

The Afterlife

By Doug Hamilton

Part I) The Afterlife

It is a natural human tendency for us to contemplate what happens when we die. A 2007 survey by International Communications Research reveals that most people have wrestled with this issue. With the primary focus being people 50 and older, it revealed the following information.

- 73 percent of respondents agree strongly or somewhat with the statement "I believe in life after death."
- Two-thirds of respondents say that their confidence in life after death has increased as they have gotten older (66 percent).
- 86 percent believe in heaven while 70 percent believe in hell.
- 88 percent of those who believe in heaven think that they will personally get into heaven.
- Almost all respondents believe in God (94 percent).
- When asked to give a percentage of people they believe will go to heaven, those who believe in heaven said on average 64 percent of people will go.
- Only 20 percent say they fear death and what happens to them after they die. The strongest predictor of fear of death is a belief that once one dies, that's the end. "Fear of death is most strongly related to uncertainty in one's religious beliefs and the possibility that something negative could happen after death," the report stated.

We can conclude much from this survey. First, people are thinking about the afterlife. Second, people are thinking many different things about the afterlife. Third, the people who ignore that there is an afterlife have the greatest fear.

Even though most people, including Christians, are thinking about the afterlife, it is still one of the least covered topics in the church. Most Christians have never really taken the time to see what the Bible actually says about what happens when we take that last breath. The aim of this study is to research what the Bible says about the afterlife so that we can be best prepared for the day which we enter it.

FACT: For most people, the last breath of their life can be something be fearful. What will be going through your mind the day you take your last breath? Do you know what awaits? Are you prepared for what is ahead?

Understanding the Afterlife

1) We are tri-dimensional beings.

- Jesus said in *Matthew 10:28*, "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in *hell*." He identified that we have a body and a soul.
- Hebrews 4:12 states that we have a "soul and spirit".
- Paul said in *1Thessalonians 5:23*, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without

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blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He further confirmed what the other two passages stated, that we spirit, soul and body. This is the entirety of our being.

We are told in *Genesis 5:1*, “*In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God.*” The word for God in this verse is *Elohim*, which is a plural term (*Genesis 1:26*, Us, Our, Our). We have a triune God; He is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 28:19*). We are made after His Tri-dimensional pattern, being body, soul and spirit.

a. Our body is temporary

The body we have is the material encasement for our soul. All of our physical bodies will die. Paul referred to our bodies as the “*body of our humble state*” in *Philippians 3:21*, for it is temporary. *It is appointed for man once to die* (*Hebrews 9:27*) and it has been that way since *Genesis 3:19* in the Garden of Eden.

b. Our soul is eternal.

Our soul is the eternal inner man in contrast to the temporary body of the outer man. *2 Corinthians 4:16* tells us that “*outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.*” Our soul is our real personality.

- i. Preferences -*Deuteronomy 12:20* “...I will eat flesh, because thy soul desireth to eat flesh; thou mayest eat flesh, after all the desire of thy soul.”
- ii. Sexuality -*Song 1:7*, “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth...”
- iii. Spirituality -*Ps 63:1*, “O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; My soul thirsts for Thee...”
- iv. Intentions -*Psalms 86:4*, “...O Lord, I lift up my soul.”
- v. Knowledge -*Psalms 139:14*, “...Wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well.”
- vi. Memories -*Lamentations 3:20*, “Surely my soul remembers...”

Long after our body dies, our soul will continue on into the afterlife. But how does the soul continue on while the body is lifeless?

c. Our “spirit” is the life force for both body and soul.

The spirit to which Paul referred to in *1 Thessalonians 5:23* can mean many things.

- i. the wind -*Hebrews 1:7*
- ii. breath -*II Thessalonians 2:8*
- iii. a resurrected soul -*1 Corinthians 15:45*
- iv. personal sentiment -*Matthew 5:3*
- v. intentions - *Philippians 1:27*
- vi. The Holy Spirit -*Acts 2:38; Romans 8:27; Ephesians 2:18*

There is yet another definition of which I am persuaded applies to the “spirit” of which Paul was referred to in *1 Thessalonians 5:23*.

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- The spirit of life is what was God breathed into Adam and made him a living soul. *Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*
- The spirit of life is what was driven from all living things during the flood. *Genesis 7:22 "...all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died."*
- The "*spirit of life*" is the life force that energizes the body of mankind. The body cannot live without the spirit of life. (Psalm 104:29; Job 33:4, 14-15)



The spirit of life is the energy force which keeps the souls from dying. We sing a song in the assembly which is called *TO CANAAN'S LAND I'M ON MY WAY* (#867). The words are the following:

To Canaan's land I'm on my way, Where the soul (of man) never dies;
My darkest night will turn today, Where the soul (of man) never dies.
Dear friends, there'll be no sad farewells, There'll be no tear-dimmed eyes,
Where all is peace and joy and love, And the soul of man never dies.

It is true that the soul of man never dies, for the spirit of life, the very life force which God breathed into Adam, made him a "*living soul*" (Genesis 2:7). It says in James 2:26, "*...the body without the spirit is dead...*" When a person dies, the soul and its associated spirit of life departs, leaving this physical being lifeless. This is why many times in the scriptures these phrases are used interchangeably.

- In Genesis 35:18, Rachel's "*soul was departing*" when she died.
- In Luke 8:54-55 Jesus brought a child's spirit back into her and she came back to life.
- In Luke 23:46 Jesus cried out, "*Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.*" Then he died.
- As Stephen was dying in Acts 7:59-60, he said, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!*"

2) There is a Tri-Dimensional Realm.

Just as we are three dimensional beings, there are three realms for which we shall all pass. They are the Present Realm, The Hadean Realm and the Eternal Realm.

a. The Present Realm

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:8 concerning this realm. "*...for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*" The *present life* is the dominion for which we exist today. Everything we do in this life, from the moment we are born to the day of our death, is included in this realm.

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b. The Hadean Realm

The Bible teaches when all people die, they go to Hades. The definition of the word *hades* means the place or state of disembodied souls, for the soul has been disconnected from the physical body. Hades always follows the death of a person as emphasized in *Revelation 6:8* “*And I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him...*”



The term *hades* carried special significance in the Greco-Roman world. To them, Hades (see right) was the god of the underworld. They believed all souls who died went to the underworld to be kept in the grip of this god. This was the Greek word which best captured the Old Testament Hebrew equivalent of *sheol*.

- Hosea 13:14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight.
- Psalm 30:3 O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit.
- Isaiah 38:10 I said, “In the middle of my life I am to enter the gates of Sheol; I am to be deprived of the rest of my years.”

c. The Eternal Realm

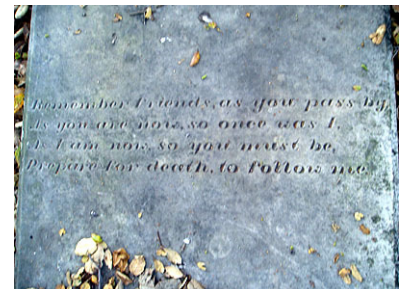
The Eternal Realm is the final destination which all souls, either good or evil, will spend eternity. Luke wrote in *Acts 24:15* “*...there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.*” Jesus said in *John 5:28–29*, “*Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.*”

We all have a date with eternity in one way or another. Jesus said in *Matthew 25:46* “*These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*” We must make sure to “*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (*Matthew 7:13–14*).

On a tombstone in Ireland it reads:

Remember friends, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so you must be.
Prepare for death to follow me.

A man was walking through the cemetery and happened upon the grave stone. He looked and meditated deeply, perhaps even thinking of these three realms for which we all will pass through. He said aloud, “To follow you I’m not content, until I know what way you went.”



Conclusion: We must always keep in mind that this is only a temporary realm and we are a temporary people, therefore let us not waste our time and resources on the temporal. Jesus said in *Matthew 6:20* that we should strive to locate our treasures in heaven. By doing so we will be able to best live for God. In the coming section there will be more detail concerning this topic.