



Spiritual Due Diligence

Exploring questions of eternal significance

Study 5 Death and Life After Death
presented by Links Players International

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Spiritual Due Diligence

Introduction to this study

WHEN A MAN OR WOMAN CONSIDERS making a significant financial investment, they normally do not rush into the decision. Rather, they begin a process commonly known as due diligence—a gathering of facts and considerations that will allow them to judge rightly whether this investment is appropriate for them.

Of course, due diligence does not guarantee success. However, if an investment fails and we ask the investors whether or not they did their due diligence, the most embarrassing answer they can give is, “No, we did not.”

While thousands of wise investors each year avoid that embarrassment by conducting due diligence in their financial endeavors, millions of people never take the same careful steps in their spiritual lives. While they have heard stories of God and the afterlife, and while they may have even toyed with such questions loosely in their minds, they have never set about the task of spiritual due diligence—considering the information that would support these eternally significant claims.

Intent of this series

The intent of this series, *Spiritual Due Diligence*, is to assist potential spiritual investors with regard to investigating the claims of the Bible, particularly as they point to a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. One study in this series will focus on the claims of other faith systems, but that is not our primary intent here. Instead, by a thorough examination of the Bible, you will have opportunity to study Christianity in depth, and thereafter you will have the tools necessary by which to measure other faiths and religions.

The audience for this series

At least three categories of readers should find great value in this series: those who are beginning their first serious investigation of the Bible, those who are desiring to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Bible, and those who may be speaking with others about their own established Christian faith.

Focus of this particular study

This study is the fifth in the series. Its particular focus is to investigate the teachings of the Bible on death and life after death. Although we are all aware that we will one day face our own death, we typically think little about the specific aspects of dying unless we have a loved one die near us or we attend a funeral. Similarly, because life after death is often regarded as the most unknowable of mysteries, few people bother to explore this topic either. The Bible, however, is unafraid to speak of either death or the afterlife. In this study we will consider the Bible’s teachings and whether we can rely on these words.

— Jeffrey Cranford and Jeff Hopper, for Links Players International



Death and Life After Death

Lesson One: Views of death

IN NEARLY ALL OF LIFE'S ENDEAVORS, WE ARE GIVEN CHOICES. If you manage a business, you know this. Your postal box is flooded with offers for this product or that. Most of these are only variations on a theme, different brands of the same item.

Every once in a while, however, something will come across your desk—or arrive in your e-mail inbox or show up on the pages of a favorite magazine—that strikes you as truly innovative. It is different than anything you have seen and, at first glance, more promising.

But if you are diligent in your management and the investment would be substantial, you are going to ask questions: Is this product truly unique? And is it better for you than what you already have?

Likewise, when we begin to read about death—something we usually do intentionally, because advertisers aren't hot on the subject!—we see that some ideas are truly unique, while others are only variations on a theme. This lesson presents an overview of death and life after death, as they are presented in various schools of thought.

Ideas about life after death

The following ideas about life after death and how we get there are espoused in different schools of religion and anti-religion. Let's take a look.

- **Death is the end.** In the materialist's consideration of death, because you have no soul, when your body ceases to function and you die a physical death, this is the end of your existence. You are either buried, entombed or cremated. There is no afterlife.
- **Reincarnation.** Faith traditions that hold to reincarnation, including most prominently the Hindu tradition, suggest that each earthly passage through life sets you up for the next passage through life. If your life is lived honorably, after your death you will return to earth as a creature of a higher order; if instead you live dishonorably, you will return to earth as a creature of a lower order. The goal of most of these suggested lineages, however, is to progress with more and more honor until your soul is eventually released into a state of eternal peace for your soul.
- **Heaven and hell.** In most faiths, including Christianity, Judaism and Islam, a form of heaven (a place of excellent existence in the presence of God) is presented alongside a form a hell (a place of tormenting judgment) as one or another destination for our souls after we die. How we are assigned to these destinations will be discussed in a later lesson in this study, but there is a

common thread that those who are right with God will go to heaven and those who are not will go to hell.

- **Purgatory.** This traditional Roman Catholic view holds that once your earthly life has ended and you are judged not so wicked as to go to hell but not yet righteous enough for heaven, you are ushered into purgatory. Here a sort of refining process prepares your soul for heaven.

The requirements of logic

With such varying views on the most essential matters of life after death—where will we go? how will we get there?—it is important to remember one of logic’s most basic principles: two conflicting truths cannot be true at the same time. While it comes off as tolerant and kind to allow that “you can have your beliefs and I can have mine,” it simply cannot be held to logically. How can one person’s existence end with the expiration of her physical body while her friend’s continuing soul is sent either to heaven or hell?

For this reason, we consider it part of our spiritual due diligence to explore the key differences between the biblical view of death and the afterlife as set against other views. If we are as yet undecided as to what we believe about God and His universe, such a study can help us make this important decision. If we are confirmed in our faith in God through Jesus Christ, it is still a key piece of following Him to understand all that we can about where we are headed when we die. The Bible teaches that hope is one of a Christ-follower’s greatest possessions; hope is increased with knowledge of what is to come. The Christ-follower should find that the lessons in this study serve to increase that knowledge.

PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS

As you begin this study, what are some basic beliefs you have held to regarding life after death?

BIBLE STUDY

Read Psalm 139:1-8. The psalmist gives credit to God’s omnipresence, not only in heaven but in the Sheol (“the abode of the dead”). What implications does this have for God’s role in eternity?

Read John 14:1-3. It is from this passage that followers of Christ, the speaker of these words, draw their hope for an eternity with Him.

PSALM 139

- ¹LORD, You have searched me and known me.
²You know when I sit down and when I stand up;
You understand my thoughts from far away.
³You observe my travels and my rest;
You are aware of all my ways.
⁴Before a word is on my tongue,
You know all about it, LORD.
⁵You have encircled me;
You have placed Your hand on me.
⁶This extraordinary knowledge is beyond me.
It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.
⁷Where can I go to escape Your Spirit?
Where can I flee from Your presence?
⁸If I go up to heaven, You are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, You are there.

JOHN 14

- ¹“Your heart must not be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. ²In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. ³If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also.”

INSIGHT FROM T.S. ELIOT

“I had far rather walk, as I do, in daily terror of eternity, than feel that this was only a children’s game in which all the contestants would get equally worthless prizes in the end.”

To what extent do you concur with Eliot, the 20th Century poet? Is there terror—or at least some apprehension—in your consideration of eternity? Is it important to you to know that this life has value in another?



Death and Life After Death

Lesson Two: What happens at death?

MYSTERY. It is a word we assign to the things that are not altogether discernible to us in the scope of our knowledge. The stock market has its element of mystery; so does the golf swing. Some say they are mystified by the vagaries of love, others by the calculations of physics.

Mystery, then, has in its essence a combination of ignorance and intrigue. No wonder we nearly all love a good mystery.

But for many people, one mystery is especially disconcerting. This is the mystery of what happens after you die. While many wise people have speculated as to what happens when we die, no one really *knows*. Even those who say they have seen visions of the afterlife in the moments they have lain “dead on the table” before a medical revival do not tell the same story. Despite these eyewitnesses, the mystery remains.

And while it does not show you what you cannot see until after you die, the Bible is not silent on the matter of death. It offers several insights for your consideration. In conducting our spiritual due diligence, let’s review some of those insights here.

Now and later

It is important to understand right away that the Bible speaks of two phases of afterlife: now and later. In other words, the first question is, *what happens to us right after we die?*, and the second question is, *what happens to us for eternity?*, because in the Bible these questions do not have the same answer.

Immediately, the Bible tells us, we are either ushered into the presence of the Lord or separated from Him. A judgment has been made as to where we will spend eternity, but this judgment has not yet been rendered. Still, we will be fully aware of where we are and why we are there.

Later, a formal judgment will be rendered, and we will be assigned to our eternal position, either (1) with Christ, sporting a new physical body and living on the new earth, or (2) apart from Christ, dwelling with the utter remorse of our sins but unable to break free from this consequence.

In this lesson, we consider more specifically what happens to us *immediately* after we die.

The presence of the Lord

You may be surprised to learn that the Bible is not especially explicit about what happens when you die. As a matter of fact, both Jesus and Paul refer to those who have died as ones who have “fallen asleep.” And Paul clearly states that there are those who have “fallen asleep through Jesus” (other translations say “*in Jesus*” or “*in*

him”). While some laughed at Christ when He made this statement of someone laying dead before Him, Christ saw things in spiritual contexts. A body may be dead, but biblically speaking a person has only “fallen asleep” when he or she has exited this world.

The view from the other side

Although it is easy to find references to those who are “asleep,” we must ask what allows us to believe that these people are aware of their existence after death. Two passages primarily point us to this understanding:

- *Luke 16:19-31*. In this passage (which we will study in greater depth in lesson 7), Jesus tells the story of a rich man and a poor man who move to their afterlife destinies. Specifically, the rich man, who is sent to hell, observes his counterpart in heaven. Additionally, he has the presence of mind to think of his brothers still alive on earth.
- *Hebrews 12:1*. This passage speaks of those who have died “through Christ” as the cloud of witnesses that surrounds those who are still living for Christ on earth.

Is this purgatory?

It is important to consider one last question about this matter of an “intermediate heaven” as author Randy Alcorn has called it: is this purgatory? In the Roman Catholic tradition, purgatory is a sort of spiritual holding tank, allowing for a “second chance” before God’s final judgment. We must humbly note that the Bible speaks of no such place and no such opportunity. In fact, in the book of Hebrews, we read that we are “appointed to die” just once, and then we face judgment. The idea of purgatory offering a second chance would eliminate the need to pursue Christ and become right with Him *before* that one death.

BIBLE STUDY

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11. What do you think Paul’s meaning was when he wrote that “whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with him”?

Read Hebrews 9:27-28. If we are appointed to die once and then face judgment, how imperative does our understanding of death and beyond become?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-9. Paul used metaphors of tents and houses and “home” to describe the difference between this life and the life to come. How does he show that the next life is preferable?

1 THESSALONIANS 5

⁹For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

HEBREWS 12

¹Therefore since we also have such a large crowd of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and run with endurance the race that lies before us, ²keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God’s throne.

HEBREWS 9

²⁷And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment— ²⁸so also the Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

2 CORINTHIANS 5

¹For we know that if our earthly house, a tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²And, in fact, we groan in this one, longing to put on our house from heaven, ³since, when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴Indeed, we who are in this tent groan, burdened as we are, because we do not want to be unclothed but clothed, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ⁵And the One who prepared us for this very thing is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment. ⁶Therefore, though we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight—⁸yet we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him.



Death and Life After Death

Lesson Three: Initial and eternal judgment

ALL OF US HAVE BEEN TOLD OF THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS. We probably had this preached to us at first when we went job-hunting as teenagers. We were told by our parents and teachers that we would want to dress cleanly and wear a smile. We would want to use our best English and look the interviewer straight in the eye. And if we were called upon to shake that interviewer's hand, our handshake had better be firm.

All of this is good, but we have also learned in living our lives that first impressions are not always what they seem. Some people are great on an interview and lousy on a job, while some of the most dependable, hardest working people in the world are also the most humble of spirit, reluctant to speak of themselves.

But if God is at all like nearly all of us perceive Him to be, we would agree that He could never be fooled, neither by intent or by accident. If God is all-knowing, as the Bible shows Him to be, He knows us as we are. And if after death we are headed for judgment, we can count on this: God's judgment of us will be based on completely accurate information.

In Scripture, as we will study in this lesson, we find that there are actually two judgments—an initial judgment and an eternal judgment. You might say that this is a bit like the judgment we make of an accused criminal when the crime is reported in the news, followed by the formal judgment that is made by the jury after hearing the evidence. You might say this, except for one key difference: God's initial judgment and His eternal judgment will in every case be the same.

Let's explore the Scriptures:

The initial judgment

In the last lesson, we took a quick look at Hebrews 9:27, which says, "And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this judgment..." In that previous context, we were noting the inevitability of death for us all. Looking at that verse again, we note that after we die, we must face a judgment. Contextually, it is impossible to say whether this refers to the judgment that comes at the moment of death, when we are ushered into the presence of the Lord or instead into a place apart from the Lord. It may instead point to a later judgment, when we will be assigned "permanent status" with Christ for eternity on the new earth or separated from Christ for eternity. What is clear is that the Bible makes no allowances for physical death being the end of our existence; after earthly death, we will go on, either with or apart from Christ.

We also know that the first judgment, wherein those who are in Christ are "at home with the Lord," gives us comforting assurance for our loved ones who have professed belief in Christ and lived for Him. Even those who come late in life (the "eleventh

hour” of Matthew 20:1-16) shall receive the reward of Christ beyond this life. Those who reject Christ in this life, however, will not be required to spend their days after this life with Him. That is, while many want to say that a loving God would not reject people or send them to hell after they die, we can suggest just as well that it is a provision of God’s love that He would not require people who have run from Him all their lives to spend time with Him thereafter. Of course, this emphasizes even more the importance of making a firm, convinced choice while we are alive in the body.

The eternal judgment

Beyond the initial judgment, however, we know that a permanent judgment will be made of all men and women after Christ returns to reign on the earth. This judgment is explained in the book of Revelation. There we read that those whose names were not “found written in the book of life” were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the same lake of fire designed for Satan’s eternal judgment. Thus, those who do not align themselves with Christ are, either on purpose or unintentionally, aligning themselves with Satan for eternity.

Meanwhile, in the next chapter of Revelation, we read that those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life are the only ones who are allowed to enter the eternal city of God.

BIBLE STUDY

Read Revelation 20:11-15 and Revelation 21:22-27.

How do these passages, coupled with the summaries offered above, influence your thinking about the importance of understanding what the Bible says about eternity?

Read Revelation 3:2,5.

These are words spoken by Christ to a group of His believers known as the Church in Sardis. What challenge does He give to them and for what reason? What rewards does He offer to those who respond affirmatively?

REFLECTION

How have our lessons so far caused you to think differently than you have thought in the past about death? Despite the fact that death will remain something of a mystery, do you find that you have more understanding now?

REVELATION 20

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. ¹²I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books.

¹³Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works.

¹⁴Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

REVELATION 21

²¹I did not see a sanctuary in it, because the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its sanctuary. ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God’s glory illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵Each day its gates will never close because it will never be night there. ²⁶They will bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. ²⁷Nothing profane will ever enter it: no one who does what is vile or false, but only those written in the Lamb’s book of life.

REVELATION 3

²Be alert, and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before my God. ³Remember therefore what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent... ⁵The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and his angels.”



Death and Life After Death

Lesson Four: Desire for resurrection

DESIRE. Because of the variance in values from one person to the next, it is one of the most debated traits a human possesses. Certainly, not all *objects* of our desires are equal, and not all are worthy. But does this mean desire itself deserves a bad rap?

Material things that we desire for their own sakes, for instance, invite criticism. When a man desires a new car “for its looks,” his wife is rarely convinced of the need. But should that man desire to give that same car to give to his wife as a gift for her pleasure, suddenly her perspective changes. Now romance or love may be in the offing, and this is another matter altogether. No wonder desire is so confounding!

But on this we can all agree: there are noble desires in the world. And nearly all of us can agree again that the desire to live forever in splendor is such a desire.

To reach this end, however, we need to be resurrected. We are aware that all die. Thus, if we are to live forever, we must be raised. And when we read promises in Scripture that there will be no more suffering or pain in heaven, we have even more impetus to be resurrected. Yet this is a hope that is greatly contested.

The resurrection controversy

For at least one obvious reason, the chance at resurrection is hotly contested: there is no way to prove resurrection empirically. We cannot see to the other side of death to know whether our friends who have passed away are living in another existence. Such a lack of insight (or foresight, as the case may be) leads many people toward atheism, wherein life and death are explained only by what can be scientifically reviewed as opposed to taken on faith.

Yet faith persists, so the question of resurrection has been in play for centuries. *Read Acts 23:6-10.* In this account, Paul was being challenged by a group of Jewish leaders, all of whom stood opposed to the message of Jesus Christ that he was teaching, including Paul’s position that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. But Paul was an able logician, a former Jewish leader himself. He knew that the council was divided in its belief in resurrection, so he threw the meeting into turmoil by mentioning that he was being held on the basis of his belief in resurrection. The council members on both sides—the Pharisees and the Sadducees—arose in argumentation. It was actually a rather funny scene! Yet it points to the long-running nature of the debate when even some religious leaders did not want to allow for the possibility of resurrection.

With this in mind, we understand that some who study this matter will wrestle the possibility of resurrection to a greater degree than others. But what these tentative friends cannot deny is the desire for resurrection that rests in others.

The desire expressed

Much of the New Testament consists of letters from one of Christ's leading followers (an apostle) to the believers in the scattered churches and homes throughout the Roman Empire. One of the least likely places that faith in Christ took hold was in the ancient city of Corinth, a cosmopolitan crossroads similar to modern-day San Francisco or New York. With a thousand worldly options at hand, it is surprising that any would express interest in Christ. But even among them, there was the yearning for eternity.

So to these people Paul wrote frankly of resurrection, as we shall see both in this lesson and the next. *Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.* We noticed in lesson two how Paul used the metaphor of the tent to describe the bodily house in which we now reside. See here how he went on to express his desire for his eternal dwelling—common to that of other believers—as a groaning.

This is no fanciful yearning, then, but rather a deeply felt desire. Paul firmly believed that the life to come was infinitely preferable to the life he was living. For one thing, in his advancing age, his body was breaking down. But as his body had been declining, his spirit had been advancing. His eagerness to join Christ, the Savior he had formerly opposed with murderous threats and actions, was at a pitch. It was time, Paul was saying, to “go home.”

BIBLE STUDY

In reading Acts 23, you are likely reminded of a discussion, perhaps tense, with others about spiritual matters? What stands were you taking and how were they opposed? How did this tension contribute to your further thinking about the matter?

To what extent do you identify with Paul in his words to the Corinthians about his desire for the next life? Do you feel as he did, trapped in a limited body, waiting for the next?

Read 1 Peter 1:3-5.

According to this passage, when will the fullness of salvation be revealed? How did Peter describe the coming inheritance, and how does this description contribute to the compelling nature of hope for resurrection?

REFLECTION

After working through this lesson, where would you say you are? Do you desire resurrection? If so, what drives this desire? If not, what do you think keeps you from the desire?

ACTS 23

⁶When Paul realized that one part of them were Sadducees and the other part were Pharisees, he cried out in the Sanhedrin, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees! I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead!”

⁷When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, and no angel or spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all.

⁹The shouting grew loud, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party got up and argued vehemently: “We find nothing evil in this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” ¹⁰When the dispute became violent, the commander feared that Paul might be torn apart by them and ordered the troops to go down, rescue him from them, and bring him into the barracks.

2 CORINTHIANS 5

¹For we know that if our earthly house, a tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²And, in fact, we groan in this one, longing to put on our house from heaven, ³since, when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴Indeed, we who are in this tent groan, burdened as we are, because we do not want to be unclothed but clothed, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ⁵And the One who prepared us for this very thing is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment.

1 PETER 1

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.



Death and Life After Death

Lesson Five: Resurrection enabled

AS IN NEARLY EVERY ENDEAVOR, many people take up golf with keen interest, hoping that the game will provide for them a meaningful social pastime for years to come, only to toss their efforts aside when progress does not materialize. Their hopes have been dashed (or required more than they had imagined); the joy of the experience never happened for them. Maybe they moved on to something else; maybe not.

Hope, though important in our lives, does have a knack for going unrealized a painful bit of the time. Romantic relationships leading to eagerly anticipated marriages disintegrate into unmet expectations and then sad divorce. Thousands of dollars saved to launch the can't-miss business are lost through mismanagement or economic circumstances. From the lowest level of society to the highest rungs of the ladder, people cling to hope. Only sometimes do they realize it.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that when Christian teachers begin to speak of the resurrection of Christ—and our own possible resurrection unto eternity—that those who would hear them hesitate.

Is this all too good to be true? Is it only a myth passed on by those whose reputations were at stake in the First Century? Can anyone really come back from the dead?

If you have ever wrestled with questions like these, you are wrestling with the most important questions in the whole world. And we're not alone in saying so. Clear back at the beginning when the apostle Paul was addressing these same questions with the earliest followers of Christ, he made certain that they understood that the resurrection was the very essence of their faith: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The original Christian theologian was explaining it quite carefully. If Christ did not have power over death, then He did not possess the requisite power to save us—not from our sins and not for eternity. But if Christ was resurrected, then He does have that power and our own resurrections—if we are in Him—are enabled.

THE RESURRECTION CHALLENGED

Interestingly, those who challenge the Christian faith do so right at this heart of the faith. In fact, the Jewish leaders who had called for Jesus' death knew that He had spoken of His resurrection on the third day, so they called upon Pontius Pilate, who had released Jesus to these leaders to be crucified, to seal the tomb against those who would rob the grave of Christ to make a case that He had been resurrected. (Of course, when Jesus arose these first disciples were in hiding from the Jewish leaders they feared would kill them, too. They were as surprised as anyone that Jesus actually rose from the dead.)

Some have made the case through the years, that Jesus only swooned, that His death was not complete. Thus He was able to rise from His grave, as He was never actually dead. This point is easily refuted by three basic arguments: (1) when Jesus was pierced on the cross by the soldier's spear, blood and water flowed, a combination indicative of death; (2) a man who had suffered a Roman scourging (39 lashes with a 'cat of nine tails') and crucifixion could not have gone untreated then recovered to walk away from his bed in 48 hours; and (3) had He been able to recover from such massive injuries, He still would not have been able to roll away the huge stone that locked Him in His tomb.

Others have suggested that the body was stolen by Jesus' close followers and that the accounts of His resurrection were only tales disseminated by those followers. However, we would be hard-pressed to imagine that the Roman guards assigned to protect the sealed tomb would have been overtaken by this small band. And it is equally hard to posit that all but one of these chief followers (the disciples-turned apostles) would have willingly gone to their martyrs' deaths for the sake of a lie (the one who was not put to death, John, was exiled for his faith).

The arguments for the truth of Jesus' resurrection have been more thoroughly discussed in other volumes (see principally the classic readable volume *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell or *The Son Rises* by William Lane Craig). Our thrust here is not to offer such an apologetic argument, but to present the biblical case that your hope for resurrection has been enabled by Jesus Christ. In conquering death, Paul wrote, He conquered "the last enemy." If this is the case, all other enemies of worth have also been rendered dead before Him. Eternal life is available, and it is available through Jesus Christ.

BIBLE STUDY

Read Matthew 27:62-63. How do the facts in this passage point to the difficulty of Christ's physical resurrection?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-26. What worth does Paul see in the resurrection of Jesus? Why do you think Paul wrote (in verse 19) that a faith for this life only is pitiable? What are your thoughts about Christ's enemies, including death—what pleases you or makes you uncomfortable about this discussion?

MATTHEW 27

⁶²The next day, which followed the preparation day, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, "Sir, we remember that while this deceiver was still alive, He said, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴Therefore give orders that the tomb be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, His disciples may come, steal Him, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead.' Then the last deception will be worse than the first."

⁶⁵"You have a guard of soldiers," Pilate told them. "Go and make it as secure as you know how." ⁶⁶Then they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting the guard.

1 CORINTHIANS 15

¹²Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, "There is no resurrection of the dead"? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without foundation, and so is your faith. ¹⁵In addition, we are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified about God that He raised up Christ—whom He did not raise up if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Therefore those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. ¹⁹If we have placed our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.

²⁰But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. ²²For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at His coming, the people of Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when He abolishes all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be abolished is death.



Death and Life After Death

Lesson Six: The New Heaven and the New Earth

IT'S HEAVEN!" This simple expression has been used for ages by those who see a landscape or feast on a meal or experience some other aspect of life that they consider to be as wonderful as possible.

But according to the Bible, heaven is not just a state of mind. Heaven is an actual place set aside for those who have entrusted their lives and their souls to Christ. There are some common misconceptions about heaven, but we'll set those aside for now and explore what Scripture teaches us about heaven.

Heaven and the heavens

The Bible establishes a difference between "heaven" and "the heavens." Let's explore the definitions of those two terms. In the opening verse of Scripture, Genesis 1:1, we read: "In the beginning God created *the heavens* and the earth." This plural terminology points to the skies above us and the universe beyond us. "The heavens" are comprised of outer space and its many components—stars, planets, moons, asteroids, comets. "Heaven," on the other hand, is the dwelling place of God. The location and concreteness of this place are unknown, but the key element of heaven (God Himself) makes heaven what it is. In Matthew 5:34, Jesus taught that, specifically, heaven is God's throne.

Who will go to heaven?

As we discussed in lesson three, those who go to heaven will be those who have aligned themselves with Jesus Christ, relying on Him as the mediator between us and God who brings salvation. Jesus Himself said, "No man comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). If this is true and heaven is the Father's throne, then no one can possibly get to heaven without Christ.

How long will heaven last?

While heaven will forever be God's home, it will not be the eternal home of those whose names are written in the book of life. The book of Revelation points to the fact that both a new heaven and a new earth will be established. God will take what is old and re-establish it as He intended it to be. Those who have chosen Christ will live on this new earth for eternity.

What will the eternal heaven be like?

The eternal heaven, though utterly new, is no more described for us in Scripture than the present heaven. We know that it is the place designed for God's own dwelling, but we know as well that God will dwell with His people (Revelation 21:3).

What will the eternal earth be like?

The new earth is described in Scripture. To begin, it will replace the old earth, if not in complete replacement, then in complete regeneration. Earth as we know it will in

its very elements “burn and be dissolved” (2 Peter 3:10). This may suggest only a destruction like the flood of Noah, where the surface of the earth is rebuilt through cataclysm, but the earth itself remains. This seems to be the case when we read of the hope of creative regeneration as described in Romans 8. Either way, the new earth will feature:

- a stunning new Jerusalem as its capital city
- the immediate presence of God
- the absence of sorrow, pain, and death
- continuing sustenance from the spring of living water

Those who are interested in the glorious details of the new earth should read Revelation 21:9-22:5, which describes the new Jerusalem in its splendor, including the extensive inclusion of gold and precious jewels.

BIBLE STUDY

Read Revelation 21:1-7.

What aspects of the new earth catch your eye? How does knowing what is in store for us increase our hope in Christ and commitment to Him? What grief and pain are you looking forward to leaving behind when you move into eternity on the new earth?

Read Romans 8:18-25.

How do the words of Paul also fill us with hope? Paul spoke of the creation's bondage—what do you think this might include, and how does it spill over into our own lives? What do you think of Paul's tension-filled picture, “we eagerly wait for it with patience”?

REFLECTION

If the hope that we have is still unseen, even these descriptive passages still require faith from us—faith in the God who can provide their fulfillment through His Son. Have you reached this point of faith in your own life? If so, how are you preparing now to spend eternity with Christ? If not, does the hope of a wondrous heaven play any part in moving you toward faith in Christ, or are you looking for something different?

REVELATION 21

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea existed no longer. ²I also saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

³Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look! God's dwelling 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. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away.

⁵Then the One seated on the throne said, “Look! I am making everything new.” He also said, “Write, because these words are faithful and true.” ⁶And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give to the thirsty from the spring of living water as a gift. ⁷The victor will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be My son.

ROMANS 8

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it—in the hope ²¹that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children. ²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. ²³And not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.



Death and Life After Death

Lesson Seven: Hell

IN GOLF, THERE IS ONE WORD ESPECIALLY THAT IS RARELY SPOKEN. It labels golf's most dreaded shot, the one the squirts off the hosel at a severely comical angle. But it's not so much superstition that keeps us from saying the word. It's conjuring up the nasty image of that shot.

Almost certainly, it is a frightening picture like this that keeps most people from broaching the subject of hell. But no study of life after death as it is described in the Bible would be inclusive without mention of hell, to which Jesus Himself referred far more frequently than He made reference to heaven.

Pictures of hell

Let's begin with a basic concept of hell, a picture that presents itself frequently in the New Testament. In Matthew 5:22, Jesus said, "But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Fool!' will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You moron!' will be subject to hellfire." Hell, as it is presented in Scripture, almost always carries with it this idea of fire.

Additionally, Jesus often spoke of hell as a place of darkness and emotional pain. Consider Matthew 22:13, where Jesus told the parable of talents, and pronounced this judgment on the faithless servant: "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

With pictures like these before us, it is no wonder that many readers of Scripture would prefer not to study hell, and why others still go so far as to dismiss these passages as inappropriate (and therefore inaccurate) in portraying a loving God. The error in this interpretation is that God chooses hell for men and women; rather, the Bible teaches, men and women choose hell for themselves in their unbelief.

The purpose of hell

It is a perfectly fair question to ask why a God of love and compassion would ever create a place as horrifying as hell in the first place. The answer is available to us in Revelation 20. In the prophetic progression shown there, the Devil (Satan), the one who deceives people, is first thrown into the lake of fire: "The Devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). Only later, after they are judged, are men and women sent to hell: "And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

Hell was not created to punish men and women. It was created to punish Satan. However, for those who choose to follow Satan, their destiny will be the same as his.

“But I did not follow Satan”

It is difficult for some who do not believe in God to understand that they are instead following Satan. “I am no Satanist,” they argue. “Why should I be sent to hell?” But the Bible offers no middle ground in this matter. Neither does eternity. Nowhere in Scripture do we find evidence of an eternal place in-between heaven and hell (nor do we find evidence that those not going to heaven are simply left to rot or dramatically annihilated by God). In every account of judgment, those judged are sent either to reward in heaven or despair in hell. By not aligning yourself with God, you may not think you are aligning yourself with Satan, but you are setting yourself up for the same eternal destiny that he will suffer.

Separation and despair

Even after an awareness of judgment and hell in this way, there are those who cannot fit hell into their concept of “a loving God.” But here is an important question: Would a loving God require you to spend eternity with someone you have spent your whole life avoiding? That is, if you have run from God your whole life, you have sent Him a pretty clear message: that if He loves you, He will continue to give you what you want in eternity.

Of course, what this means is that you will spend eternity separated from God. Many figure that this will be great—more time living it up with their friends. But the pictures of hell that Scripture provides allow for no such pipe dreams. Hell is a place of torment, loneliness, and despair. Without God, what else could it be?

BIBLE STUDY

Read Luke 16:19-31. What does this teaching of Jesus tell us about the conditions in hell? What does it tell us about the gap between heaven and hell?

Read Matthew 11:23-24. For what error were the people of Capernaum going to be judged? How does this confirm what you already know about the importance of belief in Christ?

REFLECTION

Has your understanding of hell changed because of the Scripture presented in this lesson? How do you see hell differently now?

LUKE 16

¹⁹There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, feasting lavishly every day. ²⁰But a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, was left at his gate. ²¹He longed to be filled with what fell from the rich man's table, but instead the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³And being in torment in Hades, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side. ²⁴Father Abraham! he called out, 'Have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame!'

²⁵'Son,' Abraham said, 'remember that during your life you received your good things, just as Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, while you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to pass over from here to you cannot; neither can those from there cross over to us.'

²⁷'Father,' he said, 'then I beg you to send him to my father's house—²⁸because I have five brothers—to warn them, so they won't also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'

³⁰'No, father Abraham,' he said. 'But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹But he told him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"

MATTHEW 11

²³And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. ²⁴But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."



Death and Life After Death

Lesson Eight: In review—what do I know about death and life after death?

NEARLY EVERY MAN AND WOMAN, at some point in their life, must confront their questions about death and the afterlife. It simply does not work to say to oneself, “I’ll take care of it when I get there.” The lessons in this study were intended to reveal what the Bible teaches about death, resurrection, and eternal existence.

Take some time now to review the key aspects of these lessons, making sure that you are clear on the Bible’s presentation of these issues, which certainly are invaluable in conducting one’s spiritual due diligence.

Four views of death

Four views of death are commonly held: death is the end of our existence (we possess no soul), we are reincarnated to live again on this earth according to the outworkings of our present life, we are destined for heaven or hell.

Of these views of death, which held the most sway with you when you began this study? Which holds the most sway for you now? What specifically has changed or furthered your thinking?

Two stages of judgment

The Bible teaches that upon bodily death, we will either enter the presence of the Lord or not. Later, we will be judged and assigned to our eternal existence.

How does the understanding of judgment add to the urgency of spiritual due diligence in this life?

Resurrection

The Bible, especially the New Testament, speaks frequently and boldly of resurrec-

tion. Chiefly, there is the matter of Jesus Christ's resurrection after His crucifixion at the hands of Roman soldiers. Beyond this, those who choose to follow Christ do so because of the similar hope they have for their own bodily resurrection unto eternal life with Christ.

In what ways does the Bible reveal to us the importance of the resurrection, both as something we desire within us and as something we find enabled through Christ?

Heaven and the New Earth

The Bible is not too revealing about the make-up of heaven, but its descriptions of the new earth—which will be the eternal dwelling place of those whose names are written in Christ's book of life—are quite promising.

What are some specific aspects of the new earth? How are these appealing compared to the world we live in now?

Hell

While the notion of hell turns many people away from religion, Jesus Christ did not avoid the topic, explaining its place in eternal judgment.

How are some specific aspects of hell revealed in Scripture?

WHAT'S NEXT?

This is the fifth in a series of studies on spiritual due diligence. The complete set of studies allow for a thorough investigation of some of a number of spiritual matters, including:

- The need for due diligence
- The nature of man
- The nature of God
- The nature of Scripture
- The invisible realm
- End times

The sixth study in the series, which you may explore next, is "Christ and other religions." The history of God's people, particularly as laid out in the Old Testament, frequently juxtaposes them to their foreign counterparts who worshipped other gods. In the same way, other religions and belief systems exist today. In a culture that suggests that all religions are essentially the same, it is important for us to understand key differences between these religions and faith in Jesus Christ as presented in the Bible.

Our hope throughout these studies is that you will gain a greater and greater sense of who God is and how He promises to interact with you as taught in the Bible. If this occurs, you will have accomplished what many have not—you will have conducted your spiritual due diligence.

What you decide to do with the knowledge you gain is surely a matter between you and God. But we also believe that God has designed us to live in community with other people. Therefore, it is also important that you discuss what you are thinking with others who are also considering the claims of Scripture, be they "seasoned veterans" of Bible study or quite new at the task. If you are not in a study with others at this time and would like to be, call Links Players at 800-90-LINKS and we'll offer some suggestions for groups who might encourage you in your thought and discussion.



Spiritual Due Diligence

Leading a group study

IT CAN BE DAUNTING TO BE CALLED ON to teach the Word of God. Indeed, many potential leaders have told us that while they are capable of and eager to bring a group together, or to act as host, teaching is an entirely different level, one for which they do not consider themselves prepared.

Others don't feel so much weight when it comes to teaching. They know their Bibles well, or they're naturals when speaking to a crowd.

It is, then, the precise goal of the structure of these Links Players Bible studies to provide a fully operational Bible study for those teachers who need much assistance and yet a format that leaves room for experienced leaders to bring their own learning to the table.

The lessons include these features:

- An **introduction** providing connections for the reader between what they see and know in their lives and the topic of study at hand. While we are primarily a sports-minded ministry aimed at golfers, our materials are used by many non-golfers. Therefore, these introductions use examples from more common experiences, as well as those tied to athletics.
- A **narrative** progressing through the main ideas of the lesson. Some leaders may choose to read this with the participants verbatim (or nearly so). Others may use it as a general guide for presenting the material.
- A **Bible study**, drawing from particular specific Scripture passages. These passages are included in the light green bar on the right side of each lesson. You may find that you wish to provide the broader context for these passages from your own Bible. You may also wish to look up these passages in other translations to see how the alternate wording can assist in understanding.
- A **reflection**, which challenges participants to make some mental connections and decisions about what they have studied.
- Some of the lessons also include **further thoughts**, which are presented in the dark green bars on the right of the lesson. Again, these are intended only to offer the basic information; your own study and knowledge can help expand these ideas.

In addition to these studies, as your group grows together, you will want to include opportunity for prayer among the participants. Even with a study like this one, which may include a number of participants who are just beginning their investigations of God, Christ, and the Bible, prayer is often an open door for those who are truly seeking God. Offering to pray for personal and family needs is often the best way to begin this practice.

We also strongly encourage leaders to stay in touch with participants throughout the week, simply making themselves available for further questions and discussion.

In the same way, we are available to talk to group leaders about their experiences and to answer questions regarding the studies. You may call us Monday-Friday at 800-90-LINKS.

What is a Links Player?



Spiritual
Due Diligence

THE LINKS PLAYERS BIBLE STUDIES, including "Death and Life After Death," are produced by Links Players International, a Christian sports ministry aimed primarily at golfers. The good news is that sometimes in that aim, we miss! That is, there are plenty of non-golfers who have found benefit in the Daily Devotional, Bible studies, and magazines we have published through the years.

There is a reason for this, of course, and that is because truth transcends our human experiences. For instance, while we often hate to admit it, in many ways we cannot improve on how the previous generation lived. Technologically, we may have made some nifty advancements, but in terms of human interaction—and, we believe, humans interacting with God—we don't make any real progress through time.

Therefore, whether or not you are a golfer, we think that the chief principles we teach and learn can apply to you. A Links Player tries, by the power of God's Holy Spirit in them, to live according to the following principles:

LOVE GOD AND OTHERS. When asked the greatest commandment of Scripture, Jesus replied, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" He went on to say, "*This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*" (Matthew 22:37-39)

INTEGRATE CHRIST'S REIGN AND INTEGRITY INTO ALL OF LIFE. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the crowds, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (the necessities of life) will be provided for you.*" (Matthew 6:33)

NETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST. When the followers of Jesus met together after His ascension into heaven, it was said of them: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.* (Acts 2:42)

KINDLE COMPASSION FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY. Jesus told a parable of the eventual judgment of each man and woman by God. In it, He provided insight into the standards of this judgment: "*The King will answer them, 'I assure you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'*" (Matthew 25:40)

SHARE CHRIST. One of the chief of Christ's apostles, Paul, wrote to the church at Corinth this reminder: *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing through us, we plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God."* (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Today, you may find that you have reason to be reconciled to God and to become a Links Player yourself. If so, you need to tell God in prayer: *Heavenly Father, Through Your Son Jesus Christ, I am prepared to offer my life to You. Please take it and all of my sin, and begin to renew me as Your ambassador. Amen.* If you have prayed that prayer, you will also want to share your decision with a trusted friend who knows Christ. This way they can encourage and lead you in your new walk of faith. It will be a challenge worth every step!

