

## **Where Do We Go When We Die?**

**by Don Blackwell**

Where do we go when we die? I suppose this is a question that every man who has ever lived has thought about, because death is something that we all face. As we grow and mature we see those around us pass on. We see our grandparents die and maybe later we see our parents pass away as well. Maybe even our siblings and friends. And the truth is clear that we, too, are going to die, and we wonder, "What then?"

You know, a lot of strange ideas have been given to answer this question. Some have suggested "reincarnation." That is the idea that if you lived a good life, you come back in the form of another creature. Some have the idea of a ghost and they have the idea that you come back as a spirit and you live in the house where you used to dwell. Some had the idea of "purgatory," that is, you go to a place of punishment until you've paid your debt and then you can move on from there. And of course, many people have the idea that you just cease to exist, that is, when you breathe your last breath that there will be no more conscious existence. But you know as a Christian, I don't have to engage in a guessing game. I don't have to buy into superstitions or myths, because I can know the answers to the questions, not only where I came from, but also where I'm going.

In this lesson we're going to trace the journey of the human soul and we're going to let the Bible answer for us, "Where do we go when we die?" Now, the journey of the human soul doesn't actually begin on this earth. It begins in heaven. I want you listen to Ecclesiastes 12:7. This is a verse we often times use to discuss death, but I want you to listen particularly to the end of the verse. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Hebrews 12:9 calls God the "Father of spirits." And so, the spirit originally comes from heaven. It comes from God. And so, at the point of conception, when the egg meets the sperm and a human life is created, God places a soul. He places a spirit into that new body.

You know the mother and the father give that child his physical characteristics, but they don't give him his soul. God does that. Genesis 1:26: "God said, 'Let Us [that is the Godhead] make man in Our image, after Our likeness.'" Now, what does that mean to be made in the image of God? Primarily that has reference to the soul of man. He is a being who will now live on for eternity. And so, when a human is conceived, God makes him in the image of God by placing a soul into him. Now, animals don't have that. We are far superior to the animals in that way.

Now, from the time that God places a soul into the newly formed human being, it will continue to dwell in that physical body until that person dies. 2 Corinthians 5:1 says "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent..." That is just talking about our physical body. It is a tent. It's a temporary dwelling place for the soul. "We know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God. A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." 1 Corinthians 15:54 talks about our physical body and refers to the physical body as "corruptible." And so our soul, for the 70 or 80 years that we have this physical body, it dwells in this corruptible, fleshly body.

Now, during that time we worship God with our spirit. It's coming from the physical body, but it emanates ultimately from our soul, from our spirit. John 4:24 says God is a Spirit, and "they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." So we engage the physical body, but our spirit is

the seat of worship. The spirit is the heart of man. We worship God with our spirit. We love God with our spirit, with our soul. Luke 10:27: "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and with all of your mind."

Now, all the while the physical body is wearing out. Solomon describes this process in Ecclesiastes chapter 12. He says, "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth before the difficult days come." That is, when you begin to get old the physical body gets old. He says life becomes harder in many ways. He says, "And the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'" Many people, when they get near the end, they're just ready to go and be with the Lord because physically, life gets very hard for them. He says, "While the Sun and the light and the moon and the stars, are not darkened." That is, your eyesight begins to fail. You've got to get bifocals. And he says "...and the clouds do not return after the rain; in the day when the keepers of the house began to tremble." He's talking about the hand as they begin to shake and the strong man bowed down. That is, your legs get weak; you fall. He says "...when the grinders cease because they are few;" you lose your teeth.

And he says "...and those who look through the windows grow dim. When the doors are shut in the streets and the sound of grinding is low; when one rises up at the sound of a bird." You don't sleep well like you did when you were younger. "...and all the daughters of music are brought low." That is you're losing your hearing. "Also they are afraid of height, and of terrors in the way. When the almond tree blossoms;" Your hair turns gray. He says the grasshopper, this very small creature, is "a burden." Desire fails. Your desire changes as you get older. He says, "For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets." He says, "Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the Golden Bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well." That is, you're going to die. Now listen, he says "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was." That is, the corruptible body is going to die, it's going to decay, and it's going to return to the ground and the elements. Now listen: "And the spirit will return to God who gave it."

What happens then? What happens when I die? For 75 years or 80 years, however long my soul dwells in this this physical body, what happens when the physical body dies? Psalm 90:10 says "The days of our lives are 70 years. And if by reason of strength they are 80 years, yet their boast is only labor in sorrow, for it is soon cut off..." Now listen: "...and we fly away." Isn't that fascinating language? Genesis 35:18 describes the death of Rachel and it uses this language: "And it came to pass, as her soul was departing..." James 2:26 says "the body without the spirit is dead." The body without the spirit. That's very fascinating. And so, when I die my soul leaves this old corruptible body.

But where does it go? You know, on the Day of Resurrection we know that we're going to get a new body. We're going to get an incorruptible body. But what about in the meantime? I want you to listen to this description in 2 Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, [the corruptible body] is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Right now we have a tent, we have a temporary body, but we're going to get a building, a lasting body, an eternal body. Verse 4: "For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life." Now, there's some very interesting language here because he speaks about being in this body as being clothed in a tent. And then he speaks about being in the resurrected body as being in a building, eternal in the heavens. But then he also speaks about being unclothed. What is it? What's he referring to? When is that going to occur?

Well, it's when we die and the soul leaves the physical, corruptible body. You see, there will be a period when the spirit (or the soul) will not have a body. It will be unclothed, if you will. Well, when I die and my spirit leaves my body, where does it go? Now, that's going to take us to the next part of this journey.

The entire second section of this chart comprises what is known as "Hades." This is the "Hadean realm." Now, many people are confused by the term "Hades" because they think of Hades as referring to hell. They think of it as referring to the place of punishment and that's not right. The word "Hades" actually refers to the dwelling place of the dead. It's kind of a holding area for disembodied spirits. The good who die go to Hades. The bad who die go to Hades. I think part of the reason why we're confused about this is because the King James Version translates the Greek word for Hades as "hell," and that confuses us. In the original language there are two different words. There's one word for "Hades" and one word for "Gehenna." Now, "Hades" is the dwelling place of the dead. "Gehenna" is hell, but the King James translates both words as "hell". In Matthew 16:18 when Jesus promised to build his church and He said "the gates of hell would not prevail against it," this is not hell. This is the word for Hades. It means that death would not prevent. Death would not stop his kingdom. Now, if you don't understand the distinction in these words, you're going to get very confused.

Now, incidentally just as a side note, the Old Testament word for Hades, the Hebrew word for Hades is the word "Sheol." Sheol and Hades refer to the same place. And so, once you understand that all people go to Hades when they die, it's going to clear up some things for you. For example, in Acts chapter 2:31, the Bible refers to Christ after His death as being in Hades. Now the King James Version says "hell," but the word there refers to Hades. Jesus did not go to hell when he died, he went to the Hadean realm, to Hades. But Luke 23:43, as Christ was about to die, He said he was going to go to "Paradise." Now, when you understand that Paradise is in Hades, it all makes perfect sense because Paradise is a compartment of Hades. In Hades, there is a place where the righteous go, and there is a place where the wicked go. They're all awaiting the Day of Judgment.

Now, the best description that we have in the Bible of Hades is in Luke chapter 16. It describes both compartments. Now, I want to read it together. Let's look at it together and then we'll discuss it. Luke, chapter 16, beginning in verse 19. The Bible says, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades..." Now, the King James uses the word hell. It says that he was in hell, but that's not right. The New King James correctly says that he was in Hades. "Being in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And then he cried, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'" Now, I want us first to look at this place where Lazarus was taken. We're told that when he died, when Lazarus died, he was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom. Now, this is the compartment of Hades where the righteous go to await judgment. It's the place known as Paradise. This is the same place that Christ promised the thief on the cross that he would go. Remember,

He said in Luke 23:43, "Assuredly, I say to you, that you will be with me in Paradise." In Luke 16:25 the Bible tells us, that in this place the righteous are comforted. In fact, if you study the background, the etymology of the word "paradise," it carries with it the idea of a pleasure garden.

Now, the opposite compartment of Hades is where the rich man went. This place is a place of torment. Now, this section in Hades is called "Tartarus" in the original Greek. Peter uses this word in 2 Peter 2:4 when he said, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgement." They are waiting for the judgment day. Now, this place is described for us in Luke 16:22-23 this way. Verse 22 says, "the rich man also died, and was buried." Verse 23, listen to this: "And in hell..." The King James says hell, the word is Hades. "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." Now, normally when I teach on this subject, I would spend some time here talking about the misery and the suffering of this place, and we could spend an entire lesson just on that subject. But for now, let's briefly observe that this rich man, in torment, is burning in fire. He is crying out for mercy, he's begging for mercy. He believes that a mere drop of water would bring him at least a moment's relief. I want you to appreciate with me that every person from the beginning of this world until now, every person who has died lost in the eyes of God, is in this place. Many of them have been there for thousands of years, many just for minutes, some for seconds, but they're there and are suffering.

Now, another observation that I want us to notice is the fact that there is consciousness in the Hadean realm. You know, there is a doctrine taught by some of the religious world called "soul sleeping." And "soul sleeping" suggests that when a person dies that he goes into a shaded unconsciousness and he ceases to be aware. But this passage, as well as others, teach us that after death, men are very much aware of what's going on. The rich man is crying in pain. Lazarus is comforted. You know Psalm 116:15 says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Friends, I don't believe that refers to them slipping into a state of unconsciousness. That doesn't make any sense to me.

You know, I taught on this subject on one occasion and a gentleman came to me afterwards and he said, "Don, that was a great lesson." He said, "But you need to read this particular passage because you're wrong about there being consciousness in Hadean realm," and he handed me a piece of paper. Well, I unfolded it, and I looked at it. It was Ecclesiastes 9:5, where the Bible says, "The dead know not anything." The dead know not anything. But you know he was misinterpreting that verse because he was pulling it out of context. In fact, if you will look at the next verse in Ecclesiastes 9:6 uses that phrase again, "under the sun." Again, it's used in verse 3, it's used in verse 9, it's used in verse 13. And the context of this passage is things going on in this world, things under the sun, the things on this earth. And the point of the passage is that when you die, and you go to Paradise or torment, you are no longer aware of what's taking place on this earth. Now, to prove that, in 2 Chronicles chapter 34, King Josiah was told by God that God was going to bring punishment upon Jerusalem for their sins, but that he was going to die and he was not going to see it happen. Now, I want you listen to the language in verse number 28. He said, "Surely I will gather you unto your fathers, [that is, you're going to die] and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity that I will bring on this place and its inhabitants." Now, what's the point? He will have died. He will have gone to the Hadean realm. So he was not going to see what was going to take place on this earth. The dead know not anything with regard to what's going on back here.

Now, one final thing that I want you to notice about the Hadean realm. You notice that on the chart that, between Paradise and Torment, There's a green line and it has the words "great gulf"? That's because Luke 16:26 says that there is a divide. There is a great gulf fixed so that no one can pass from one side to the other. Once you are in Paradise, you are there to stay until the Day of Judgment. Once you are there in Torment, you are there to stay until the Day of Judgment. And so, that means every person who has ever died unfaithful in the eyes of God is still there. Many have been there for thousands of years, some for minutes, some for seconds. But I think about them crying, "I'm tormented in this flame." But it doesn't end. Now, that takes us to the next section of this chart, which is the resurrection day. The resurrection day is what we typically call the "Judgment Day." The Bible calls this day the "day of the Lord." Peter says, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night..." (2 Peter 3:10). Now, what is going to happen on that day, the Day of Judgment? To the souls who are in Hades, who are in Paradise or Torment, what's going happen to them? On that day the Hadean realm is going to give up all the souls that it contains, and it will cease to exist. Also on that day, the earth is going to give up the bodies. John 5:28-29, Jesus said, "For the hour is coming in which all that are in the grave will hear His voice and will come up forth." Those that have done good, to the resurrection of life, those that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation [or damnation]." And then the souls (the spirits) that have come from Hades will be reunited with the bodies that have been resurrected on the earth. But with this new union [we have] the new body. The new body is going to be different. The resurrected body is not going to be like the physical body that we have now. The resurrected body will not be made of the same particles that were put in the grave. The resurrected body will be a different material, if you want to use that term.

You know, sometimes people will express concern about having their bodies cremated because they think that's going to pose a problem at the resurrection. But the resurrected body is not going to be made up of the same elements that we have on this earth. How do I know that? 1 Corinthians 15:50 says, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." The resurrected body will not be a flesh and blood body. Listen to this from verse 44 of 1 Corinthians 15, "The body [that is, the physical body] is sown in corruption, it [the resurrected body] is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body. There is a spiritual body."

Now, let's break this down; what we've just read. It says the resurrected body will be incorruptible. You see, our current bodies are subject to death. They get old, they wear out. But the new body won't wear out. Secondly, the resurrected body will be a glorious body. Our present bodies have many things associated with them that are not glorious. They're low and vile. The new body will be a thing of beauty and joy and purity. Thirdly, the resurrected body, he says, will be raised in power. You know, our present bodies get tired. They're inherently weak. The resurrected body will have unfailing vigor. It will be capable of unwearying activity. The resurrected body will be a spiritual one. And our present bodies are natural. He says the resurrected body will be designed for spirit life as opposed to physical, fleshly life.

So, the Day of Judgment is going to be a resurrection day. It's the day that Hades will be destroyed. It's the day that we will get our resurrected, new, incorruptible, spiritual bodies. Now, with that in mind, listen to 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in

victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" Death and Hades will be overcome on that day. In other words, the physical grave and the temporary abode of the dead, the Hadean realm, will both come to an end on the Day of Judgment.

You say, "Well, what about those of us who are still living when the judgment day comes?" 1 Corinthians 15:52 says, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." And so, the living also will be changed into an incorruptible body. And then we'll be gathered before the throne of God. After both the good and the bad have received their resurrected body, we will stand before the throne of Christ and we will be judged. Matthew 25:32 says, "And the nations will be gathered before Him, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." And all humanity, friends, all humanity will be there on that day. The rich man and Lazarus will stand before God to receive their eternal judgment. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be there. Ahab, Jezebel, and Judas will be there. Romans 14:12 says, "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God." 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that which He hath done, whether it be good or bad."

You know, sometimes people will ask, "Well, what is the point of the judgment if people have already been in paradise or torment? It seems like they've kind of already been judged." But you see, the judgment day is not a day in which God has to make a judgment call. It's not like God has to weigh the facts and the figures and figure out who is saved and who is lost. He knows that at the very moment that you die. In fact, he knows before you die where you will be eternally. Judgment day isn't a trial like we might think of. In fact, you might call it the "pronouncement of judgment" day. It's the sentencing day. It's the day that God states the reasons why you were lost or saved. And then, He pronounces your eternal sentence or reward.

Somebody says, "But you know, it seems rather unnecessary. Since the righteous and the wicked already know where they will spend their eternities, it seems unnecessary." Friends, let me suggest to you that the judgment day is necessary for several reasons. Number one: those who are still living haven't been assigned punishment or bliss, and so it's necessary for them.

Number two: righteousness must be displayed. Now listen to me. The last time that the world saw Christ, He was dying as a criminal. Remember, He was only seen by his followers after his resurrection. But on the Day of Judgment, every eye will see him as the righteous judge.

Number three: the judgment day is necessary because it will be a day of exposure. The reasons why a man is lost will be stated. The reasons why a man is saved will be heralded.

Number four: it is the day when death is finally defeated. You know, for years, I wondered about to the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:26. It says, "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." And I thought to myself, "You know, hasn't Christ already defeated death? Did not He do that at his resurrection?" And so, I was puzzled about this. But listen to the context, verse number 24. "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." Now friends, this is talking about the day that the tombs will be emptied and the Hadean world will come to an end. It is this day. The judgment day is oh so very necessary.

Now, the next part of the chart we're going to talk about is eternity. In Matthew 25:46 the Lord said, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." You know, man has been created in the image of God, and thus, has been given an eternal soul, and that soul will never cease to exist. Now, the Greek word that's translated as "eternal" means eternal, everlasting, without end, never to cease, indeterminate as to duration. Now, you'll see in the chart there are two alternatives as to where we will spend eternity. One is a place of eternal bliss. That's the destination at the faithful. It's heaven. And to them, the King will say on the day of judgment, "Come, you blessed to my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..." (Matthew 25:34). In Matthew 25:36 He calls this place life eternal. Now, the other destination is a place of eternal torment. It's hell. It's described in Revelation 21:8 as "the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." It's the place the Lord has in mind in the judgment scene in Matthew 25 where He says to the sinners, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment..."

How long, then, is the punishment in hell going to last? Is the punishment in hell going to be temporary or are people just going to burn up and cease to exist? No, the Bible says it's going to last eternally. It's going to be everlasting. Revelation 14:11 says, "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night..." Friends, I can't imagine anything more terrifying than that. You know, the man who dies and goes to hell: he has tomorrow, and the next day, and the next year, and the next 100 years, and a million years from now he will still be suffering and burning and continuing to exist. Each day that passes, he's no closer to the end. Now, you know we're speaking rather accommodatively because there is no time in eternity. He will simply be suffering forever. The soul of man enters the physical body at the point of conception, and at death it goes into Hades where it remains, as a spirit, until the day of resurrection. On that day, it reunites with the body, the new, incorruptible body, and then that soul and the new body will spend eternity in heaven or hell.

Now, we've been discussing the future of our souls, but let's bring the discussion back home to where you and I live. If you go back to the beginning of the chart, you will notice that on the earth there are two categories: the saved and the lost. And everyone on earth fits into one of these two categories. You'll also notice that the saved and the lost are traveling on different pathways. Notice that for the saved, for the righteous, the pathway representing death is very narrow. Now that's because Matthew 7:14 says, "Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it." Notice also, that for the lost, their pathway for death is wide and that's because Matthew 7:13 says, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it." And perhaps the most important thing to notice is that after death, the saved and the lost end up in different locations. And friends, where you will go when you die depends on where you are heading while you're alive. Every person alive today is on one of two paths. It is either the narrow path that leads to heaven, or it is the wide path that leads to hell. If you die today, what does eternity hold for you? If you died in the next few moments, where would you be when you opened your eyes? What would you see? Seconds from now, what would you see? Would it be angels carrying you to paradise, or would you lift up your eyes being in torment?