

# The Journey of the Soul: From Death to Eternity

## A Complete Biblical Teaching Manual

---

### Article

Death is not the end—it's a doorway. But what lies beyond that threshold? Is it a void, a light, a place of silence or of unending awareness? For centuries, people have wrestled with these questions. Thankfully, Scripture gives us more than mystery—it gives us a map. In this journey, we'll explore what the Bible teaches about the afterlife, from the earliest moments in human history to the final chapter in God's redemptive plan.

### **Before Christ: What Happened to the Dead?**

Before Jesus rose from the grave, all who died—both righteous and unrighteous—went to a place the Bible calls *Sheol* in Hebrew or *Hades* in Greek. This realm was believed to be literally beneath the earth and was divided into two distinct compartments. On one side was a place of comfort known as Paradise or Abraham's Bosom, and on the other side was a place of torment.

The righteous—people like Abraham, Moses, and David—went to Paradise. There, they were fully conscious, capable of speech, and comforted in their soul-bodies. This wasn't Heaven, but it wasn't hell either. Meanwhile, the wicked were confined to the torment side of Sheol. Luke 16 gives us a vivid picture: a rich man, now in agony, begs for water and can see Lazarus, the poor beggar he once ignored, resting in peace with Abraham. The rich man could feel pain, thirst, and sorrow, and he remembered his life vividly. In both cases, the dead had a form—one that could see, speak, feel, and remember.

### **The Death of Christ: A Shaking in Two Worlds**

When Jesus died on the cross, the Gospel of Matthew records that the earth shook. Rocks split open. Graves burst. And in the spiritual realm, something far greater was taking place. Scripture tells us that Christ "descended into the lower parts of the earth" (Ephesians 4:9). He also "preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19). This wasn't a sermon offering salvation—it was a declaration of victory.

Christ entered Sheol not as a victim, but as a King. In Paradise, He may have spoken directly to the saints, announcing that the time of waiting was over. In the realm of torment, the proclamation was different: judgment had come, and every knee—even those in the underworld—would bow.

## **Resurrection Power: The Saints Walk Again**

Then, something miraculous happened. After Jesus rose from the dead, many saints who had died were also raised. Matthew 27 tells us that their graves opened and they appeared to many in Jerusalem. These weren't ghosts. These were real people with real bodies—very likely glorified bodies, similar to the one Jesus now had.

This event wasn't random. It was a divine signal: death was defeated, and resurrection life had begun. These saints weren't brought back to die again like Lazarus had been. Instead, they were lifted into the new reality Jesus had inaugurated. Their resurrection served as both proof and prophecy—proof that Christ had overcome the grave, and prophecy of what all believers will one day experience.

## **Forty Days of Glory**

For forty days after His resurrection, Jesus remained on Earth. But He wasn't the same. His body bore the marks of crucifixion, yet He could walk through walls, vanish from sight, and ascend into Heaven. He could be touched, He could eat, and He could speak with warmth and wisdom.

This was a glorified body: immortal, incorruptible, and beautiful. The Gospels describe these moments with awe. He appeared to Mary in the garden. He walked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He met with over 500 people at once. And yet, when John later saw Jesus in the Book of Revelation, the familiar, wounded Savior had become something even greater—His eyes were like fire, His voice like rushing waters. The marks may no longer have been visible. What was once needed for belief had been gloriously surpassed by what was now revealed in full.

## **Paradise Relocated: A Heavenly Ascent**

Scripture tells us that when Jesus ascended to Heaven, He led “captivity captive” (Ephesians 4:8). This means that He didn't ascend alone. All the righteous who had died before His resurrection—those resting in Abraham's Bosom—went with Him. Paradise was moved. No longer beneath, it now resides above, in the presence of God (2 Corinthians 12:2–4).

Sheol's waiting room for the faithful was emptied. From that point forward, those who died in Christ would go straight to be with Him—not to wait in the earth, but to dwell in light and glory.

## Today: What Happens When We Die?

Now, when a believer dies, the soul immediately enters the presence of Christ. Paul says it clearly: to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). There's no delay. No waiting room. Just glorious reunion with the Savior.

These souls are still conscious. Still personal. They can worship, rejoice, and wait for the resurrection to come. Their glorified bodies are not yet received, but their identities are fully intact.

On the other hand, unbelievers still go to the torment side of Hades. Like the rich man in Luke 16, they remain aware, remorseful, and uncomfortable. This is not their final destination, but it is a real place of pain, fully known and fully experienced.

## What's Still to Come

The next great event is the resurrection. For believers, this will happen at Christ's return. The dead in Christ will rise first, receiving glorified, incorruptible bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). These bodies will be like His: full of power, no longer subject to aging, weakness, or death.

Then comes the **Judgment Seat of Christ**. This is not a judgment of condemnation, but a review of every believer's works. Rewards will be given. Crowns will be placed. And some will shine more brightly than others—not because they were better, but because they were faithful.

Unbelievers will be resurrected after the millennial reign of Christ. They will appear at the **Great White Throne Judgment** (Revelation 20:11–15). Every deed will be judged. Their names will not be found in the Book of Life. And then comes the final sentence.

## The Final Separation: Death Dies

The last enemy to be destroyed is death itself. Revelation tells us that both death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. No longer a place of waiting, Hades will be no more. What remains for the wicked is eternal separation from God in a place of conscious punishment.

The New Beginning: Eternal Glory

But for the righteous—those who belong to Christ—a new world is coming. A new Heaven. A new Earth. No more tears. No more night. No more death.

Here, glorified believers will walk with God. They will eat, celebrate, create, worship, and rule. Their joy will never end, and their bodies will never fail. This is not a clouded spirit realm—it is real, physical, eternal life.

## **Final Thoughts**

The journey of the soul is not just a theology—it's a story. One written by a faithful God, offered to every human being. From the first grave to the last throne, God has been telling us that death is not the final word. Jesus is.

Whether you're new to these truths or rediscovering them afresh, let this truth sink in: The grave is not the end. It's the doorway to eternity. Choose the path that leads to life.

## I. Death and the Afterlife Before Christ's Resurrection

### 1. Sheol / Hades – The Realm of the Dead

In both the Old and New Testaments, the place of the dead was called:

- **Hebrew:** *Sheol* (שְׁאוֹל)
- **Greek:** *Hades* (ᾍδης)

This realm was **beneath the earth** (Isaiah 14:9, Numbers 16:30–33) and divided into **two compartments**:

#### A. Paradise (Abraham's Bosom) — For the Righteous Dead

**Scripture:** Luke 16:22; 23:43

- Occupied by righteous individuals: Abraham, Lazarus, Moses, David, etc.
- It was a place of **comfort, rest, and relational awareness**.
- Souls there retained **memory, emotion, personality, and sensory experience** (Luke 16:25).

Nature of Their Existence:

- Not yet resurrected, but in **soul-body form**—conscious, speaking, seeing, and feeling.

## B. Torment (Hades) — For the Unrighteous Dead

**Scripture:** Luke 16:23–24

- The rich man was in **flame, thirst, and torment**.
- He had **eyes**, a **tongue**, and **desire**, yet no hope of relief.
- He could see Paradise but was separated by a “great gulf” (Luke 16:26).

Nature of Their Existence:

- Like the righteous, the wicked retained a **personal, sensible identity**.
- Their soul-bodies could experience **regret, agony, recognition**, and **relational memory**.

## II. Jesus’ Death and Descent into Sheol

### 1. The Moment of Death and the Earthquake

**Scripture:** Matthew 27:50–51

- Jesus died and the earth **shook violently**.
- Veil torn, rocks split, graves opened.
- This cosmic quake signified the **breaking of death’s grip** and **Jesus’ descent into the underworld**.

### 2. Christ’s Descent into Sheol

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:9; 1 Peter 3:19

- Jesus descended into “the lower parts of the earth” (Sheol/Hades).
- He **proclaimed victory** to the “spirits in prison”—likely the wicked and fallen angels (1 Peter 3:19–20).
- This was not a gospel invitation, but a **triumphal announcement**: *“It is finished.”*

### 3. Earthquake as a Cosmic Response

The earthquake at His death may reflect the **supernatural shockwave** of Jesus entering Sheol in power—declaring the end of captivity and beginning the exodus of the righteous.

### III. Christ's Resurrection and the Raised Saints

#### 1. Resurrection of the Saints

**Scripture:** Matthew 27:52–53

- Many **righteous saints** rose after Jesus and appeared in Jerusalem.
- These weren't resuscitations like Lazarus—they were **resurrections**.
- No mention of re-death; they likely had **glorified, incorruptible bodies** (1 Corinthians 15:42–44).

#### 2. Jesus' Glorified Body

**Scripture:** Luke 24:39–43; John 20:27; Acts 1:3

- Jesus' body was **physical** but **glorified**:
  - He could eat and be touched.
  - He could appear/disappear.
  - He retained **wounds**, but they did not impair Him—likely retained as **proof**, not necessity.
- **No decay** was present (Psalm 16:10).

In **Revelation 1**, Jesus is revealed without mention of wounds—glorified beyond recognition from earthly form.

### IV. Jesus' Ascension and the Relocation of Paradise

**Scripture:** Acts 1:9–11; Ephesians 4:8

- Jesus ascended to Heaven and “**led captivity captive**”.
- **Paradise** was relocated **from Sheol to Heaven** (2 Corinthians 12:2–4).
- All the righteous dead (Abraham, David, etc.) were brought into **God's presence**.

## V. The Present State of the Dead

### 1. Believers Now

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23

- Upon death, believers go immediately to be with Christ.
- They await resurrection in conscious, joyful soul-body form.
- No Sheol—direct access to God's presence.

### 2. Unbelievers Now

**Scripture:** Luke 16:23; Revelation 20:13

- Still go to Hades, in conscious torment.
- They await resurrection for **judgment** at the **Great White Throne**.
- Experience **regret, isolation, pain**, and awareness of truth rejected.

## VI. The Final Resurrection and Judgments

### 1. Resurrection of Believers (First Resurrection)

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; 1 Corinthians 15:51–53

- Believers receive glorified, incorruptible bodies.
- Reunion with Christ in the air at the **Rapture** or **Second Coming**.
- These bodies are:
  - Immortal
  - Glorious
  - Spirit-empowered (1 Corinthians 15:44)

### 2. Judgment Seat of Christ

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:10

- Believers judged **for reward**, not condemnation.
- Works examined; crowns and roles in eternity assigned.



### 3. Resurrection of the Unbelievers (Second Resurrection)

**Scripture:** Revelation 20:11–15

- All unsaved dead are raised in **soul-bodies**, possibly renewed for **judgment**.
- Stand before the **Great White Throne**.
- Books are opened—deeds judged.
- All not found in the Book of Life are **cast into the lake of fire**.

## VII. The Fate of the Unbelieving Dead

### 1. Hades and Death Cast into the Lake of Fire

**Scripture:** Revelation 20:14–15

- Hades is emptied, then destroyed.
- This is the **Second Death**—eternal separation from God.
- Conscious, permanent, tormenting.

“These shall go away into everlasting punishment...” (Matthew 25:46)

## VIII. The Eternal Home of the Righteous

**Scripture:** Revelation 21–22

- A New Heaven and New Earth.
- No death, sorrow, pain, or sin.
- God dwells with man.
- Glorified believers live in **incorruptible bodies** with **everlasting joy**.

## IX. Summary Chart of the Afterlife Journey

Stage	Believers	Unbelievers
After Death (Before Christ)	Paradise (Abraham's Bosom)	Torment in Hades
After Christ's Death	Christ descends, proclaims victory	Hear judgment proclaimed
After Resurrection	Raised in glorified bodies	Remain in Hades
Present (Now)	Souls with Christ	Souls in Hades
At Second Coming	Receive glorified bodies	Await second resurrection
Final Judgment	Judgment Seat of Christ (rewards)	Great White Throne Judgment (condemnation)
Eternity	New Heaven and Earth with God	Lake of Fire