

BASIC BIBLE TRUTHS

Life after Death

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH

When you have read this article you will know the answers to these questions:

1. Why is the view of Jesus Christ about life after death so important?
2. What is the Bible hope for a future life?
3. When will the chosen ones be with Jesus Christ?
4. What is "the resurrection of the dead"?
5. What is "the judgement"?
6. What does the Bible say about "immortal souls"?
7. How do future events fit together?

1. WHY IS THE VIEW OF JESUS CHRIST ABOUT LIFE AFTER DEATH SO IMPORTANT?

The world has had many leaders, some political and others religious. Of all the great leaders, Jesus Christ is the only one who has been raised from the dead. Hundreds of people saw him after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). This makes Jesus unique. Because he has experienced life after death, he is the best one to tell us about it. If we are wise, we shall listen to what he has to say.

2. WHAT IS THE BIBLE HOPE FOR A FUTURE LIFE?

A soldier once prayed before a battle: "Oh God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul." How sad, that when he may have been about to die, he did not know anything about a future life. Yet many people today are just like that soldier. They do not know what to expect when they die. The Bible hope is centred on three great truths:

- (a) The return of Christ from heaven;
- (b) The resurrection of the dead; and
- (c) The establishment of the Kingdom of

God on earth by His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus himself states these three great truths when he says, "When the Son of man (Jesus) comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory" (Matthew 25:31); and, "the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and shall come forth" (John 5:28,29). Knowing about this hope will help us to understand what the Bible teaches about life after death.

3. WHEN WILL THE CHOSEN ONES BE WITH JESUS CHRIST?

Jesus makes this very clear to us. He says, "The Son of man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he will reward each according to his works" (Matthew 16:27). Notice the order of events: (a) Jesus shall come in glory, and afterwards... (b) He shall reward. First of all he comes, and then he rewards. As Jesus has not yet come back to the earth, he cannot already have rewarded anyone. Jesus also said, "You shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). As the resurrection has not yet taken place, nobody can already have been rewarded. The return of Jesus to the earth, the resurrection of the dead and the reward of everlasting life to faithful followers, are all still in the future.

4. WHAT IS "THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD"?

Jesus spoke of "Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob" being in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, when the dead are raised, they will be recognisable as people. They will have bodies, just like Jesus did when God raised him from the dead. After his resurrection, Jesus could be seen and touched (John 21:27). He was not a spirit without a body. The Apostle Paul's promise was that Jesus "will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). So, just like Jesus, those given everlasting life will have immortal bodies. The resurrection of the dead will take place when Jesus returns to establish God's Kingdom on earth. Paul tells us: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive ... Christ the first fruits; afterward those who are Christ's at his coming" (1 Corinthians 15:22,23). Until that day, for those who have died, death is like a sleep (1 Corinthians 15:51; Psalm 6:5). Their next waking moment will be the resurrection. Time has no meaning in the grave. The Bible hope of the

resurrection was well expressed by Martha long ago. Speaking of her brother Lazarus, she said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24).

5. WHAT IS "THE JUDGEMENT"?

The Bible makes one thing clear from the beginning. God has given us the freedom either to choose His way or to He tells us what will happen if (a) we reject it. serve Him, or (b) we reject Him. People who know about God, and are therefore answerable to Him, "must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). To those who have served him, Jesus will say, "'Come you blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). Those who "do not obey the truth" (Romans 2:8) will not be in God's kingdom. Jesus confirms these teachings. He says that those who have "done good" will be blessed with "the resurrection of life", and those who have "done evil" will suffer "the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:29).

6. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT "IMMORTAL SOULS"?

The Bible says nothing about "immortal souls". Yes, that's right, absolutely nothing. Although "immortal(ity)" and "soul" occur, the words "immortal soul" never appear together anywhere in the Bible. The word "soul" (Hebrew, nephesh in the Old Testament, and Greek psuche in the New Testament) refers to: (a) Life: for example, 1 Samuel 22:23: "he that seeks my life, seeks your life"; and (b) A living being (human or animal): for example, Genesis 46:18: "These she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen persons (AV, souls)". Sailors use the word "soul" in the same way. When they are in danger at sea, they send out an "SOS" signal. This means "Save Our Souls". It is a cry for help, asking someone to save their natural lives. In the Bible, we find that a soul (Nephesh, person) can:

- (a) Touch (Leviticus 5:2)
- (b) Eat (Leviticus 7:20)
- (c) Sin (Leviticus 5:15)
- (d) Die (Joshua 11:11; Ezekiel 18:4)

The idea that people have immortal souls came from Greek philosophers. This idea is not correct. It is not supported by the Bible. Jesus always teaches that he is coming from heaven, not that we are going to him.

7. HOW DO FUTURE EVENTS FIT TOGETHER?

We can summarise Bible teaching about the future like this: (a) When we die, we are simply dead, with no knowledge of anything. It is like a long sleep, until— (b) Jesus Christ returns to the earth, to (c) Raise the dead, and (d) Judge the responsible living and dead, then finally (e) Establish God's Kingdom on earth. Daniel tells us: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). In which group will you be? Do you have the wisdom to follow Jesus now? If you do, you will live for ever with him when he comes in glory to establish God's Kingdom. Yes, there is life after death. May this wonderful promise touch your heart, and encourage you to serve God now, because "those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

