

## **What Does the Bible Teach about Heaven and Hell**

### **Introduction**

If anyone said to you *Do you believe in heaven and hell?* it would be reasonable for you to reply, *It depends what you mean by heaven and hell?* It is clear in Scripture that the truth of heaven is balanced by the truth of hell. They are both realities. They should arouse intense interest in each of us, because Scripture is quite plain. You and I will certainly end up in either one or the other, and that for all eternity. And the Lord Jesus Himself said far more about heaven, and far more about hell, than anyone else.

To prepare us to pay heed to what scripture affirms, we need to think about the sort of creature man is, as a race, and as individuals.

Man, is a unique creature of God, is composed of spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). He may be, and is, in the language of Scripture, always identified with one or another, according to the aspect of truth being revealed or recorded; with his body when his natural relation to his fellows and the material world is in view, and with his soul and/or his spirit when his relationship with God and matters beyond the material are under consideration.

Man's body was formed of the dust of the earth (Genesis 3:19). It is said to be a mortal body (Romans 8:11); that is, subject to death. It should be noted that the death recorded in Genesis 2:17 was not natural death, which separates the soul and spirit from the body, but a moral death of separation from God. Genesis 5:5 tells us that Adam lived a total of 930 years of natural life before he died.

Man's soul was derived from the *in-breathing* of His Creator (Genesis 2:7). Man is the offspring of God (Acts 17:28 – 29), and made in the image and glory of God (1 Corinthians 11:7), so as to give him dominion over all God's other creative works except angels.

Man's spirit is his highest part, linking him directly with God. The spirit of man which is in him (1 Corinthians 2:11) is given by God to each individual (Ecclesiastes 12:7). It is the possession of *spirit* formed within him by God (Zechariah 12:1) that makes man a responsible being, and gives him the capacity for intercourse with God, Who is a Spirit. This is a capacity which no creature, other than man, possesses. To the spirit is also ascribed intelligence, understanding, and judgment.

Romans 5:12 tells us that *by one man*, that is, Adam, *sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*. Because of that, Hebrews 9:27 says, *It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*. Death is not the climax of man's existence, but it is a crisis point. Natural death is the separation of the spirit and soul from the body. Spiritual death will be the final, and total, separation of the man from God.

Like Adam, every person has become morally separated from his God. This is death in its first form, in those who live, and die, without Christ. The second death (Revelation 20:14) is separation from God of the entire person; spirit, soul and body, for ever. This must be the doom of all who reject the remedy, and despise the free gift of God, which is eternal life (Romans 6:23).

In His incarnation, the Lord Jesus took the form of a true Man, possessing spirit (Luke 23:46), soul (Matthew 26:38) and body (Hebrews 10:5). After living His perfect life upon earth, and by His personal death, the Lord Jesus abolished death (2 Timothy 1:10). That is, He annulled it, rendered it powerless for all His own.

Death presents no fears to Christian believers. If they die, their spirits rest with Christ beyond death, while their bodies await the triumphant shout of the returning Lord, Who will call all His own to share His triumph in that day of *the redemption of our body* (Romans 8:23).

For the Christian, his death has been *abolished* judicially at the Cross, and will be so actually in the final triumph of Christ, in His power and glory. The same word is used in 1 Corinthians 15:26. The Christian shall never see death as unsaved sinners must. He possesses the life of Him Who conquered death and carries the keys of death and of hell (Revelation 1:18).

But what does Scripture reveal to faith about our final departure from the present world, and the state which is to be entered into after death? And what awaits both the redeemed and the unredeemed is the intermediate, disembodied state which is entered upon at death. They shall enter the final and eternal condition in which they shall ever abide, after the final resurrection. Refresh your memories. Read Daniel 12:2; John 5:24 – 29; Acts 24:15; 1 Corinthians 15:12 – 23; Revelation 20:4 – 15.

This brings us back to our main subjects, Heaven and Hell.

## **Heaven**

In the world, there is cynicism about heaven, but it is real, not imaginary. Three heavens can be identified from Scripture. First, the atmospheric heavens, or, as we might say, the atmosphere, where we can see the clouds, and from which we feel the rain when it drops. Secondly, above that, the starry heavens, which we might call the stratosphere. Beyond that, which man cannot see, however clever he is, there is the very dwelling place of God. We are only going to think about the last. The Lord Jesus was glad to speak happily of it as *my Father's house* (John 14:2). Think of that. Those who are going to heaven are going to dwell in the very presence of God, and in the enjoyment of the eternally subsisting relationship of the Father and the Son.

God has prepared for heaven those who shall be there, by sending His Son into the world that we might be saved through Him (John 3:17). After paying the price that we could never have achieved for ourselves, Christ has gone back to heaven as our forerunner (Hebrews 6:20). Indeed, His presence there prepares the place for us. He has already prepared us to be fit to be there by dying for our sins, and being raised again for our justification.

The joy of heaven is not its location. Indeed, the very idea of physical, geographical location is foreign to the concept of heaven. *God is Spirit*. Heaven, the immediate presence of God, is therefore a spiritual concept, not a material, physical, geographical location. Heaven is much more about being with a person than being in a place. Heaven is what it is to us because Jesus is there.

The Apostle Paul crystallised the hope and joy of heaven when he expressed the *desire to depart to be with Christ, which is far better* (Philippians 1:23). The Apostle John affirmed that when we get to heaven *God shall wipe away all tears from (our) eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain* (Revelation chapter 21:4). That will

be wonderful, but even more wonderful will be being with Christ personally, in the personal presence of the One Who loved (us), and gave Himself for (us) (Galatians 2:20).

The Lord Jesus Christ deserves the utmost honour, the highest place in heaven, both because of Who He is and because of what He's done. And He shall have it! And it is He Who has said, *I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also* (John 14:3). His presence there, having died for us and risen again, has prepared the place for us. He wants us to be with Him. He has said so. We shall be there with Him because He has said so.

It will be joy all the way, and for all eternity, to be with Christ, Who loves us with such a wonderful love. With Christ, in heaven, *the Father's house!* That must be far, far better than anything else we could ever have. That is the joy of heaven. There can be no sweeter destiny for those who love the Saviour. We know that we shall be with Him, and like Him, for ever, because He has said so.

Because of that, the Christian can say with the Apostle Paul, *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21). He possesses a life over which death has no power. All that remains to be done is for the tie that holds it to the mortal vessel of his body to be loosed. When that occurs, the ransomed and unclothed spirit and soul will pass instantly into a state of conscious and intelligent bliss, in the immediate presence of the Lord. Time as we know it will be irrelevant. His saints will pass quickly from occupying the body here upon earth to being *absent from the body, and ... present with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:8).

By the way, the Bible word used for the present location, and condition, of those Christians who have died since they trusted Christ as their Saviour, and are therefore absent from the body, and present with the Lord, is:

### **Paradise**

Let me say here and now, I am no scholar of the original words used in the Bible. That certainly applies to the word translated here *Paradise*. I am told that, in the Greek New Testament language, the word means a garden, a pleasant park, enclosed and private to its owner. It is said to be derived from the times of the Persian Kingdom, when the heir to the throne had his royal residence surrounded by its or pleasure grounds, to which he welcomed his personal friends to share his honours and his joys, while awaiting the glories of the throne.

The word is used just 3 times in the Bible. The first occasion was when the Lord Jesus said to the dying robber alongside Him, *Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43). The other two passages, 2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7, speak of Paradise as the present abode of the spirits of the redeemed. It is the name given by the Lord to that state, in which, for a season, they abide with Him, far from the toils of earthly life, sharing His joys as now *hid with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:3). Having been welcomed where He is, they enjoy the secret and unspeakable delights of the presence of their Lord. That condition will continue until He comes again, and takes us to heaven proper to be with Him and like Him, for evermore.

### **What about Hell?**

Let me say again, I am no scholar of the original words used in the Bible. However, like *paradise*, I have learned to trust the many scholars who have determined that any study of the use of the word Hell is dependent on the use of three special words.

#### **1. The Old Testament Hebrew word Sheol.**

Old Testament men of faith understood that after death they would pass to a place of rest from their labour, a place of silence and darkness (Genesis 37:35). This abode of departed spirits was known by the Old Testament Hebrew word *sheol*, usually translated *hell*. It is described as composed of two separate compartments; an upper *sheol* in which the souls of the righteous were

peacefully at rest, and a lower *sheol* in which the anger of God burned against the unrighteous (Deuteronomy 32:22). The word refers to *the unseen, invisible world*. In no case is it used for the burial site for the body, as we would say, the grave, but always for the soul.

## **2. The New Testament Greek word Hades (equivalent to *sheol* in the Old Testament)**

The New Testament Greek word *hades* is generally translated *hell* in the KJV. The references to death and *hades* together in such passages as Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13 – 14 connect the body with death, and the soul with *hades*.

At the final resurrection, death will deliver up the bodies, and *hades* the souls of the dead, for judgment (Revelation 20:13). Thus, both death and *hades* will become empty; no descendant of Adam, either saved or lost, will be found there, eventually. In the eternal state there will be no more separation of soul and body. The resurrected and changed saved will be in eternal glory (1 Peter 5:10). The lost will be in Gehenna (Mark 9:43/44) – called the lake of fire in Revelation 20:14.

In the Lord's own description of it in Luke 16:19 – 31, *Hades*, like its Old Testament equivalent *Sheol*, consisted of two compartments, with *a great gulf fixed* between them. Two men in the disembodied state, after death and before resurrection, one in conscious bliss *comforted*, the other in conscious awe *tormented*. The figurative language used need produce no difficulty. The figures used express facts. Abraham's bosom to a Jew would express the place of highest privilege and honour, and a spirit able to *remember, pray, be tormented* apart from the body. Neither the saved nor the lost will have yet come to the final re-embodied state. The bliss of the one, and the woe of the other, mean that both have already, as disembodied spirits, entered upon the conscious and actual experiences here described in the words *comforted* and *tormented*.

## **3. The New Testament Greek word Gehenna**

In contrast, the other word used by the Lord Jesus for hell was the New Testament Greek word *Gehenna*, never previously used in Scripture. His illustration referred to a gorge west and south west of Jerusalem, the Valley of Hinnom, where, in His time on earth, the filth and rubbish of the city was burned. Receiving fresh supplies almost every day, the fire never went out. The Lord used this as an illustration of a place of eternal punishment *prepared for the devil and his angels* (Matthew 25:41).

The Lord Jesus used various images to describe hell. He used the images of unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12), outer darkness ... weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12), and everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46), to demonstrate that hell is a place of continual, eternal torment. These scriptures confirm that in the eternal state there will be a spiritual locality where evil shall be confined (Revelation 21:8). This is the biblical teaching on hell. Those who try to dilute it are only diverting people from the reality of the judgment of God. Hell is real. Everyone who does not submit to the gospel of Christ will go there.

## **Conclusion**

The meaning of the words we have looked at make the Gospel plain:

1. There is, indeed, a heaven to be gained and a hell to be avoided (Matt. 6:20; 25:41; Mk. 9:47; Lk. 16: 19 – 31; Heb. 9:24; Rev. 20:13).
2. There is a day of judgment ahead for each of us as individuals (Heb. 9:27).
3. If any of us could have satisfied the righteous judgment of a Holy God by anything we could do, say or even think, there would have been no need for God to send His Son into the world, that we might be saved by the value to God of the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary (Lk 1:, Heb. 9:28).

4. There is no doubt that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and ... He was buried and ... rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3 – 4).
5. The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7).
6. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life (John 3:36).
7. He that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him (John 3:36).
8. Time is short. Jesus is coming again (John 14:3).
9. The exhortation to the Philippian gaoler is still available to you and me, *Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved.* (Acts 16:30 – 31).

Let me say, Thank you very much for your patience in listening to this Truth for Today talk number T1100, entitled Heaven and Hell, from our series named What does the Bible teach about various things.

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