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**Death, Eternal Life, and the Future of the World in the Bible**

**1. The Bible: What does it mean that the Bible is “the inspired Word of God?”**

* Inspiration is the belief that the writers and canonizers of the Bible were led by God, with the result that the writings of the Bible convey what God wants us to know about who God is and how we can experience life through him.
* Many ideas about how this happened.
* We say the Bible is sacred, that it is God’s Word (“Word” means “revelation”), we are saying that God has given us what God wants us to know about how people came to know God through time.
* **As the inspired Word of God, the Bible shows how our understanding of God and how we relate to God changed over time (over the 1000+ years of Biblical history). Examples:**
* The place where we should worship God changed: tabernacle, temple, synagogue, church, heart and mind.
* The identity of the “people of God” changed?” Jews, Jew and Gentiles, all believers.
* How we relate to the Law changed. Jesus said, “You have heard it said in the Law, but I say to you . . .” All the law summarized, “Love God, Love your neighbor as yourself.”
* Attitudes about women and marriage changed.
* Redemption from sin changed. Animal sacrifices, Jesus’ sacrifice.
* The identity of those accepted by God changed. Law-keepers, repentant sinners.
* The identity of God was redefined from One who is to be feared to One who is love.

**3. We see a similar development of ideas about death, eternal life and the future of the world as we move through three periods of Biblical history.**

* The Time of the Ancient Hebrews. The books and traditions in the Bible that date from 1200 BCE to the Exile of Judah and Israel to Assyria and Babylon (8th century BC). This includes: The Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy), the books of history and poetry.
* The Time of the Exile (8th-6th centuries BC). This includes the Hebrew prophets.
* The Time of Greco-Roman Domination, when Israel and the early Christians lived under the authority of the Greeks and the Romans (the 4th century BC through the 1st century AD. This includes the Book of Daniel, Jewish intertestamental writings, and the New Testament.

**4. Death, Life and the Future of the World in the Early Hebrew Bible**

* Cosmology: common among many ancient cultures and particularly the ancient Hebrews is the theory that universe is constructed in three parts or realms (The “Three-Story” universe). The three parts are these:
  + The firmament or heavens was the upper realm, the dwelling place of God and God’s angels and the place of the sun, moon, planets and stars. Here no mortals belong
  + The realm of the earth below, also called the “dry land,” which is the proper human place, shared with all forms of life, a thoroughly mortal realm.
  + Below the earth was the bottom, dark realm of the dead, which was called Sheol by the Jews and Hades by the Greeks.
  + Psalm 115:16-18 puts it succinctly: “The heavens are Yahweh’s heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men. The dead do not praise Yahweh, nor do any that go down into silence. But we [the living] will bless Yahweh from this time forth and for evermore.”
* Communication between God and humans (between the upper and middle levels involved God coming down to Mount Sinai or Angels coming down to deliver message to humans. God and angels visit the mortal realm of the humans (Jacob’s ladder) . Humans on the other hand, are placed only on the earth below, with no possibility of a future in heaven. The only possible movement is down to Sheol, to the lower level of the dead.
* For the Ancient Hebrews there was no idea of an immortal soul living a full and vital life after death. Human beings are made of dust and return to the dust (Genesis 2:7, 3:19). Death was an end
  + Psalm 146:4: “When his breath departs, he returns to his earth, and on that very day, his thoughts perish.”
  + Job 14:10-12: “But man dies and is laid low, man breathes his last and where is he? As waters fail from a lake, and as a river washes away and dries up, so a man lies down and rises not again, till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be aroused out of his sleep.”
  + There is no idea of reward or punishment. It is a kind of nothingness, only a shadow or shade of the self remains (Ps 88:10).
  + Even God’s prophets are in Sheol (1 Samuel 29:11). Saul asks the witch of Endor to bring Samuel up from the dead. Samuel is not happy about being disturbed.
  + Holds true for the greatest of Israel’s heroes: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David (Deut. 32:48-5; 2 Sam 12:2-23). Death is the great equalizer.
  + Exceptions: Enoch (walked with God), Elijah (taken to heaven in a fiery chariot).
* Two views of the future, both are historical
  + Pessimistic: human life is full of injustice and tragedy and will continue being like this. “For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts are the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20).
  + Optimistic view dominates the Pentateuch and historical books (still historical). God is making of Israel a great people, Israel is God’s chosen people, they will be a blessing to all people. Israel will be set high above the nations of the world (Deuteronomy 28:1) and experience incredible material blessings—peace, power, wealth and health (28:3-14, but only if Israel keeps God’s commandments. This pertains to Israel as a nation, but not to the dead.

**5. Death, Life and the Future of the World during the Exile**

* From the 8th to the 6th centuries BC, the nation of Israel suffered a number of military, political and social catastrophes. They lost their land, many were killed, and the intelligentsia we taken off into exile. During this time, in the writings of the prophets, we see the beginnings of two new views of the future of Israel, which correspond directly how the prophets view the severity of the historical situation
* The dominant view was that, in the future, Israel would be restored, that they would again regain the promised land and receive the full measure of blessings that God had promised, Davidic kingship would be restored, peace and prosperity would abound, and the other nations would be converted to Israel’s God. These are the main passages: Isaiah 2:2-4, 11-12; 27:12-13, 35, and 66:18-24; Jeremiah 3:15-25; 16:14-21; 23:1-8; and 30.31; Ezekiel 11:14-21, 34:11-31, 36:8-38, 37, and 40-48; Hosea 1:10-11; 2:16-23, and 3:1-5; Joel 3; Amos 9:9-15; Micah 5; Zephaniah 3; Haggai 2; Zechariah 10:6-12 and 12-14.
* A second view, found in a few texts, sees the world as being so decadent that only a dramatic intervention by God, a cosmic transformation of the universe will ensure Israel’s restoration. The transformation is so complete, it is like a new or a second creation—a new heaven and a new earth (Is. 11:6-9; 65-17-25; 66:22-24). This scenario:
  + Total peace (Is 2:4, Mic. 4:3)
  + The coming of messianic Davidic King (Is. 11:1-5; Mic. 5:2-4)
  + Suffering and the hardships of life are wipe away (Is. 25:7-8)
  + The “resurrection” of the righteous dead of the past (Is. 26:19)
  + Complete justice is ushered in and the wrath of God utterly destroys all sinners (Is. 35; Zech. 14:8-11: Ez. 47-48)
  + Wicked angelic powers are destroyed in God’s overthrows evil (Is. 24:21-22)
* **All this still takes place on earth**, salvation and eternal life takes place at the end of history on earth. There is still no notion of the soul having eternal life in heaven.
* Summary: Three key elements: (1) the coming of the Messiah; (2) the resurrection of the dead (from Sheol to earth); (3) the restoration of Israel on earth

**6. Death, Life and the Future under the Rule of the Greeks and the Romans**

* This period spans from the 4th century BC through the 1st Century AD. It includes books like Daniel, the Jewish Intertestamental Books (2 Esdras, Ethiopic Enoch, Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Maccabees, and others), and the New Testament.
* Jewish Intertestamental Literature
  + Over 1000 Jewish book written between 4th century BC and 1st century AD.
  + This include Dead Sea Scrolls and other more Hellenistic (Greek influenced books (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon, 1,2,3,4 Esdras, Judith, Suzanna, Tobit, Baruch, Prayer of Manasseh, Prayer of Azariah, Song of the Three Young Men, Ethiopic Enoch, Bel and the Dragon, Sirach, Ascension of Isaiah, Testament of Job, the Apocrypha, and many others)
  + Had Hellenistic and Persian influences, that were no widely accepted among Palestinian Jews. Chief among these was Zoroastrianism (Persian prophet Zoroaster who made a sharp distinction between good and evil (Dualism)
  + These writing often ascribe a high value to Women
* The rise and development of Apocalyptic scenarios:
  + For some, Jewish persecution was so severe and the possibilities for Israel seemed so bleak in the face of Greek and Roman domination, that a general hope for change was not enough. These writings focus on “signs of the end” that signal God’s dramatic intervention. Apocalyptic books are written in a code language so that the persecutor could not understand what was being said.
  + The basis for all these schemes is the Book of Daniel (chapters 2, 7, 8, 9, 11) (written about 200 BC).
  + The basic scenario is this:
    - Following a succession of dominating world kingdoms (Babylon, Persia, Greece or Rome), a terrible evil ruler will come.
    - The Temple in Jerusalem will be defiled
    - God’s people will be persecuted
    - Evil will be utterly crushed by the sudden intervention of God (Messiah)
    - The resurrection of the dead and the great judgement follows
    - The Kingdom of God is passed to God’s elect and the persecuted
  + Each time a new ruthless candidate shows up in Jerusalem, groups within Judaism or Christianity would be whipped up into an apocalyptic frenzy (Antiochus Epiphanies, 169 BC; Pompey, 63 BC; Caligula, 41 AD; the general Titus 70 AD [the destruction of Jerusalem]; Nero, 54-68 AD).
* What happens to the dead before the resurrection?
  + Daniel 12:2-3, speaks about the resurrection of the dead, but until the end, during the interim, they remain “asleep” in Sheol. Dead stay dead till the resurrection. Then everlasting life for the righteous, everlasting death for the unrighteous.
  + During the intertestamental period around 50BC, a new view developed among some Jews that the state of the dead, during the interim period before the resurrection, either in Sheol (Hades) or in various levels of heaven (2 Esdras), depended on whether those who had died were **righteous** or **wicked**.
    - The Wisdom of Solomon (50 BC), for the righteous: “But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. (3:4)
    - The Wisdom of Solomon, for the wicked: “Short and sorrowful is our life,

and there is no remedy when a man comes to his end, and no one has been known to return from Hades. Because we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been; because the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts. When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air. Our name will be forgotten in time, and no one will remember our works. (2:1-4).

* Within in Judaism, during the time of Jesus, there were many different types of Judaism, each having their own views on death, life and the end of the world (Josephus, Jewish historian @ 90 AD).
  + For the Sadducees on the Torah (first 5 books of the OT) were sacred, therefore they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. When you’re dead, you’re dead, in Sheol.
  + For the Pharisees, The Torah, the writings and the prophets were sacred, their scenario was (1) the Messiah would come, (2) the dead would be raised, (3) God would judge between the wicked and the righteous, God’s kingdom would be set upon earth (for some); God’s kingdom would be set up as a “spiritual” kingdom
  + Apocalyptic Jews (e.g., Essenes). The scenario parallels Daniel vision, a new heaven and a new earth.

**7. Death, Life and the End of the World in Early Christianity.**

* The resurrection of the dead.
  + Nowhere in the NT do we find the old Hebrew idea that death is the final end. Jesus rebukes the Sadducees, who held such a view (Mark 12:18-27), arguing for both continuing existence after death and the final resurrection of the dead. In Acts 23:6-10, Paul says the same thing when arguing with the Sadducees. The resurrection of the dead comes at the end of time when Jesus returns in the clouds to gather up his people (Luke 20:34-36; Matt. 11:20-24; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 11:18).
  + The view of the resurrection is influenced by Jesus’ resurrection, who after death, had a spiritual body and went to heaven to be with God. Jesus’ resurrection is the firstfruits of our resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)
* The state of the dead before the end.
  + Paul uses the metaphor of “sleep” to described the bodies of the dead Christians before the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:9-10), but he distinguishes the physical body which is in the ground (Sheol), which will in the future be raised from the dead, from the spiritual body which is, at the moment of death joined with God and Christ in Heaven. (Phil. 1:19-26; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; 1 Thess. 4:14). Paul’s views of life after death may have been experienced by his own “near-death experience,” when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road and was converted (2 Corinthians 12). Other NT writers portray the dead as consciously waiting in heaven in a state of peace for the end of the world, Christ’s return (Luke 16:19-31, 23:43; 1 Pet. 3:18-20; 4:6; Rev. 6:9-1; 7:9-12).
  + The Gospel of John shows that for Christians, eternal life is not something that Christians can experience in the age to come, but beginning now, in this life and continuing after death (eternal life =37 times in Gospel of John; 6 times in 1 John) (John 3:16; 4:14; 5:24; 10:27-28). Conveying this idea is the purpose of writing the Gospel (20:31).
  + Eternal life is the alternative of Sheol or Gehenna, the possibility of perishing remains for those who reject Christ (3:16) (annihilation not torture). Three NT words for “hell” (Sheol, Gehenna and Tartarus. Tartarus is only used once in the NT in 1 Peter and simply means to go down. Sheol continues to describe the bottle level of the 3-story universe where all go after death. Jesus’ preferred word is Gehenna, which is literally a garbage dump in a valley south of Jerusalem, where the fire never when out. The poor and Jewish outcast were thrown into it when they died. Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisees saying that they and not the unclean will experience this, not the poor, whom they reject. A full theology of hell was not developed by the church until centuries after Jesus.
* Some Christians held to apocalyptic views. Some early Christians, adopted the apocalyptic views of Daniel and the intertestamental authors, asserting that the physical world will pass away, replaced by a new creation ((Rom. 8:21; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21—22). The views of this group of Christians, particularly under Roman persecution is found in the Book of Revelation.
* Key Passages
  + Luke 23:42-43: “I tell you the truth, today you shall be with me in paradise.
  + 2 Corinthians 5:6-10: Spiritual body, exchanged for our physical body. What did Paul experience at his conversion?
  + The spirit of departed Christians goes to be with Christ at the moment of death (Phil. 1:19-26; 1 Thess. 4:14)

**Key points for Christians**:

1. We are loved by God.
2. Jesus has told us how God wants us to live in this world, and the “in life” benefits or consequences of living God’s way or not.
3. God has something for us to do while we are alive, we have a purpose
4. We will be with God at the moment of death, we have nothing to fear, it will be extraordinary.
5. God is in control of history, and in God’s wisdom, will decide when to intervene, intermittently and permanently. God is hesitant to intervene. God is love, love cannot be coerced. Love requires that we be free. We are not robots. God has given us the freedom and responsibility to make life work, as those in his image, fix the problems we face, to end suffering and set things right wherever and how ever we can.

**Common components of after-death experiences (University of Virginia):**

* feeling very comfortable and free of pain
* a sensation of leaving the body, sometimes being able to see the physical body while floating above it
* the mind functioning more clearly and more rapidly than usual
* a sensation of being drawn into a tunnel or darkness
* a brilliant light, sometimes at the end of the tunnel
* a sense of overwhelming peace, well-being, or absolute, unconditional love
* a sense of having access to unlimited knowledge
* a “life review,” or recall of important events in the past
* a preview of future events yet to come
* encounters with deceased loved ones, or with other beings that may be identified as religious figures
* when one returns to life, as sense of being transformed, having a purpose, not fearing death.

**Key texts:**

Daniel 12:2-3

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. **3**Those who are wise[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel%2012%3A2-3&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22085a)] will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Daniel 12:13

As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

Mark 12:23 “Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.” Wife has 7 husbands they all died. Whose wife will she be in the resurrection.”

**Isaiah (View if the Future)**

**1. Total peace**

2:4. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

**2. Coming of the Davidic King**

11:1-5

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,

And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,

The spirit of wisdom and understanding,

The spirit of counsel and strength,

The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

And He will delight in the fear of the LORD,

And He will not judge by what His eyes see,

Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;

But with righteousness He will judge the poor,

And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;

And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,

And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

**3. Suffering and hardships of life are wiped away, IS 25:8**

He will swallow up death for all time,  
            And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,  
            And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;

**4. Resurrection of the righteous of the past IS 26:19**

But your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise— let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy— your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.

**5. Complete justice is ushered in and sinners will not participate. Is 35**

And there will be a highway called the Way of Holiness.

The unclean will not travel it—only those who walk in the Way—

and fools will not stray onto it. No lion will be there,

and no vicious beast will go up on it.

Such will not be found there,

but the redeemed will walk upon it.

**6. The dead are still sleeping**

But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

! Corinthians 15

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”[h]

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 For we live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, that we will be be away from the body and at home with the Lord.