

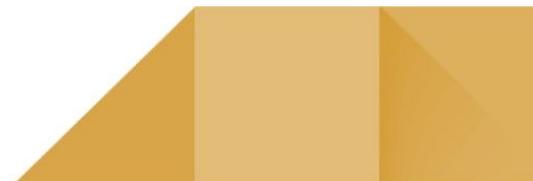


INTRODUCING

# THE GOSPEL

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Life after death





## Lesson 6: Life after death

### Introduction

Everyone dies. There have been many ideas about what happens next, but these are usually based entirely on speculation. There are only two ways to know what happens after death: if someone died and came back from the dead to tell us what happened; or if God - who knows everything - could tell us, although we would need to know that it had really come from God.

Fortunately, we actually have both kinds of evidence! Jesus was killed by being crucified, but on the third day, he rose from the dead, as we learned in lesson 2. The words of Jesus on the subject of death therefore have some personal experience behind them.

Not only that, but the resurrection of Jesus confirms that he came from God, and we can therefore trust him when he endorses the Bible as the word of God.

In this chapter you will learn:

- What Jesus' experience of death was
- What the Bible says happens to us when we die
- What our hope is for the future



## The resurrection of Jesus

Jesus died and rose again, as we explored in lesson 1. On the day of his resurrection, he met several different groups of his followers at various times, who then all reported the resurrection to each other.

We are told of one of these encounters in **Luke 24**, where ten of Jesus' closest disciples were gathered, alongside two others who had recently met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, and probably others as well. But their response on seeing Jesus - who appeared very suddenly among them - was not what you might expect:

**“But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.”**

Luke 24:37-40

At this stage, the people in this room are naturally startled by seeing someone that they knew had been killed. They had been told that Jesus had risen, but were unprepared for the reality. Their initial reaction is that Jesus is simply an apparition.

Jesus' response is to not only reassure them that he is a real, solid, living person, but to allow them to touch him and confirm he is physically present.

However, even though the disciples had heard that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and even seen and touched him physically, they needed even more evidence:

**“And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.”**

Luke 24:41-43



Jesus makes it absolutely clear that he is real by consuming food - it is almost impossible to think what else he could have done to convince them! He then goes on to explain that his death and resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament:

**“Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”**

Luke 24:44

The resurrection of Jesus is key to our understanding of what the Bible teaches about life after death. As we will explore later on, without his resurrection, we have no hope.

## Bible teaching about life after death

The Bible contains many very clear passages which explain what happens to us when we die. Here’s one example from Ecclesiastes:

**“But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.”**

Ecclesiastes 9:4-6

These verses state quite clearly that the dead do not know anything - all their emotions and their thoughts are gone. This picture is picked up again further down the chapter:

**“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”**

Ecclesiastes 9:10

The word ‘Sheol’ simply means ‘the grave’; this is where we are going, but we will not think or know anything because the dead do not think or feel.

So if our minds and memories finish, what happens to our bodies? Again, plenty of places in the Bible spell out what awaits our physical selves when we die:



**“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”**

Genesis 3:19

So when we die, our thoughts end and our bodies decay naturally when we are buried.

## The hope of life

**Read: 1 Corinthians 15**

But the dead are not beyond hope, even though they cannot experience that hope while they are dead. That hope is the resurrection. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so will those who are faithful also be raised from the dead when he returns. This is a part of the Kingdom of God.

**“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”**

1 Corinthians 15:21-23

The whole of this chapter in Corinthians is about resurrection. In fact, it describes two resurrections. The first is the resurrection of Jesus Christ - described as the firstfruits, or the first cut of the harvest - which has already happened. The second resurrection is the resurrection of those who belong to Christ.

The next phase of the Kingdom of God is described in the next few verses:

**“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”**

1 Corinthians 15:24

This describes a period of time after Jesus returns and the faithful are raised in which Jesus brings an end to all the evils of the world. During this time, some will still die - death is not destroyed until the end of this period.



The period between the return of Jesus and the destruction of death is described in **Revelation 20** as lasting for a thousand years, and is therefore known as the millennium.

There were many people who found it difficult to believe in the resurrection when the Apostles were teaching. The Greeks in particular found the idea of eternal life with a bodily resurrection in opposition to many of their philosophies. It is a subject that the Apostle Paul dealt with in some depth in his letters:

**“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”**

1 Corinthians 15:13-18

This passage points out that the guarantee of our future resurrection is the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. The hope is of resurrection, and if Jesus remained dead, there is no such thing as resurrection, and we have no hope.

## The day of judgement

The final point about the resurrection of the dead at the return of Jesus is that there will be a judgement.

**“...because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”**

Acts 17:31

The day of judgement is already chosen by God, but no-one else knows when it will happen. The judge will be Jesus.

The Bible gives us some brief pictures about what this judgement will be like:





**“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”**

Daniel 12:2

This passage describes a resurrection with two outcomes. When Jesus returns, many of the dead will be raised, but then one of two things will happen. Either they will receive eternal life, or they will be given to shame and contempt.

So who will be in this first group? Let’s look at some more verses.

**“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

John 6:39-40

This verse says that those who get eternal life will be those who have believed in Jesus. It also suggests that when the resurrection happens, it won’t be a gradual process, but will happen in a single event that the Bible calls the ‘last day’. This is the last day of mankind’s rule, and the day on which the Kingdom of God begins.

Another picture of judgement is given in **Matthew 25** - a more complex one.

**“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”**

Matthew 25:31-34

These verses remind us that the day of judgement happens soon after the return of Jesus, and that all nations will be gathered to be judged. The reward for the faithful will be the Kingdom of God. But the destiny of the others is described further down the chapter:



**“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”**

Matthew 25:46

It's important to look further into what this 'eternal punishment' is. Many cultures and religions have the idea of a place of eternal torment, but this is not what the Bible teaches. We can look both in the Old and New Testaments for what will happen to this second group.

**“But the wicked will perish; the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away.”**

Psalms 37:20

**“...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”**

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

These, and many other passages, confirm what we would expect from a merciful God. God would not want to inflict eternal suffering on his creation, even though they have turned away from him. God has no need of this; the punishment for sin is death, and for those who fail to accept God's way to be saved, this death is an eternal and final punishment.

## Responsibility

The last remaining point about the resurrection of the dead is that not everyone who dies will be raised. Some of the verses we have just looked at tell us that 'many' will be raised, implying there are some that won't.

Romans 2 talks in detail about God's judgement, and is just one of a number of places where the Bible suggests that only those who are responsible will face judgement.

**“For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.”**

Romans 2:12



This indicates that a lack of understanding is the deciding factor. Those who do not understand what God requires will never be raised from the dead - even on the day of judgement they will remain in the grave. They will therefore not answer for their deeds at judgement.

**Lesson summary:**

1. At death, we know nothing until we are raised at the day of judgement.
2. Our resurrection will be physical, like Jesus.
3. When we are resurrected, we will be judged. If we are found faithful, we will receive eternal life in God's kingdom. If we are not found faithful, we will die forever.



## Lesson 6 summary questions:

1: Read **Genesis 3:19**, **Job 10:9** and **Psalm 104:29**.

- a) What happens to those who die?

Now read **1 Kings 2:10**, **Mark 5:39** and **Acts 7:60**.

- b) How do these verses describe death?
- c) Why do you think death is described in this way?

2: Read the account of the death of Lazarus in **John 11:1-44**.

- a) How does Jesus describe Lazarus' death? (v11-14)
- b) What does Martha think will happen to Lazarus in the future? (v24-26)

3: Look at **John 5:25-29**, **Romans 2:6-8** and **2 Corinthians 5:10**.

- a) What do these verses tell us about the judgement?
- b) When will the judgement happen?

4: Read **John 3:16**, **John 6:40**, **Romans 6:8** and **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14**. What do these verses tell us is necessary to be raised?

### Deeper dive questions

5: Why is the empty tomb an important element of telling us about what Jesus is like after the resurrection?

6: **1 Corinthians 15:20-23** compares the resurrection of Jesus to the first fruits of a harvest. In what way is the resurrection of Jesus the first fruits?