

**Discussion Starter #1:** What are some popular beliefs people have about what happens after death? Where do people get these ideas?

**Key Passage:** *"It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."* (Hebrews 9:27)

Let's examine some non-biblical ideas that people have about what happens after death:

- **Soul sleep** – This is the belief that after a person dies, his/her soul “sleeps” until the resurrection and final judgment. However, when the Bible describes a person “sleeping” in relation to death (Luke 8:52; 1 Corinthians 15:6), it does not mean literal sleep. Sleeping is just a way to describe death because a dead body appears to be asleep. The moment we die, we face the judgment of God (Hebrews 9:27). For believers, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23). For unbelievers, death means everlasting punishment in hell (Luke 16:22-23).
- **Purgatory** – According to Catholicism, Purgatory is a place that a Christian's soul goes to after death to be cleansed of the sins that had not been fully satisfied during life. However, the Bible is clear that Jesus died to pay the penalty for all of our sins (Romans 5:8; Isaiah 53:5). Jesus suffered for our sins so that we could be delivered from suffering. To say that we must also suffer for our sins or, in some way, to atone for our sins ourselves by cleansing in Purgatory, is to say that Jesus' suffering was insufficient and denies the adequacy of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus (1 John 2:2). The idea that we have to suffer for our sins after death is contrary to everything the Bible says about salvation.
- **Annihilation** – This is the belief that unbelievers will not experience an eternity of suffering in hell but will instead be “extinguished” after death. While there are some passages that seem to argue for annihilationism, a comprehensive look at what the Bible says about the destiny of the wicked reveals the fact that punishment in hell is eternal. Jesus said in Matthew 25:46, *“Then they [the unsaved] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*
- **Reincarnation** – This is the belief in the rebirth of a soul in a new body after death. It is a central tenant within the majority of Indian religious traditions, such as Hinduism, and Jainism and also the New Age movements, along with followers of spiritism. However, reincarnation is unbiblical and must be rejected as false. The concept of reincarnation is completely without foundation in the Bible, which clearly tells us that we die once and then face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus refuted Reincarnation just He refuted Annihilation in Matthew 25:46: *“Then they [the unsaved] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

**Discuss:** Which of the views above do you find easiest to refute? Which is most difficult? ”

## What Does the Bible Say Happens After Death?

### • For the Christian

The Bible tells us that after death believers' souls/spirits are immediately taken to heaven, because their sins are forgiven by having received Christ as Savior (John 3:16, 18, 36). For believers, death is to be "*away from the body and at home with the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23).

Passages such as 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 describe believers being resurrected and given glorified bodies. If believers go to be with Christ immediately after death, what is the purpose of this resurrection? It seems that while the souls/spirits of believers go to be with Christ immediately after death, the physical body remains in the grave "sleeping." At the resurrection of believers, the physical body is resurrected, glorified, and then reunited with the soul/spirit. This reunited and glorified body-soul-spirit will be the possession of believers for eternity in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21-22).

**Discuss:** What are you most looking forward to about heaven?

### • For the Non-Christian

For those who do not receive Jesus Christ as Savior, death means everlasting punishment. However, similar to the destiny of believers, unbelievers also seem to be sent immediately to Hades / Hell, a temporary holding place, to await their final resurrection, judgment, and eternal destiny. Luke 16:22-23 describes a rich man being tormented immediately after death. Revelation 20:11-15 describes all the unbelieving dead being resurrected, judged at the great white throne, and then being cast into the lake of fire. Unbelievers, then, are not sent to the Lake of Fire immediately after death, but rather are in an unpleasant temporary realm of punishment (Luke 16:24).

**Discuss:** What aspect of hell are you most thankful that you will not have to experience as a believer?

A famous physician said that the fear of death is rooted in three things: fear of pain, fear of separation, and fear of the unknown. Since it is a part of Christ's ministry to deliver us from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-18), His life and work strike at these roots. Jesus assures us that there is nothing dreadful about death. He promises us a greater work to do and more permanent relationships in the life beyond. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 he comforts people sorrowing over their dead loved ones by saying in heaven we will be "with them" and "with him"—we have the hope of a future reunion. Jesus met death in hand-to-hand combat and disarmed it. He rendered it powerless to hurt us. Then he came back to life saying, "*Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*" (Revelation 1:17-18).

**Discuss:** In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul writes to Christians regarding death: "*But we do not want you to...grieve as others do who have no hope.*" What does this mean?