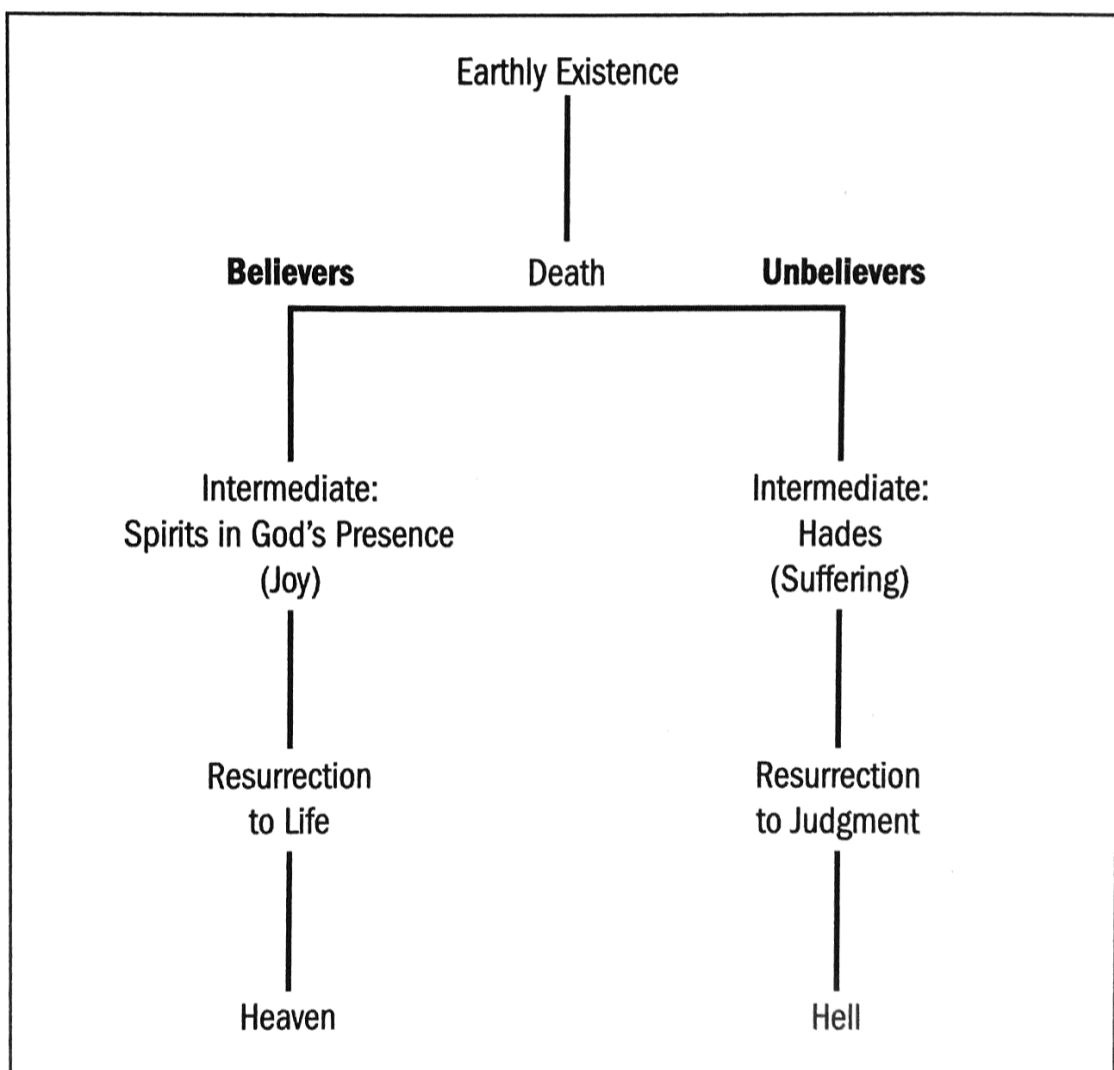
—Luke 24:2–3

The Bible tells us clearly that:

- When Jesus was resurrected he had a resurrected body (John 20:19–20).
- We too will one day have a resurrected body (1 Corinthians 15:42–44).
- We receive that resurrected body when Jesus returns (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

Do not fear. Although the body awaits resurrection, when you die your spirit immediately goes to be with the Lord.

Picture it like this:





Key Personal Perspective

How Can I Be Sure I Won't Spend Eternity in Hell?

What kind of crime does a person have to commit to be sent to such a horrible place? The crime that will send a person to hell is:

_____ Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior we all need.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

—John 3:16–18

Remember: If you decide (by desire or by neglect) to live separate from God in this life, you'll live separate from him in the next life! But if you accept God's offer of a relationship with him through Jesus in this life, you'll live with God in the next life!

Begin working on memory card 9, "The Truth about the Afterlife."



Discussion Questions

1. What do you think most strongly influences most people's beliefs and opinions about the afterlife?
 - The Bible
 - Other world religions
 - New Age thinking
 - Wishful thinking
 - Movies and television
 - Other _____
2. We've learned that there is a hell. What is it that most clearly reminds you that hell is a real place? Why is it important that there is a hell?

3. Take some time together as a group to pray two things:
 - Prayers of praise for Jesus' willing sacrifice on the cross to save us from hell.
 - Prayers for those you know who have not yet trusted Christ to save them.
4. Why do you think the Bible so clearly and graphically tells us that hell is a place of suffering?
5. How does it make you feel to realize that you, as a Christian, will never have to stand before God to be judged on whether you'll be in heaven or hell—it's already settled! Talk together about the confidence and the joy of knowing that we've already made the most important decision in our lives.

A Answers to Fill-Ins

Jesus

Satan and his angels
on earth

lake of fire

don't give up hope

trust them to God

Hades

Abraham's bosom,
paradise

no rest

second chances

rejecting