

# *Dust To Dust (I): The Meaning of Death*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

This is the first in a series of lessons on the uncomfortable, but unavoidable subject of death. Every book in the Bible is about life and death in some way, whether it is spiritual, physical, or more likely, a combination of both. Unless the return of Christ interferes, everyone here from the youngest to the oldest is destined to live a while longer and then to die. Our existence does not end there, however; it is only beginning really. Eternity follows and eternity is based in the use of the life we now possess, making it vitally important that we understand the purpose of life and the force of death. This first lesson in the series seeks to discover what is the meaning of death and what are its origins and purposes.

## **Discussion**

### **I. The Origin of Life and Death**

#### **A. Atheism**

1. science is the methodical observation of entities and events, as when astronomers study the skies and physicians examine the human body, but no one can observe the originating moment of the universe because it occurred so long ago
2. modern scientists may offer guesses that deny a place for deity, but their work is not truly science because their prejudices reject the overwhelming evidence for intelligent design in the cosmos and creation
3. the origin of life is unknown to scientists, but the word of God gives its details to the faithful

#### **B. The Genesis of Life and Death**

1. along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and two others that no longer exist, God crowned the creation of the universe and the Earth by forming man and putting him in charge of the planet (Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17)
2. Adam was not created as a baby, but as a mature person capable of tending to his own needs, which included eating and two notable fruit trees grew in Eden
  - a. the tree of life produced fruit capable of sustaining the life of mortal man beyond his natural years and Adam was encouraged to eat from it because his existence in Eden was open-ended
  - b. the tree of knowledge of good and evil produced fruit that would open human eyes to the other side of free will, the side of evil that inevitably leads to disaster
3. in the midst of all this life—green plants, young animals, a healthy mist watering it all—comes the first mention of the possibility of death
  - a. the tree of knowledge of good and evil produced fruit that would bring on death, and the devilish serpent, a spirit being unlike Adam and Eve, knew that (Genesis 3:1-7)
  - b. when they ate, they had occasion to experience shame for the first time and hid themselves from their creator
  - c. after punishing them and their tempter, God blessed Adam and Eve by suspending their access to the tree of life, compelling them to live and die without it (Genesis 3:22-24)
    1. the planet had been marred and it was no longer suitable for Adam and Eve to dwell in permanently, but if they persisted in Eden, eating from the tree of life, they would spend eternity in the midst of temptation
    2. God mercifully limited their lives on Earth to a shorter period and set in motion a scheme to conquer the specter of death that they had empowered with their sin

#### **C. Spiritual and Physical Death**

1. death is both a physical and spiritual matter, but while all must end their physical lives, spiritual life should only be enhanced afterward unless spiritual death should be one's sentence (Hebrews 9:24-28)
  - a. divine judgment follows physical death, and for those under the grace of God, the blood of Christ allows them to be justified in his court and rewarded with eternal life rather than eternal torment, the second death
  - b. the inevitability of physical death and divine judgment makes the promise of that tree of life all the more vital, then, for it has been transplanted into heaven where the redeemed will subsist on its life-giving fruit (Revelation 22:1-5)

2. physical death is a consequence of our first parents' sin, a curse visited upon every succeeding generation as a result of the introduction of iniquity into an original paradise; the presence of disease, crime, cruelty and disaster can all be traced to Eve's fateful decision to eat the wrong fruit

3. for that reason, the world is overrun with temptation, so that when we each fall into it, we become personally responsible for our transgressions as much as Adam and Eve were (Romans 5:12-19)

a. Adam's disobedience only made yours possible; your own disobedience when you matured into accountability before God brought you under condemnation (Romans 3:23)

b. while the consequences of Adam's sin persist, it does not follow that the actual, personal guilt for those sins clings to your personally innocent conscience (Ezekiel 18:19-20)

c. you are innocent of Adam's sin, but guilty of your own and those sins promise only the wage of death (cf. Romans 6:23)

## II. Hopelessness of Death

### A. The Cycle of Life

1. only after the introduction of sin and death does the purpose of life become both clear and urgent

a. to serve God with vigor (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, 13-14)

b. to prepare for the judgment of God to come after we expire (Second Corinthians 5:9-11)

2. death brings to a close our own period of service and preparation, our opportunity at life on Earth in the midst of both blessing and temptation

a. in spite of the fact that we frequent fountains of youth like plastic surgery and medical advancements that give first the illusion of earthly immortality and then the prolonging of our tenure here, death remains inevitable for every creature that draws a breath

b. and in spite of its pain and sadness and loss, physical death is preferable to dwelling forever in a corrupted environment like this Earth where pain, sadness and loss are never ending

3. in his understandable self-pity, Job sees that benefit to death in the cycle of life (Job 3:11-19)

### B. Death Is Not The End

1. physical death is the end of life on Earth, but not of the immortal spirit that dwells in this tabernacle of flesh

a. the Hebrews of the Old Testament had a very limited understanding of the afterlife, for God was early in the process of revealing the scheme of spiritual salvation

b. Job called death "the way of no return" (16:22), "the house appointed for all living" (30:23)

c. Solomon said, "No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it" (Ecclesiastes 8:8).

2. physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body (cf. James 2:26); the fleshly body is subjected to decay while the spirit continues

a. death is the ultimate equalizer, for both the rich men and the Lazaruses of the world must die (cf. Luke 16:19-31, Job 21:22-26)

b. the Hebrews called the immediate fate of the soul upon physical death "Sheol," a shadowy place where both righteous and unrighteous dead waited (cf. Second Samuel. 22:6, Isaiah 14:9-15, Job 17:1-16)

c. beyond Sheol, the Hebrews possessed only a little knowledge and even less hope (Job 7:6-10)

## Conclusion

How much hope do we possess beyond the grave? In our next lesson, we will examine some Bible obituaries for clues.

# *Dust To Dust (2): Houses of Mourning*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

Understanding that life and death are both spiritual and physical matters, we turn our attention in this lesson to certain Bible obituaries that reveal much about the state of men facing their own earthly mortality and spiritual appointment at God's judgment seat. Among this list, however, is the Man, Jesus Christ, whose death and subsequent resurrection gives hope to all those who have faith in him. Ecclesiastes 7:2 says that it is "Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart." Today, we go to houses of mourning.

## **Discussion**

### **I. Some Obituaries**

#### **A. Patriarchs**

1. Jacob capped a memorable life by gathering his sons, the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel, to bless them as his death approached (Genesis 49:28-33)
  - a. in the throes of death, Jacob remained interested in the fate of his children and their offspring, but also loyal to those who had gone before him, his grandparents, parents and wife
  - b. he seems to have no ideas about a spiritual eternity, but is solely concerned with being gathered to his people in the tomb
2. his son, Joseph, lived also to be a grandfather, but then went the way of all living things (Genesis 50:22-26)
  - a. like his father, Joseph was concerned that he not be buried in Egypt, but in the land of promise; he was thoroughly convinced that God had acted in his life and would fulfill his compact with Abraham
  - b. he was mummified and his coffin was carried with the pilgrims when they left Egypt centuries later and was finally buried in Canaan (cf. Joshua 24:32)

#### **B. Pilgrims**

1. the death of Moses is second only to the death of Jesus Christ in terms of the sense of loss among his followers; Moses was larger than life and the embodiment of God's direction in Israel
  - a. sadly, his death was marred by one of the few errors he committed (Deuteronomy 34:1-12)
  - b. physically, Moses was permitted to stand on the precipice of the Promised Land and to view what he would never obtain; he worked his entire life toward one goal, and because of one sin, he fell one foot short of it
  - c. if ever a system of mercy and justification for the sinner were desirable, it would be then
2. his successor, Joshua, was just as faithful, if not as legendary, as Moses, but he did not escape death either (Joshua 23:14-16, 24:14-15)
  - a. no greater challenge or commitment could be made by a man of Joshua's stature: "Choose."
  - b. if Joshua were a dallier with idols like many of Israel's kings, he could not make this challenge without being a hypocrite, but Joshua lived his entire life for the Lord
  - c. the message is powerful: You must choose today whom you will serve.

#### **C. Monarchs**

1. King Saul began his reign with great promise and humility, but fell into jealousy and murder before dying of his own pride (First Samuel 31:1-6)
  - a. his request for assisted suicide was rebuffed and so he terminated his own life as he had lived it, shamefully and sinfully
  - b. if it belongs to God to set the limits of man's life, man has no right to steal that prerogative and end his life when he sees fit
2. King David followed him, perhaps third in stature among Hebrew worthies, but David also grew old and died (1 Kings 2:1-11)
  - a. David reminds his son of the conditional nature of God's promises to his people, lays upon Solomon obligations that David had left outstanding and then he rested with his fathers in the soil
  - b. we have all seen pictures of Saddam Hussein following his arrest—the once proud man reduced to dirty rags and starvation

c. imagine, King David, off his throne and reduced to a lifeless, pallid figure—that is the way of all the Earth, even kings and corporate leaders

3. King Hezekiah bargained for 15 more years when his death neared (Isaiah 38:1-8)

#### D. Disciples

1. John the immerser was beheaded for his convictions about the will of God (Matthew 14:1-12)

2. Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied to the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 5:1-11)

3. Stephen died because he told the truth and refused to play political correctness (Acts 7:51-60)

#### E. Apostles

1. Peter's death is not detailed, but his preparation for it is (Second Peter 1:10-15)

2. the apostle Paul lived an exciting, productive, dangerous life in service of Christ, but finally, his tenure on Earth came to an end (Second Timothy 4:6-8)

## II. The House of Mourning (Ecclesiastes 7:1-4)

### A. It Teaches

1. most of the people whose obituaries we just read died in old age, but a few were snatched from life prematurely by our standards

a. the patriarchs and kings lived to be grandparents, but Stephen and John died martyrs for a cause, long before their mothers would have anticipated their demise

b. still others in the Bible died without the benefit of much life at all, as infants or children

2. the house of mourning we have entered today confronts us with the reality of our own mortality, that we have only a limited time to dwell on Earth in service and preparation

3. take it to heart, for you know not how much more time you have (Luke 12:13-21)

a. in what does your life consist today, and do not answer too hastily, but consider where your focus is

b. in death, each of these characters was consumed with spiritual things, with finding some meaning beyond their own deaths; don't you wait until then to find meaning for your life

### B. Is Temporary

1. we have not overlooked the most horrible scene of death of all; we must go to the house of mourning owned by Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 23:44-46a)

2. we have visited 12 houses of mourning today prior to taking note of the death of Jesus Christ, for he introduces hope into each of them, since his death was not at all permanent (First Corinthians 15:20-22, 50-58)

## Conclusion

Faith is the victory that overcomes the world and Christ's resurrection has defeated the power of death that makes the house of mourning a desolate place. In the house of the Christian, the sunny rays of hope always break through the gloom of loss, promising a better tomorrow beyond the clouds.

# *Dust To Dust (3): The Brevity of Life*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

While at the house of mourning, we are so often reminded of the brevity of life. Perhaps that is the central theme in what man is to take to heart while surrounded by the specter of someone else's death. Compared to eternity, life on Earth is immeasurably brief and our investment of time and energy is better made on something that endures. Today, we emphasize the brevity of life to remind us that time is precious and not to be wasted.

## **Discussion**

### **I. Life is Short**

#### **A. Life is A Breath (Job 7:1-7a)**

1. once Job realized that God was not going to terminate his life to end his awesome suffering, he began to wonder even more philosophically about the purpose and brevity of life
2. he compares the quickness of his experience to the swift movements of the weaver's shuttle and all his days to one mere breath
  - a. surely we can all identify with Job's observation, for school years and wedding anniversaries all seem to pass by us so quickly; watching our children grow up seems to go too quickly and we feel almost instantly old
  - b. "Where did the time go?" we are heard to wonder and we mean it
3. while we are at the house of mourning—comforting the loved ones of the dearly departed or facing some national tragedy like a terrorist attack, war or space disaster—we suddenly and temporarily identify with the brevity of life and often vow to stop wasting time, but we can't help but fall back into bad habits when the shock wears off

#### **B. Every Man Is a Vapor**

1. in the thirty-ninth psalm, David begins by recounting a certain vow of silence he had taken because he had recognized the power of the tongue in doing evil (Psalm 39:1-6)
  - a. he held his peace until his spirit was stirred up within him over the issue of life's brevity—he asked to know the measure of his days and how many he had left
  - b. when he comments that "Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor" he recognizes that even the newborn that will live to be 80 years old is but a wisp in the wind before an eternal God
  - c. but his deepest indictment of man is that he busies himself in vain, heaping up treasure on Earth only to leave it all behind when the shadow of death falls
2. if life is only about labor and sorrow, it is a pitiful existence (Psalm 90:10-12)
  - a. David was only echoing the sentiments of the greatest man who ever lived, for the ninetieth psalm belongs to Moses, who likewise pleaded with God to teach man to number his days so that he could gain a heart of wisdom
  - b. instead of busying himself in vain, he should make the most of his life, but how?
3. life's brevity is a humbling realization (Psalm 144:3-4)
  - a. if God takes notice of us in spite of our quick expiration date, there must be some reason
  - b. perhaps life has a greater purpose than just procreation, sweaty labor and the roller coaster of happiness and sorrow

### **II. Purpose**

#### **A. The Answer (First Peter 1:24-25)**

1. Jeremiah the young weeping prophet said, "Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps."
  - a. the solution to life's shortness is not in the minds of scientists or the books of psychologists or the vaults of bankers or the bosoms of harlots; the answer is in the enduring word of the Lord
  - b. Paul wrote, "When you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4)
2. although Moses and David and Solomon lived thousands of years ago, what you must acknowledge right now is that the tendency of man to define success in life materially has not changed one bit

a. we continue to determine our happiness in terms of paychecks and tax brackets and talk of giving our kids a better life than we had almost always means providing them more things and disposable currency

b. while most will recognize these facts, few will ever try to change them!

3. relative to the entire world, most all of us are rich men in our pursuits (James 1:9-11)

a. our drive to make life meaningless subjects us to all manner of temptation to cheat and waste time (First Timothy 6:6-10)

b. we are woefully discontented because we are wasting our brief lives on the carnal while giving only passing notice to the spiritual (Philippians 4:6-7, 12-13)

c. how many of us can honestly say that we are free of anxiety, filled with contentment and certain that the peace of God guards our hearts?

#### B. The Meaning of Life

1. people climb mountains and spend decades of ivory towers of academia searching for the meaning of life, having forgotten that it is provided in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

a. fear God and keep his commandments because God created us and will judge how we have used our time on Earth, to serve him or self

b. "He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14) and offers his mercy and grace to all who believe and obey the gospel, but in the end, even the knees of the reluctant and those who refuse his pity will bow before his judgment seat

2. Jesus said, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my father and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21)

3. fearing God and keeping his commandments is your Job One (Matthew 7:24-27)

#### C. Redeem The Time

1. stop wasting time! (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

2. do not delay serving God so that you can fill your youth with indiscretion and leave God with your feeble dotage (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8)

3. procrastination is keeping you unsaved and unfruitful (James 4:13-17)

4. life just is not sufficiently long to lend so much of it to the devil (Ephesians 5:8-18)

### III. Daily Renewal

#### A. Better Perspective (Second Corinthians 4:16-18)

1. before you leave the house of mourning, study how your perspective on life has changed

2. bad things seem less onerous and a heavenly hope seems more valuable

3. strive never to lose that perfected perspective: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

#### B. Be Prepared (Second Corinthians 5:1-7)

1. making room in your heart and life for the Spirit is key to cementing that changed perspective - giving priority to the Lord and fulfilling your purpose in the life God gave you and Jesus bought back for you

2. then you can live hopefully and confidently that this brief life will be followed by an eternal one

### Conclusion

Life is too short to resist the gospel invitation again today.

# *Dust To Dust (4): Hades*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

A certain hopelessness pervades many Old Testament writings as the scheme of salvation was early in the process of revelation and men had very limited knowledge about a life after this one. It is not at all unusual to hear sage men like Solomon and Job remark about the vanity of their existence in the midst of hardship, temptation and joy, which all seemed to be so temporary and meaningless because of the constant specter of death. Slowly, however, hints appear that God has more in mind than the annihilation of every individual life, that the souls in Sheol have a future, and that future is in the Messiah. In this fourth installment in our series, we will look at the afterlife as it exists from the point of death until the day that every soul is resurrected to judgment.

## **Discussion**

### **I. The Specter of Death**

#### **A. Dead All Over**

1. man naturally desires his life to have meaning, not just to himself, but also to others, and so he prepares a legacy for himself by crafting, conquering, naming and collecting
2. yet, like Solomon, he begins to realize the futility of his efforts, for once he is dead, why should he care what is thought of him on Earth, even as others take control of his feeble legacy and alter it to suit themselves (Ecclesiastes 2:15-23)
3. later, he well summarized the hopeless feeling that infects every atheist today who rejects the reality of God, judgment and eternity; for Solomon the believer, it was the result of his limited knowledge about the scheme of redemption that led him to such hopelessness (Ecclesiastes 9:3-9)
  - a. Solomon was only able to see circumstances on a physical plane and his comments about the ignorant dead reveal that
4. then there is Job (Job 13:28-14:12)
  - a. Job openly desired to die because his life was so painful in the midst of Satan's assaults against him, but still he despised the fact that death would apparently end his existence
  - b. still, Job seems to recognize the certainty of being called again by God to face judgment, but without the grace that comes through Christ, even that was painful for him to anticipate
5. for such Hebrews, all that existed in their understanding was Sheol, a shadowy, dusty place located somewhere beneath the Earth where all the dead, righteous and unrighteous alike, existed and waited
  - a. "the sorrows of Sheol" (Second Samuel 22:6) punished the wicked and stifled the good (cf. Isaiah 14:9-15)

#### **B. Glimmers of Hope**

1. there are, however, some glimmers of hope, in the Old Testament about life after death; for instance, Hannah knew that, "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up" (First Samuel 2:6)
2. a certain woman of Tekoa conveys an interesting insight as well (Second Samuel 14:14)
3. Isaiah foresaw the glorious results of the age of the Messiah (Isaiah 25:6-9)
4. David prophesied about the possibility of resurrection but probably never understood exactly what he was describing (Psalm 68:19-20)
5. David even went so far as to predict the resurrection of God's Holy One from out of Sheol (Psalm 16:9-11)

#### **C. Sheol**

1. throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrews understand that people live a while and then die and go to Sheol, a term sometimes used to describe their physical graves where the bodies decay and at times used to denote the shadowy place where their souls waited indefinitely
2. when convinced of God's goodness and kindness, some of them were curious about the possibility of a new life after death, but the mystery surrounding death and its apparent hopelessness caused them all to fear death terribly

3. in the Greek language, the word *hades* answers to the Hebrew Sheol, having the same basic connotations

## II. Jesus Fills In The Blanks

### A. Jesus Recognized the Reality of Hades

1. in the midst of a sermon on making wise use of money, Jesus stops to illustrate his point eternally with the story of the rich man and Lazarus

a. some contend that his teaching is a parable and it well may be, but that makes no difference, because even a parable contains only truths and no lies; either this account actually happened or it could have, like certain parables

b. in this passage, Jesus recognizes a home for the dead that is neither Heaven nor Hell

2. Jesus provides the clearest description ever of Sheol, or Hades (Luke 16:19-31)

a. at the point of death, an immediate assessment is made of an individual's life and even as his body is buried, his spirit is transported into Hades, where there are two compartments, one called "Abraham's bosom" and the other defined by torments

b. the compartments are near enough that the wicked can see through their torment into Abraham's bosom, but are separated by a great fixed gulf that prevents passage from one side to the other

c. Abraham explains that one's Haden assignment is based on the character of his earthly life

d. so awful was his torment that the rich man suddenly became spiritually aware and asked that a messenger be sent to his family, but Abraham responded that if men on Earth will not hear the will of God in the way it appears, neither would they hear a messenger from beyond the grave

3. Jesus even hinted that the gates of Hades would play a role in the establishment of his royal church (Matthew 16:13-19)

a. think of the gates of Hades like the gates at the cemetery and imagine that the dead had risen and desired to walk away, but the gates were locked and would not swing open

b. in some way, the gates of Hades are going to get between Jesus and his coronation

c. as he went to the cross and certain death, Jesus foresaw his own journey into Hades (Luke 23:39-43)

### B. The Holy Spirit Recognized the Reality of Hades

1. this teaching of Christ is completely supported by the later inspired writing of the apostle Peter (Second Peter 2:4, 9)

a. between death and resurrection, the spirits of the dead are reserved for judgment, having already been assessed as either godly or unjust

b. they are reserved for the day of judgment, when God will pronounce their guilt or justification and reward or condemn them permanently

c. during this reservation period in Hades, there is absolutely no possibility of reforming or changing one's fate, which was determined by his conduct on Earth; Hades is not purgatory

2. Jesus himself died on the cross and his body went into a new tomb while his divine spirit separated from it and entered shadowy Sheol, but the gates of Hades could not hold him (Acts 2:22-32)

a. and when he walked out of Hades, he conquered death and made it possible that every lingering soul there and all who would come might be resurrected back to life and live forever

b. Jesus "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (Second Timothy 1:10) and became the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (cf. First Corinthians 15:20)

### C. Finally, Answers and Hope

1. all that mystery, curiosity and hopelessness that defined the Old Testament attitude about death evaporates the moment that Christ's spirit reoccupies the body in the tomb (First Corinthians 15:3-8)

2. there is not faith without confidence in the resurrected Jesus (First Corinthians 15:12-20)

3. the paralyzing fear of death is replaced with a resolute hope about its outcome (Hebrews 2:14-16)

## Conclusion

In the final lesson in this series next time, we will consider what will happen when Judgment arrives and the tombs are opened and emptied.

# *Dust To Dust (5): Heaven or Hell*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

This final lesson in our series on death finds us at the time when Jesus finally returns in the clouds and commences the final acts of the Christian age before eternity becomes man's only reality. Atheism is abolished and every knee bows before the Son of God as books of life and lives are opened for examination.

## **Discussion**

### **I. Resurrection Day**

#### **A. Second Coming**

1. when the resurrected Jesus ascended into Heaven, he sat down at the right hand of God to begin his reign over the kingdom of the redeemed (cf. Acts 2:29-33, Colossians 1:13)
2. at the same time, back on Earth, his disciples were assured that this was not the end (Acts 1:9-11)
  - a. building on a foundation of his many parables, the inspired writers of the New Testament begin sketching out the anticipation of the great return of Jesus Christ, not to try again to reign in Jerusalem—for that was never his plan—but to commence the judgment and spirit the redeemed back to Heaven with him (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
  - b. at his reappearing, the Lord will judge the living and the dead (cf. Second Timothy 4:1); “To those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28)
  - c. Jesus had gone to his father's house where there were many mansions to prepare a place for the redeemed (cf. John 14:1-6)
3. contrary to the claims of many false prophets in the last 150 years, no one can determine from the Bible or any other source when Jesus will return (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)
4. the church will be finished with the Lord's Supper, taken to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again, and will be prepared to be wed to him as his bride and presented to God (cf. Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 19:9)

#### **B. Resurrection of the Dead**

1. when Jesus returns, all the dead will be resurrected to kneel before him in judgment; the population of Hades will return to zero and join the living around the judgment seat
  - a. “And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power” (First Corinthians 6:14)
  - b. “[T]here will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15)
2. the just will depart from Abraham's bosom to receive their reward and the unjust will be transferred from their reservation to their final judgment of punishment

### **II. Judgment Day**

#### **A. All Must Appear**

1. Paul writes that, “we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (Second Corinthians 5:10)
2. Judgment Day is not the day of reformation, for it will be too late then; today is the day to reform (cf. Second Corinthians 6:1-2)
3. the parables of Matthew 25 stress the importance of preparing for Judgment Day because when it arrives, it will be too late to convert
  - a. the parable of the 10 virgins teaches us to “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the son of Man is coming” (1-13)
  - b. the parable of the talents motivates disciples to work while it is day, for night is coming in which no one can work; the diligent disciple will be told on Judgment Day, “Well done, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your lord” while the apathetic disciple will be cast into outer darkness to wail and gnash his teeth (cf. 14-30)
  - c. in that day, it will be as if Jesus were separating sheep and goats as he distinguishes his holy nation from the unwashed world at large (cf. 31-46)

## B. Vindication of the Disciples

1. Christians, who suffered persecution and temptation for the entire age, will be finally vindicated by their God (Second Thessalonians 1:3-10)

a. yet not only is it the persecutor who is punished, but also all those who did not know God or who did not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ

b. while you are claiming to have faith, but refusing to submit to some New Testament command or another, think carefully about what it means to refuse to obey any facet of the gospel, especially since we know that Jesus is the author of eternal salvation for all who obey him (cf. Hebrews 5:9)

2. still, even some who fancied themselves disciples, but hypocritically so, will be lost on Judgment Day

a. the hypocritical disciple may accomplish many great works but lend his heart back to the devil nonetheless (Matthew 7:21-23)

b. the apathetic may become apostate without even realizing it (Hebrews 2:1-4)

c. forsaking Christ is a fateful decision (Hebrews 10:26-31)

## C. Standard of Judgment

1. the standard of judgment on that day will be the word from God in the era in which the individual lived, whether it be prior to Moses, during the Law of Moses, or during the New Testament period we live in (cf. Romans 4:15, John 12:48, Romans 2:12-16)

2. and because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the judgment of God will be augmented by the power of his blood (Hebrews 9:11-15)

3. judgment is according to works (Revelation 20:11-13)

a. your words (cf. Matthew 12:37), thoughts (cf. Hebrews 4:12) and actions (cf. First Corinthians 3:8) will all be assessed; even your secrets will be known (cf. Romans 2:16)

b. without the application of Christ's blood, every soul would be lost, for "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)

c. because of his grace, the sincerely submissive can be saved and justified in the last court (Romans 2:4-11)

4. the scene is depicted (Revelation 20:11-15)

## III. Eternity

### A. Heaven and Hell

1. the Judge only has two options and they are literally as different as night and day

2. the justified in refurbished resurrection bodies (cf. First Corinthians 15:35-49, 1 John 3:2) will spend eternity in Heaven, described by John who saw it (Revelation 21:1-4, 22:1-5)

3. the lost will spend eternity in Hell, the fiery furnace, place of wailing and gnashing teeth, where the worm dies not and the fire is never quenched

### B. Earth

1. the Earth will be destroyed as testimony to the end of God's patience (Second Peter 3:8-13)

2. there will be no paradise on Earth, for the one hope is Heaven (First Peter 1:3-5)

### C. Motivation

1. the volume of knowledge about eternity is intended to motivate everyone to faith and repentance, so that he fears not those who kill the body, but him who punishes the soul (cf. Matthew 10:28)

2. we must be motivated to make sacrifices and correct our priorities lest we fall from grace or reject it altogether (cf. Mark 9:43, Luke 9:57-62, Hebrews 12:15, 2 Thessalonians 1:1-9)

3. "This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16)

4. as we ponder eternity today, we should be motivated to reverse our drift toward Hell and to start the trek toward Heaven (Matthew 7:13-14)

5. and to put the kingdom of Heaven before all (First Corinthians 15:50-58, Second Peter 1:10-11)

## Conclusion

This is where we are all headed—we have a date with destiny that will lead either to Heaven or Hell.