

ONE MINUTE AFTER YOU DIE

May 21, 2023

▶ CONNECT

As you begin your group, take time to look back and answer the following questions:

How did God's Word speak to you this week?

Where do you see God at work in your life?

What happens to us immediately after we die? You would be hard-pressed to find a question that sparks more curiosity than this one. Just about everyone—believers and non-believers alike—is fascinated to know what happens on the other side of death. The Bible doesn't provide many details about what happens but reveals some things that we can expect the moment after we die and beyond.

What makes people fear death?

▶ GROW

So, what happens immediately after we die? Here are seven things the Bible reveals to us:

1. The soul is separated from the body (James 2:26).
2. The dead are conscious and aware (Philippians 1:23-24).
3. Believers are immediately taken into the presence of Christ in heaven (Luke 23:43).
4. Believers experience the glory of God in heaven, a place that far surpasses our lives on earth (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8).
5. In heaven, believers look forward to the resurrection of our earthly bodies and the final consummation of God's kingdom (Romans 8:23).
6. Believers are cleansed from all sin and made perfect after death (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 5:27; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).
7. Those who do not put their faith in Christ for salvation, spend eternity separated from Him in hell (Matthew 13:30; 25:41; Luke 12:5; John 3:36; Romans 2:8-9; Hebrews 10:29)¹

Death is the passageway for us into one of two places. Those who have put their faith in Christ for salvation can have comfort and confidence that through His person and work, they will be ushered into His loving presence in heaven af-

END NOTES

1. Adapted from Matt Perman, "What Happens at Death?," *Desiring God*, January 23, 2006, www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-happens-at-death.

ter their souls have left their bodies. Those who have not put their faith in Christ for salvation will experience an eternity separated from His loving presence in hell.

Read John 11:25-26 and 14:1-6 as a group. Make observations about the passage by answering questions such as these:

- What do you see? What do you find interesting or insightful? What's something new you learned or hadn't seen before?
- What is the author's main point? How does he make it?
- What lesson am I meant to learn from this passage (or story)?

Next, ask what this passage says about God, humans generally, and yourself particularly.

- What does this passage say about God? What does it say about His character and activity in our lives and the world?
- What does this passage say about us? What does it reveal about human nature?
- What does this passage say about you? How does it directly apply to your identity, worth, and purpose in life?

▶ SHARE

Understanding what God has revealed about death and eternity helps us live with Christ in our day-to-day lives while having a perspective on eternity.

Knowing that death ushers us directly into the realities of either heaven or hell should make us look up to Christ as our refuge and salvation and should make us strive, as Paul, to "have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to him" (2 Corinthians 5:9). Even for believers, the prospect of death is sometimes a fearful thing because death is enshrouded in great mystery as the realm to which we have never gone. But we may take courage and lay aside our fears in the confidence that we have a God who, time after time, says to his people, "Do not be afraid" (Joshua 11:6; Isaiah 44:8; Matthew 14:27; 17:7; 28:10; Revelation 1:17). God wants His people to be comforted in the face of death: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you" (Isaiah 43:1-2).²

Heaven and hell are not just ideas; they're real places where we'll spend eternity. You don't need to be scared of dying if you're a believer. Jesus already won the battle against death by rising from the dead. If we trust in Him, we can live with total confidence today because death isn't the final chapter of our story. Or, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said before his death: "This is the end—for me the beginning of life."

How would you live differently if you understood that what you did today has eternal significance?

What does it look like to face death with hope and faith?

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2. Perman, "What Happens."

As a group, come up with Dos and Don'ts regarding how to comfort someone in grief over the death of a loved one.

Consider an area in your life where you're experiencing suffering or adversity. How does the hope of eternal life impact how you approach that area?

Think of someone with whom you could share what you've learned from our conversation about God and His truth. Commit to sharing with that person this week.

▶ PRAY

As we prepare to leave the group tonight, we desire to step out and live a Jesus-centered life and submit to the Spirit (Romans 8:6-8). Take time to reflect on this past week and set intentions for next week by answering the following questions:

- *How have you fed your spirit this week?*
- *What are ways you drifted to feeding your flesh?*

Take a few moments to pray for each other and God's continued growth in those areas.

▶ DISCOVER MORE

DEATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Discussion of death in the New Testament is profoundly influenced by the death of Jesus. His death itself represented God's profound love for His people and a substitutionary atonement for their sins (Marshall, "The Death of Jesus"). His death is redemptive (Mark 10:45; 14:24), sacrificial (a prominent theme in Hebrews), brings justification, and reconciles sinful people with God (Rom 5:10; Col 1:20, 22) (Rom 3:21–26). In New Testament thought, Jesus' resurrection is a demonstration of and precursor to the general resurrection of the dead at the end of the age.

The New Testament contains little explicit information about the state of the dead awaiting resurrection, although some indication may be found in Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). Here the righteous Lazarus dies and is transported to "Abraham's bosom," while the rich man finds himself in Hades, tormented in fire. This parable may support the idea of a compartmentalized Hades (note the vast chasm between the tormented and those who are comforted, Luke 16:26). Additionally, it reflects the notion of reward and punishment after death. Other passages sometimes used to define the intermediate state include Matt 10:28; Luke 12:4–5; 23:43; Acts 2:27, 31; 2 Cor 5:1–10; Phil 1:23–24; Rev 6:9–11 (see Osei-Bonsu, 169–194).

Various theories about the state of the dead awaiting the resurrection have been proposed. The dominant understanding has been that people experience some form of disembodied existence following death (Osei-Bonsu, "The Intermediate State in the New Testament," 169). The New Testament does not offer a clear picture of the state of the dead, beyond promising the resurrection of the dead and a final judgment (Matt 25:31–46; John 5:28–29; Rev 20:11–15; Acts 24:15;

compare Dan 12:2).³

HEAVEN

Heaven is the term used in the Bible to indicate the space where God and various spiritual beings reside. It is also used to speak of the area above the earth—the sky.

Major Concepts of Heaven from the Hebrew Bible

For the ancient Israelite, the cosmos consisted of heaven, earth, and the lower waters (Exod 20:4). In the Hebrew Bible, heaven is the location of the clouds, the atmosphere (Job 35:5), and the area across which the stars journey in their paths (Jer 8:2). Various passages state that the heavens were created by the Lord (Gen 1:1; Isa 45:12) and that they could be opened at His bidding to bring rain (Gen 7:12). The Israelites believed there was a vast body of water in the heavens that was the source of the rain (Jer 51:16; Psa 148:4). They thought there were vessels in heaven for the storage of the rainwater (Deut 28:12; Job 38:37). The word “heaven” may come from an Akkadian phrase meaning “place of the waters” (Wright, *Early History of Heaven*, 55). However, it is also possible that the term originates from an Ancient Near Eastern root meaning a hollow and high place (Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 39).

The word “heaven” in the Old Testament usually designates the place of God’s habitation (Psa 14:2; 1 Kgs 8:30, 39). To differentiate between the visible heaven and the dwelling place of God, biblical authors often referred to Yahweh’s abode as the heaven of heavens or the highest heaven (Deut 10:14; 1 Kgs 8:27; Psa 148:4; Neh 9:6). Certain attributes of God—such as His justice—are said to exist in heaven (e.g., Isa 34:5). God was not alone in the heavens—the celestial beings also inhabited it (Gen 28:12; 1 Kgs 22:19).

Some biblical authors provided physical descriptions of heaven. Job 26:11 says that the heavens are secured by pillars. Genesis 8:2 speaks of the windows of heaven, which can be fastened to restrain the rain. The poetic passages of the Bible which speak of heaven may not be literal descriptions.

Development of the Concept of Heaven

In early Jewish thought, heaven was a place solely for God and the heavenly hosts. Israel did not regard heaven as a place a human would inhabit—except in extraordinary instances such as Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11). They believed the dead descended to the Underworld—Sheol (Gen 37:35; 42:38; 1 Kgs 13:31).

Exposure to Persian concepts during the exile likely influenced later Jewish thinking and writing about heaven and the afterlife. The Iranian prophet Zoroaster (ca. 1400 bc) taught that after death the soul would be judged and condemned to hell, or would be rewarded a place in heaven (McDannell, *Heaven: A History*, 12). There emerged in Jewish thought (ca. 250 bc) the hope for the reunion of Israel in the divine dwelling-place—in the renewal of all things (2 Macc 1:27–29; 2:7–8, 17–18; Tob 14:4–7).

The ability of human beings to rise from their earthly setting and enter heaven is described in the Qumran documents. The Qumran community (ca. 150 bc—ad 68) believed that in the midst of their worship on earth they could also participate with the angelic worshipers in heaven. By God’s mercy these devout worshipers were purified so that they might stand

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3. Martin A. Shields, “Death,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

with the angels and sing praises to the Lord (1QH 11 19–23; 1QM 7 4–6). It was the conviction of the community that their present worship experience was similar to the worship experience they expected to enjoy in the future established kingdom of God (Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath*, 889).

The New Testament Concept of Heaven

Gospels and Acts

The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles reflect an understanding of heaven similar to the Old Testament—with some advances in thought. The book of Acts retains the faith that God created the heavens (Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24). Heaven is still used to talk about the atmosphere and the dwelling-place of the birds of the air (Matt 6:26). It was also the vast space in which the stars moved (Acts 2:19). The term “heaven” signifies the dwelling-place of God and the abode of the angelic hosts (Matt 18:10). It is also where the Son of God originates (John 3:13; 6:33).

In the New Testament, the word “heaven” is found most frequently in Matthew (84 times). The author of Matthew frequently contrasts “heaven” and “earth.” Heaven is the place where treasures are to be accumulated—not on earth (Matt 6:19–20). The follower of Jesus should call no one on earth his father—he has but one Father in heaven (Matt 23:9). The Christian prayer is for the kingdom of the Father in heaven to come—and manifest itself on earth (Matt 6:9, 10). Jesus’ message in Matthew is described in terms of a contrast between heaven and earth—showing the superiority of heaven (Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 210). But heaven and earth will not always stand in contrast. The goal of God’s redemptive plan in Jesus is not the removal of the earth in the sense of being replaced with a kingdom in heaven, but is instead the renewal of all things so the earthly realms will resemble the heavenly pattern (Matt 6:9–10; 19:28; Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 210).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus consoles his disciples about his departure by telling them, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places” (John 14:2 ESV). There are two ways this passage has been understood: the words “Father’s house” may be a reference to heaven (e.g., Morris, *The Gospel*, 567); or one can take Jesus’ statement as a metaphor for community, congregation, household, or group of people (e.g., Hos 1:4; Heb 3:6; see Aalen, “‘Reign’ and ‘House,’” 228). The phrase “many dwelling places” focuses on the idea that there is unlimited space for all in heaven, rather than on the size of the structure. If this is Jesus’ intention, then the nuance of the phrase is more relational—the disciples and God reside together in a family relationship.

In John 14:2–3, Jesus also tells his disciples that He is going to prepare a place for them. In keeping with the metaphorical sense of Jesus’ statement, the preparation likely refers to spiritual preparation. A person dwelling with God is only made possible by the spiritual preparation made by Christ on the cross (Carson, *The Gospel*, 489).

Pauline Letters

Paul’s letters show a development in ideas about heaven. Graeco-Roman thoughts about heaven involved the belief that the human soul originated in the divine realm and then desired to return to that place after death. Cicero (ca. 50 bc) believed that once an individual dies, the soul desires to return to its true home in heaven (*Republic* 6.13, 23, 24, 29). This belief may have influenced the concept of heaven as a future abode of an individual after death (Wright, *Early History*, 139). The term heaven is employed by Paul to refer to the Christian hope (2 Cor 5:1–2; Phil 3:20).

Yet at the same time, for Paul, heaven is a spiritual realm that coexists with the material world of space and time (McGrath, *Theology: The Basics*, 124). Paul uses the term “heavenly places” (τοπουανίους, *epouraniois*) in Eph 1:3 (NRSV). Heavenly places is used four other times in Ephesians (Eph 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) to mean the upper part of the cosmos, but also symbolically it represented a spiritual world. In Ephesians 2:6 the text states that Christians—in anticipation of the age

to come—even now share Christ's heavenly reign (Lincoln, "Re-examination of the Heavens," 472).

Paul asserts that heaven is the present dwelling place of Christ—from where he will come for final judgment (1 Thess 1:10; 4:16). God's wisdom is revealed to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (Eph 3:10). Further, the heavenly realms is the place of conflict between believers and evil spiritual forces (Eph 6:12).

Paul—and others—believed that there were several heavens (2 Cor 12:2–4; 2 Macc 15:23; 3 Macc 2:2). In apocalyptic literature the number of heavens ranged from one to seven. It was in this uppermost heaven that God dwelt with the angels (1 En. 67:2; 71:5–10; *Testament of Levi* 3).

General Letters and Revelation

The prophet Isaiah had already spoken of a new heaven (Isa 65:17), and several New Testament authors expand on this notion. Hebrews 1:10–12 speaks of the perishing of the visible temporary heavens. Later, the author refers to this same cataclysmic end-time event (Heb 12:26–28) to describe the removal of the created heavens in order to usher in the final kingdom. The passing away of the visible heavens is also found in Rev 21:1 and 2 Pet 3:12.

In the book of Revelation, John enters an open door in heaven in order to witness the celestial affairs that are usually veiled (Rev 4:1). John sees the heavenly realm abounding in life, celebratory praise and worship. Revelation portrays the heavenly domain as the place of final judgment (Rev 20:9) and the vindication of the righteous (e.g., Rev 11:11–12).

Revelation 21–22 foretells the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. The dwelling of God will be with a redeemed humanity in a new city on the new earth. Heaven is the transformed city of Jerusalem, the transformed Garden of Eden. In sum, Revelation looks forward to the unification of the heavenly and earthly realms.

Heaven in Reference to God

At times, the word heaven is used by both biblical and non-biblical authors as a way to refer to God without speaking the divine name (e.g., 1 Macc 3:18, 4:19, 16:3; Luke 15:18, 21). Matthew's preference for the phrase "kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God" likely reflects the Jewish tendency not to use the divine name (e.g., Matt 3:2; 5:3; 8:11; 13:24; 18:1; 19:23; 23:13).

Hell

Hell (γέεννα, *geenna*). The Greek word is often translated in English versions of the New Testament as "hell." It is a noun derived from the Hebrew phrase (gy' hnm), which means "Valley of Hinnom." The Valley of Hinnom was a ravine along the southern slope of Jerusalem (Josh 15:18; 18:16). In Old Testament times, it was a place used for offering sacrifices to foreign gods. Eventually, the site was used to burn refuse. When the Jews discussed punishment in the afterlife, they employed the image of this smoldering waste dump.

The Afterlife in the Old Testament

Sheol

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4. David Seal, "Heaven," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Sheol generally refers to the dwelling place of a person after death. In a few texts, Sheol is represented as the place where everyone goes—though, this is likely hyperbole (Psa 89:48; Eccl 9:10). Other texts indicate it is the dwelling place for the good or righteous (e.g., Gen 37:35; Pss 88:3; 89:48; Isa 38:10). Still other passages indicate it is the final abode of the wicked (e.g., Num 16:30, 33; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Job 21:13; 24:19; Pss 9:17; 31:17; Isa 5:14).

According to the descriptions in the Old Testament, Sheol is located in the “Underworld.” In order to get there, one must descend (Num 16:30, 33; Job 17:16; 21:13; Prov 5:5; 9:18) and one must dig towards it (Amos 9:2). In order to get out, a person would need to ascend (Psa 30:3). Sheol is located opposite of heaven (Psa 139:8; Amos 9:2). It is infested with worms and maggots (Isa 14:11). This language could be figurative.

Valley of Hinnom

In the Valley of Hinnom, King Ahaz and King Manasseh offered their sons as sacrifices to the gods of Baal and Molech (2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; 2 Kgs 16:3).

In condemning the valley as a place of idol worship, the prophet Jeremiah anticipated that it would become a “Valley of Slaughter,” a place of judgment for worshipers of foreign gods (Jer 7:30–34; 19:1–13; 32:34–35).

Isaiah predicted that Israel’s enemy Assyria would be destroyed with fire at Hinnom (Isa 30:29–33). Hinnom became closely associated with death, corpses, and punishment—it became a fitting image of God judging the wicked.⁵

New Testament

The New Testament often distinguishes between *ἀδης* (*hadēs*) and *γέεννα* (*geenna*). For instance, a few passages simply use *ἀδης* (*hadēs*) as a synonym for the death or the grave. For example, Acts 2:27 and 2:31 state that Jesus was not left in *ἀδης* (*hadēs*) or “the grave.”

The term *γέεννα* (*geenna*) occurs ten times in the Gospels (Matt 5:22, 29; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5) and also in Jas 3:6. The word *ἀδης* (*hadēs*) occurs ten times in the New Testament (Matt 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev 1:18, 6:8; 20:13, 14).

Jesus’s Teaching on Hell

Jesus teaches that, after their death, people either enter the kingdom of God or are cast into *γέεννα* (*geenna*) (Matt 10:28; Luke 13:28). In addition, Jesus discusses three aspects of hell in his teaching: its inhabitants, its features and the extent of its punishment.

Hell’s Inhabitants

Jesus frequently describes those who are destined for *ἀδης* (*hadēs*). Jesus tells the inhabitants of Capernaum that their unbelief will lead them to *ἀδης* (*hadēs*) (Matt 11:20–24). Jesus also warns of several sins that might condemn one to *ἀδης* (*hadēs*), including calling a spiritual brother or sister a fool (Matt 5:22) and giving into sinful tendencies (Matt 5:29–30). For Jesus, a person is either a child of *ἀδης* (*hadēs*) or a child of Abraham (Matt 23:15; Luke 19:9). Jesus

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5. David Seal, “Hell,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

questions the scribes, Pharisees and hypocrites about how they expect to escape the condemnation of ἀδης (hadēs) if they are committing the sins of their ancestors (Matt 23:31–33). In His preaching, Jesus promises the gates of ἀδης (hadēs) shall not prevail against the church (Matt 16:18).

Descriptions of Hell

Jesus describes hell as an eternal fire where the devil and his angels are destined (Matt 25:41). He also calls it the abyss (Luke 8:31). It is a place of darkness, where a person experiences weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:8–12). The weeping suggests suffering and pain while the gnashing of teeth suggests despair and anger.

Beyond these images, Jesus also portrays hell (or ἀδης, *hadēs*) in Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). In this passage, ἀδης (*hadēs*) is depicted as a permanent abode and a place of torment. Further, it seems it accommodates some individuals, but not others. The rich man went there after dying, and Lazarus did not. Instead, Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom, a traditional designation for the place of the dead who were righteous in life. This parable also teaches about the irreversible nature of punishment in the afterlife.

The Duration of Hell's Punishment

There are two primary perspectives on the extent of hell's punishment. One view contends that the wicked experience eternal conscious suffering (Walvoord, "The Literal"). The other view argues that the wicked eventually are consumed by hell's fire, thereby forfeiting their existence (Fudge, "The Final End").

Matthew 10:28 might imply that hell destroys both the body and the soul, making punishment only temporary. However, other texts support the eternal duration of hell's punishment. For example, Jesus, drawing on Isa 66:24, speaks of hell as the place where the worm never dies and the fire is never extinguished (Mark 9:48). In Matthew 25:46, it seems that the punishment is forever rather than for a while. Jesus claims that upon death some people will go to eternal punishment while others will enter into eternal life.

Paul's Teaching on Hell

Paul stresses the expectation of salvation, and does not emphasize the topic of hell or its torments. The idea of torture as a punishment for wicked deeds is totally absent from his teaching about the last days. For Paul, salvation is the opposite of death (2 Cor 7:10). In Second Thessalonians 1:8–10, he describes the final days: Jesus will come with flaming fire, and will impose a penalty on those who do not acknowledge God or who refuse to accept the gospel of Jesus (Kyrtatas, "The Christian Origin," 286).

The Concept of Hell in the Rest of the New Testament

The remainder of literature in the New Testament primarily focuses on the judgment of those sentenced to hell. The Second Letter of Peter includes the verb ταρταρώ (*tartarōō*), which is often translated as "cast into hell" (2 Pet 2:4 NRSV). In this passage, Peter describes the divine power, which has imprisoned the rebellious angels (Bernstein, *The Formation*, 251). The verb ταρταρώ (*tartarōō*) is related to the noun Τάρταρος (*Tartaros*). Τάρταρος (*Tartaros*) is the Greek word for a subterranean place, lower than δης (*hadēs*), where divine punishment was conducted. The passage suggests that if God did not spare the rebellious angels from the fire of δης (*hadēs*) then He certainly will not show mercy on false teachers leading people astray (2 Pet 2:1–10).

Hebrews 10:26–27 also describes those who are bound for the punishment of δης (*hadēs*)—a raging fire will consume the enemies of God. Whether this imagery of fire is metaphorical or literal is debatable (see Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*).

While Revelation does not mention the term *δης* (*hadēs*) directly, the author provides the most pointed descriptions of those who will experience the torment of *δης* (*hadēs*) in the life to come. Two themes concerning *δης* (*hadēs*) emerge in the last book of the New Testament. First, Jesus is the one who possesses power over *δης* (*hadēs*) (Rev 1:18). Second, the lake of fire eventually will house all the “authors of evil” and all whose names are not found written in the book of life (Bernstein, *The Formation*, 259). Therefore, *δης* (*hadēs*) itself is judged and thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:13–14), the beast and false prophet are sent to the lake of fire (Rev 19:20) and finally, the devil is thrown into the eternal fire (Rev 20:10).⁶

John 11:25-26

11:25-26 I am the Resurrection and the Life. This is the fifth of Jesus’ great “I am” revelations. The Resurrection and the Life of the new Age is present right now because Jesus is the Lord of life (1:4). Jesus’ words about life and death are seemingly paradoxical. A believer’s death issues in new life. In fact, the life of a believer is of such a quality that he **will never die** spiritually. He has eternal life (3:16; 5:24; 10:28), and the end of physical life is only a sleep for his body until the resurrection unto life. At death the spiritual part of a believer, his soul, goes to be with the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 5:6, 8; Phil. 1:23).⁷

11:25 Jesus does not merely say that he will bring about the resurrection or that he will be the cause of the resurrection (both of which are true), but something much stronger: **I am the resurrection and the life**. Resurrection from the dead and genuine eternal life in fellowship with God are so closely tied to Jesus that they are embodied in him and can be found only in relationship to him. Therefore **believes in me** implies personal trust in Christ. The preposition translated “in” (Gk. *eis*) is striking, for *eis* ordinarily means “into,” giving the sense that genuine faith in Christ in a sense brings people “into” Christ, so that they rest in and become united with Christ. (This same expression is found in 3:16, 18, 36; 6:35; 7:38; 12:44, 46; 14:12; 1 John 5:10.) The “I am” statement here represents a claim to deity.

11:26 Lives refers to those who have spiritual life now. Those who believe **shall never die**, in that they will ultimately triumph over death.⁸

John 14:1-6

14:1 Having left their homes and occupations to follow the Master, the disciples are now faced with what appears to be complete failure. The noble cause to which they had given themselves for the past three years seems about to crumble. How reassuring, then, would be the words of Jesus, “Set your troubled hearts at rest” (the present imperative may suggest “stop being troubled”). The verb (*tarassō*) means “stir up,” “unsettle,” “throw into confusion.” In 11:33 it depicted Jesus’ reaction when he encountered the sorrowing Mary, in 12:27 when he anticipated death, and in 13:21 when he predicted his betrayal.

As members of the Jewish community, the disciples would know from their own religious tradition that God would never abandon them. Throughout history he had responded to the needs of his people and protected them in times of distress. Jesus is saying to his disciples, “You *do* trust in God; therefore trust also in me [*pisteuete*, “trust,” can be taken as indicative or imperative in either clause]. Have I not yet convinced you that I and my Father are one [10:30; cf. 17:21–23]? If the Father is worthy of your trust, so also is the Son.” In light of this, then, Jesus urges, “You must not let

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8. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2045–2046.

yourselves be distressed" (Phillips).

14:2 The reason the disciples are able to set their hearts at rest is that, although he will leave them for a time, Jesus will return. While he is gone, he will be preparing a place for them in his Father's house, i.e., where God is, in heaven. "Many rooms" is a way of saying "enough room for everyone." The KJV's "mansions" (stemming from Tyndale) is misleading. In Old English the word meant "dwelling place" without any special reference to a palatial mansion. Some writers take the Greek *monai* ("rooms") as representing an Aramaic term meaning "shelters along the road" where a traveler could spend the night. Temple calls them "wayside caravanserais" and pictures Jesus as "our spiritual dragoman, who treads the way of faith before us." While it is comforting to think of "resting places" as stages in our spiritual growth and of Jesus as the One who goes ahead to prepare each place and lead us there, it is better to take *monē* as related to *menō* ("to abide"), a basic verb that occurs frequently in John. The "many rooms" are in the Father's house, not along the road that leads there.

Since the place Jesus is preparing for his disciples is in heaven, it is difficult to say with any precision what this may entail. Speculations about "celestial palaces" miss the point. To be in the Father's house is to be with him; everything else will pale by comparison. Marsh, 501, holds that the actual preparation of the permanent dwelling places was accomplished "not after the death on the cross, but in it and by it"—an interesting thought, though by saying that Jesus is "going there" (i.e., to his Father's house) in order to prepare a place, the text puts the preparation subsequent to the ascension.

14:3 Jesus' return for his disciples is as certain as his departure: "I go" and "I will come back." It is somewhat difficult to determine whether at this point Jesus is speaking of his post-resurrection appearances or his return at the end of the age. In the first case, it is not clear in what sense he would then take his disciples to be with him; in the second case, it is difficult to understand how the second advent would fulfill the apparent immediacy of the promise. Some have solved the ambiguity by holding that Jesus is speaking at this point of his "return" in the person of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it is best to understand the passage as blending all three suggested interpretations: in the resurrection Jesus comes back from the dead, in the current age he lives among us by the Spirit, and at the consummation he will come again for his own.

The promise Jesus makes to his followers is that on his return he will take them to be with him so that they also may be where he is. The deepest longing of the human heart is to be in the presence of God. In the book of Revelation, John portrays the essence of eternal bliss in the words, "They shall see his face" (Rev 22:4). When the new Jerusalem descends from heaven, then will be fulfilled the glorious promise, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev 21:3). There is no greater joy than the presence of God—which is why those who now live in vital relationship with him experience the greatest satisfactions life has to offer.

14:4–5 Jesus tells his disciples that they "know the way to the place where [he] is going," but Thomas questions both *where* Jesus is going and therefore *the way* that would take them there. While the question posed by Thomas is in a certain sense rational, it reveals an inability to grasp spiritual truth. True, if they don't know where Jesus is going, they cannot know the way. But Thomas should have known that Jesus was speaking spiritually rather than geographically. The disciples had been told by Jesus that he would be crucified and would return to his Father (cf. 12:7–8, 23–24, 27, 32, 46–47). Their understanding of that truth, however, was limited by the narrow scope of their imagination. They were unable to grasp the fact that for Jesus to "go away" could signify something other than merely geographical separation.

14:6 Unwittingly, the mundane question by Thomas led to one of the most far-reaching and provocative statements ever made by Jesus. For Thomas, the way to an unknown destination cannot be known. Jesus answers, "I am the way." Jesus is not one who shows the way but the one who himself *is* the way. He is the way—the only way—to the Father, for

“no one comes to the Father except through [him].” The particularism of Jesus’ teaching has caused many to stumble. The mind-set of secular society regards such exclusive claims as intolerant. Certainly there are other paths that lead to God. Not so! To accept Jesus Christ involves accepting all that he said, even though open support of his claims may cause a bit of embarrassment when brought up in certain circles of contemporary society.

Jesus is the only way to God because he is also “the truth.” Note that each of the three nouns (way, truth, life) is preceded by a definite article. “Truth” and “life” do not modify “way,” as though Jesus were saying, “I am the real and living way” (Moffatt). He is the truth. Ultimate truth is not a series of propositions to be grasped by the intellect but a person to be received and therefore knowable only by means of a personal relationship. Others have made true statements, but only Jesus perfectly embodies truth itself. He is the truth. And he is also “the life.” Eternal life is to know Jesus Christ (17:3; cf. 1 Jn 1:2; 5:20). Apart from him is darkness and death.

Barclay, 2:157, mentions that in this sublime statement Jesus took three of the great basic conceptions of Jewish religion and made the tremendous claim that in him all three found their full realization. The fifteenth-century Augustinian priest Thomas à Kempis (*The Imitation of Christ* [...]) joined the three as follows: “Without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; without the life, there is no living.”

▶ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Edwin A. Blum, “John,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*.

Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” *The ESV Study Bible*.

Robert H. Mounce, “John,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Luke—Acts*.

David Seal, “Heaven,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

David Seal, “Hell,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

Martin A. Shields, “Death,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.