

Do you ever wonder what happens when we die?

- Ancient Greeks believed in an underworld, hades, where the shadows of the dead reside.
- Hinduism teaches reincarnation, that the soul of the dead lives on in a different body.
- Many Christians believe that the dead go to heaven or hell immediately after death.
- Other Christians think of death as an unconscious sleep until the resurrection.

All healthy people have an innate desire to live. Death is an unwelcome intruder, imposed upon humanity because of sin. But what is death? How can we find reliable answers about this mysterious realm while we are alive?

Fortunately, *God* knows the answers, and He has not left us in uncertainty about what death is; neither has He left us without hope beyond death. In fact, inattention to what God reveals about this subject may cost us our lives!

Let us see what the Bible says happens ...

BEYOND THIS LIFE

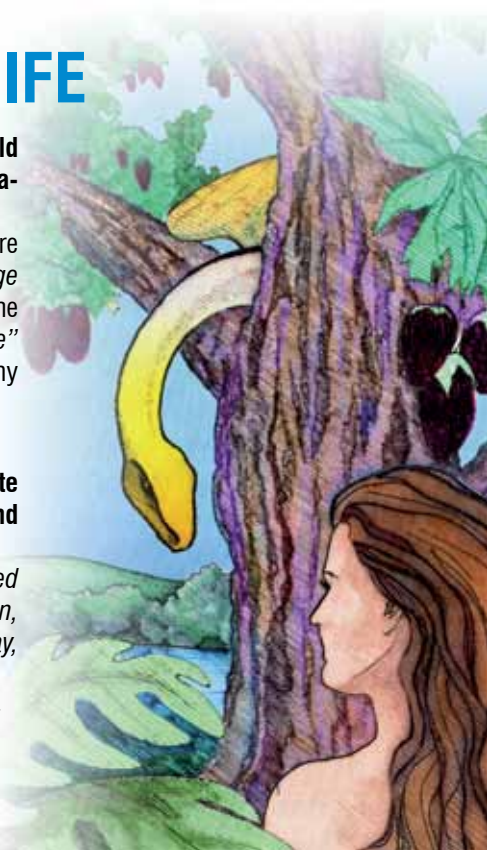
1. After God warned that disobedience would result in death, who emphatically contradicted this?


When Eve reported that she and Adam were not allowed to eat of the “*tree of knowledge of good and evil*” on penalty of death, the serpent¹ argued, “*You will not surely die*” (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-4). Today, too, many people believe this lie.

2. What happened after Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

“*[God] drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way,*

¹ “*That serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan*” (Revelation 12:9).





to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24). There was another tree in the garden of Eden, of which Adam and Eve had been free to eat. It was the tree of life. Because sin causes unimaginable grief, even to the sinner himself, God barred access to this tree to prevent Adam and Eve from becoming immortal sinners.

3. What is death?

The dictionary defines it as the “termination of life.” The dead “*are not*” (Matthew 2:18). To understand this, let’s consider the process God used to create man. “*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*” (Genesis 2:7 KJV). It doesn’t say here that Adam *received* a living soul, but that he *became* one. Although his heart, lungs, and other body parts were complete, Adam was a *dead soul* until God breathed life into his lungs.

4. What happens when a person dies?

“*The dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it*” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The word “spirit” is translated from a Hebrew word that means “breath.” When one stops breathing, the brain waves cease; and the person dies.

5. Does a person’s spirit contain a conscious entity that survives the death of the body?

Man’s “*breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*” “*The dead know nothing.... Their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished.... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going*” (Psalm 146:4 KJV; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10). Note that it doesn’t say here that some kind of consciousness is released. Rather, it tells us that in death not merely the body but also all the thoughts and emotions “perish.”

6. Does the Bible then deny that the righteous go to heaven immediately after death?

The pious king David wrote: “*In the grave, who will give You thanks?*” “*The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence*” (Psalm 6:5; 115:17). The apostle Peter said, “*David did not ascend into the heavens*” (Acts 2:34).

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7. Where, then, do the dead go?

They return to the earth from which they were taken, just as God told Adam and Eve: *“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you **return to the ground**, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and **to dust you shall return**”* (Genesis 3:19). In the KJV, the Hebrew and Greek words for the grave are translated as “hell.”² Both the godly and the ungodly go there when they die.

8. How long do the dead remain in the grave?

Jesus said, *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which **all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation**”* (John 5:28-29). The remains of everyone rest in the grave until they arise in either the first or the second resurrection.

9. How does the Bible describe the state of the dead between the moment they die and the resurrection?

David referred to this as *“the sleep of death”* (Psalm 13:3). Jesus said, *“Lazarus **sleeps**, but I go that I may wake him up.’ ... However, Jesus spoke of his **death**, but [the disciples] thought that He was*

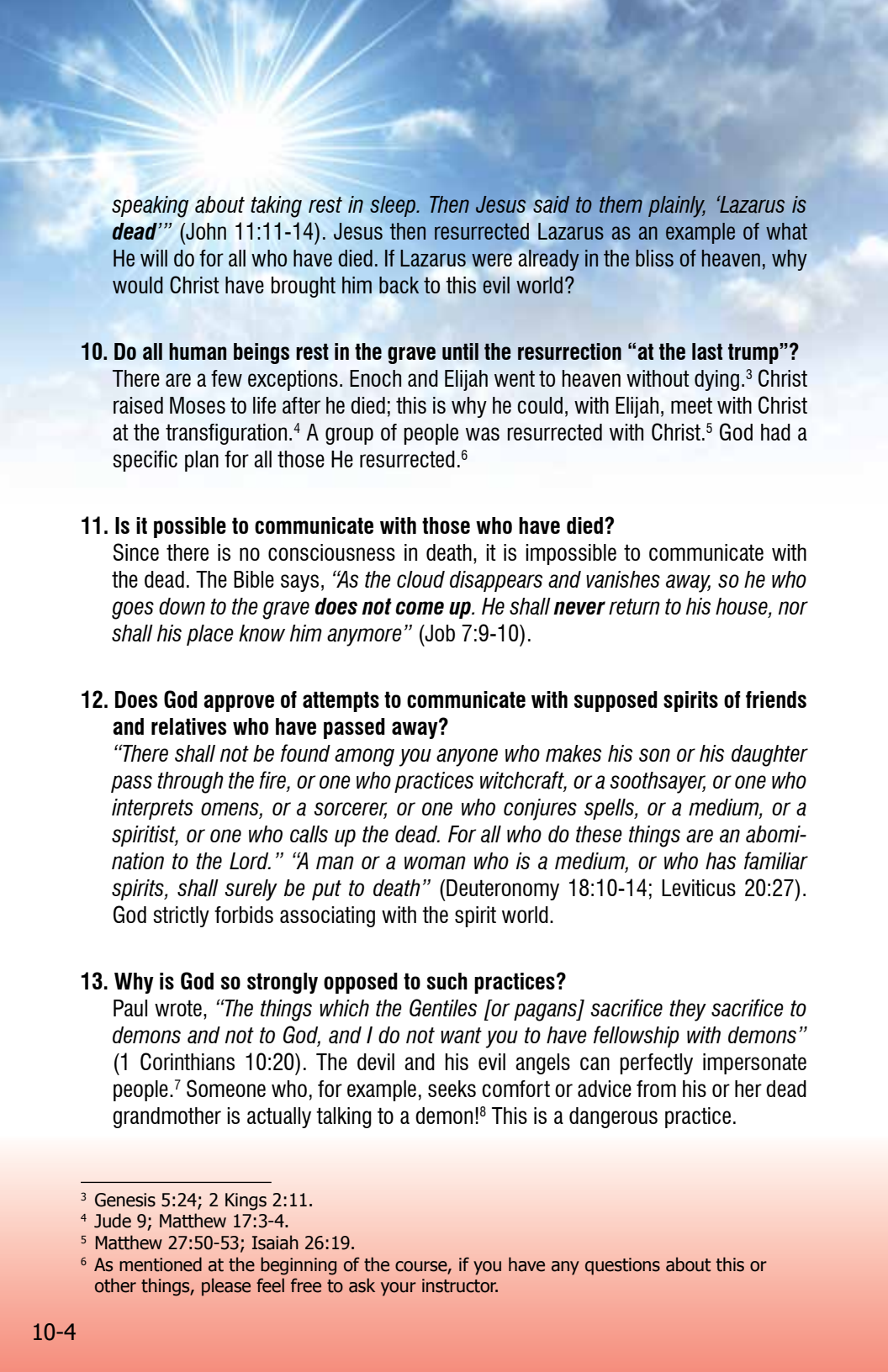
THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is frequently cited as proof that people go straight to heaven or hell* when they die. Like an allegory, a parable is a tool used to illustrate a concept. This parable is not about the state of the dead but about two principles: (1) God rewards people according to His own standards, not the standards of this world; and (2) He will not use supernatural signs to convince people to live righteously, because this would not change their hearts. Jesus was using both a common story of the day and the prejudices of His hearers to teach an important lesson: Even if someone were to come back from the dead, it would not change the minds of those who were determined not to believe—as when He raised Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, from the grave (John 11). And His own resurrection was a second witness. It was explained away by those who chose not to believe.

Literally interpreting the details of this parable would raise at least the following questions: Are all the righteous dead “sitting in Abraham’s bosom”? How happy will the righteous be in heaven if they are continually harassed by lost friends and relatives being tortured in hell? Will the redeemed be so heartless that they can enjoy heaven while others suffer intensively? The Bible says, *“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind”* (Isaiah 65:17). If the parable were meant to explain the state of the dead, it would contradict the Bible in many places. God does not lie.

* The original word means “the place of punishment.”

² The English word “hell” is translated from three different words in the original languages. The words mean “the grave,” as in this case, “the atmosphere,” and “the place where the wicked are punished.”



*speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is **dead**’” (John 11:11-14). Jesus then resurrected Lazarus as an example of what He will do for all who have died. If Lazarus were already in the bliss of heaven, why would Christ have brought him back to this evil world?*

10. Do all human beings rest in the grave until the resurrection “at the last trump”?

There are a few exceptions. Enoch and Elijah went to heaven without dying.³ Christ raised Moses to life after he died; this is why he could, with Elijah, meet with Christ at the transfiguration.⁴ A group of people was resurrected with Christ.⁵ God had a specific plan for all those He resurrected.⁶

11. Is it possible to communicate with those who have died?

Since there is no consciousness in death, it is impossible to communicate with the dead. The Bible says, *“As the cloud disappears and vanishes away, so he who goes down to the grave **does not come up**. He shall **never** return to his house, nor shall his place know him anymore” (Job 7:9-10).*

12. Does God approve of attempts to communicate with supposed spirits of friends and relatives who have passed away?

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord.” “A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death” (Deuteronomy 18:10-14; Leviticus 20:27). God strictly forbids associating with the spirit world.

13. Why is God so strongly opposed to such practices?

Paul wrote, *“The things which the Gentiles [or pagans] sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons” (1 Corinthians 10:20). The devil and his evil angels can perfectly impersonate people.⁷ Someone who, for example, seeks comfort or advice from his or her dead grandmother is actually talking to a demon!⁸ This is a dangerous practice.*

³ Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11.

⁴ Jude 9; Matthew 17:3-4.

⁵ Matthew 27:50-53; Isaiah 26:19.

⁶ As mentioned at the beginning of the course, if you have any questions about this or other things, please feel free to ask your instructor.

14. Since we are mortal, how may we obtain eternal life?

“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.... Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:50-53). No created being has eternal life unless God grants it. He has promised to give His people immortality “at the last trump,” when Jesus comes to gather them.

15. How does the apostle Paul describe the glorious hope with which we can comfort one another?

Paul said, *“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.... The dead in Christ will rise first [in the first resurrection, as discussed in Lesson 10, question 1c, including the footnote]. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 16-18). What a truly exciting event this will be!*

KING SAUL'S CONTACT

Facing a crisis, King Saul (having disobeyed God for a long time and not listening to Samuel when he was alive) commanded the witch at Endor to “bring up Samuel” (1 Samuel 28:11). Does this mean that Samuel’s soul existed and was conscious after he died? If Samuel were in heaven, why did the witch say, “I saw a spirit ascending **out of the earth**” (1 Samuel 28:13)? Did this spirit talk as if it loved Saul, as Samuel had? Or was it a wicked spirit, intending to discourage Saul so he would not be fit for battle the next day? Indeed, Saul died in that battle (1 Samuel 31). According to Scripture, “He who goes down to the grave **does not come up**” (Job 7:9).

A QUESTION TO PONDER

If people were already immortal and had been transported directly to heaven immediately when they died, who would be resurrected when Jesus comes in the clouds of heaven?

⁷ 2 Corinthians 11:14.

⁸ See also 1 Timothy 4:1 and Revelation 16:14.



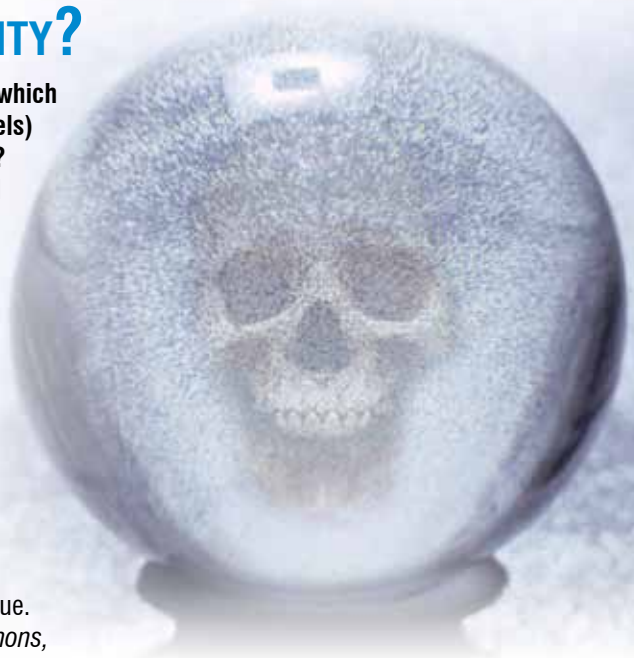
What about ...

OCCULT ACTIVITY?

- **What are some ways in which demons (fallen angels) gain power over people?**

Because the supernatural fascinates people, Satan uses this element as a tool to deceive, gain power over, and destroy individuals. Evil angels haunt houses, move pointers over Ouija boards, pilot UFOs, put spells on people and then “heal” them, and predict the future and make their predictions come true.

“They are spirits of demons, performing signs” (Revelation 16:14).



- **How can we be protected from evil angels?**

Jesus said, *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31-32).

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

What is the truth about the millennium, the thousand-year period mentioned six times in Revelation 20? How does it relate to “Closing the Books,” described in Lesson 11?

REVIEW QUESTIONS



Please answer the following questions—and send them to us so we can help you with any misunderstandings. Note that multiple-choice questions may have more than one correct answer. *Circle the letters of all correct answers.*

1. Who contradicted God's warning that disobedience brings death?

- a) Adam and Eve.
- b) The serpent.
- c) Saul.

2. When God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils,...

- a) Adam *became* a living soul.
- b) Adam *received* a living soul.

3. When a person dies,...

- a) he returns to the ground and becomes dust.
- b) if he is saved, he goes to heaven; if he is unsaved, to oblivion.
- c) his remains stay where they are placed, until the resurrection.

4. "In death not merely the _____ but also all

the _____ and _____ 'perish.'"

5. How long will the dead remain in their graves?

- a) They will stay in their graves forever.
- b) Until either the resurrection of the righteous or the resurrection of the wicked.
- c) Only their bodies stay in the grave; their souls go to heaven.

6. What may happen if we try to contact a dead relative?

- a) God will be very displeased.
- b) The dead are dead—they *cannot* communicate with the living.
- c) A demon may impersonate our relative, give us bad advice, and cause us untold grief.



7. When does a person become immortal?

- a) No created being has eternal life unless God grants it.
- b) At the last trump, when Jesus comes, the righteous will receive immortality.
- c) A person's soul is already immortal.

8. What "blessed hope" does the apostle Paul extend to those who have lost loved ones to death?

- a) The hope of the resurrection.
- b) The assurance that their loved ones are with Jesus in heaven.
- c) The hope of meeting them again when we meet the Lord in the air.



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