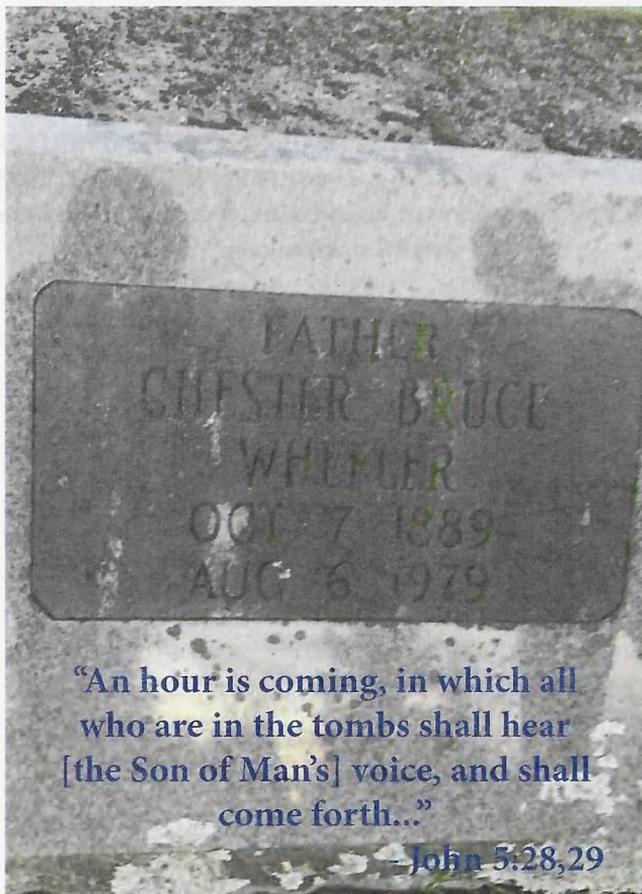


What Happens when you die?



by Jay Wilson

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**[“Immersion” and its derivatives are often used
as clarification of “baptism” and its derivatives.]**

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE?

FEAR OF DEATH

The fear of death has always plagued mankind. And the modern, sophisticated American is no different from the most primitive peoples of the earth. His mind softened from an overdose of TV and entertainment, the modern sophisticated American hurriedly scours his online news sources or social media posts, frantically searching for interviews with those who have died and come back to life.

From the most primitive of people to the modern sophisticated American, the fear of death holds grim sway, leaving its victims quivering skeletons long before they are lowered into the ground or meet the blast of the cremation ovens. Hence this observation from the inspired stylus of the author of Hebrews: They are children of flesh and blood “who through fear of death [are] subject to slavery all their lives” (Hebrews 2:14,15).

How about you, friend? Does fear of cancer cause your mind to melt? Does the fear of a heart attack give you preliminary thrombosis? Does the possible loss of your job because of your political and religious convictions cause your stomach to agitate? Does the possible loss of business due to taking a strong stand for Christ and His church cause your bone marrow to shrivel?

How about you, preacher? Does the possible loss of collection revenues prevent you from preaching about sin? Does the possible defection of more than half of your congregation where you preach cause you to pussyfoot instead of proclaim? Does the fear of earthly authorities cause you to compromise?

If your answer to any of these questions is YES, then, brother, you are a slave of the devil who has kept you in bondage through your fear of death.

Drop your *National Enquirer*. Forget the ignorant comments on social media. Quit paying attention to those interviews with those silly deceived souls who have met the Outcast Angel — clothed deceptively as an angel of light — in the shadowy realms of near-death. Ignore the testimony of those pitiful souls who are bound for the fires of hell and the immediate torment of Hades, who have been deceived into thinking that everything on the other side of death is Paradise for everyone.

Pick up your Bible. Read there the testimony of the only One who has been to the other side of death, and has come back to tell us about it. Listen to Him who conquered death, not only for Himself, but for all who would obey His gospel!

NETHER-NETHER LAND

Of the Messiah it was written: “For You will not abandon My soul to *Sheol*; neither will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay” (Psalm 16:10). What is this “Sheol”?

“Sheol” is the Hebrew word used to describe the realm of the grave, and what lies beyond. Sheol describes the nether world, where the spirit and soul of the individual have left the body to moulder, and passed into the world of “the unseen”. Concerning the passing of soul and spirit from earth, James said, “the body without the spirit is dead” (James 2:26).

On the day of Pentecost, 30 AD, just 50 days following Jesus’ resurrection from

the dead, and just 10 days following His ascension into heaven, the apostle Peter stood in the temple and proclaimed for the first time the gospel of Jesus Christ. Proving that Jesus was crucified was no problem; proving that He was resurrected required more effort. Since he was preaching to a Jewish audience, Peter quoted the Old Testament scriptures in order to back his own eyewitness account of the resurrection. He needed a “Thus says the Lord,” to verify his observations to an intelligent, thinking audience. One of those which Peter quoted was Psalm 16:10: “You will not abandon My soul to Hades, nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay” (Acts 2:27).

Instead of calling Sheol by its Hebrew name, Peter is reported as calling the nether world by its Greek name, “Hades”.

Hades is not the lake of fire that is called “hell”. Hell is the Greek word “*Ge-henna*”, deriving its name from the garbage dump on the south side of Jerusalem. “Hades” was the word used to describe the general realm containing the spirits and souls of the dead.

In Luke 16, Jesus told the true story of a rich man who died, and of Lazarus — a beggar who used to get the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table — who also died. Of the rich man it is written: “And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.’ ” (Luke 16:23,24).

The bad part of Hades is obviously not some wonderful place, where the soul feels vibrantly free, as some would have you believe the nether world to be. It is a place of **torment!**

How did Jesus know? He created Hades. He is the One who knows about the spiritual realm, as He even pointed out during the days of His earthly sojourn, “No one has ascended to heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man” (John 3:13). That statement was prefaced with this poignant comment from the Lord, “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12). He is just trying to get us to understand the way it is.

Lazarus made it into the comfortable spot in Sheol. “But Abraham said [to the rich man in Hades], ‘Child, remember that during your life you received good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’ ” (Luke 16:25,26).

Lazarus was in comfort; the rich man was in agony in the place generally termed “Hades.” It is significant that Jesus told the thief on the cross: “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Since Jesus went to Hades, it is clear that the name for the good part of Hades is “Paradise.”

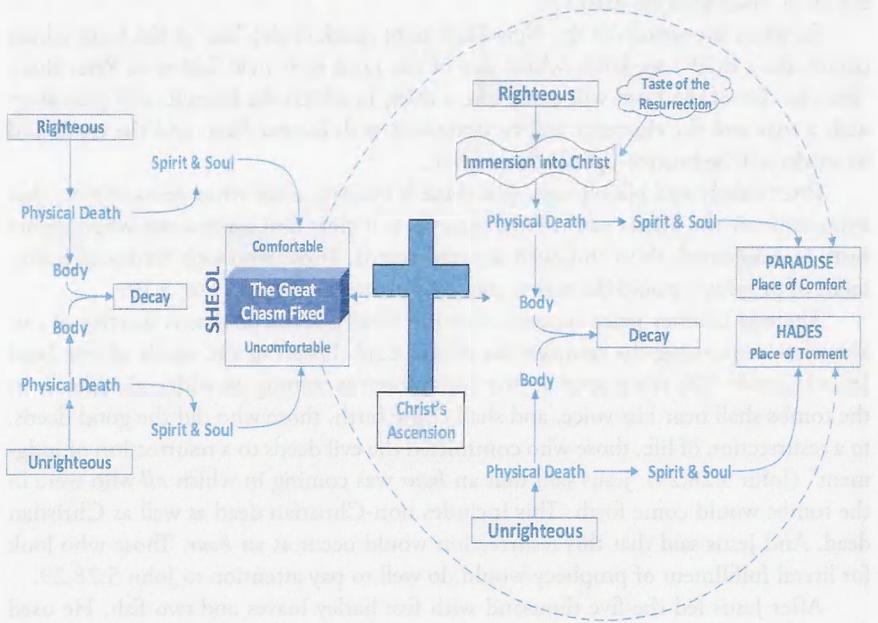
At the time of Jesus’ death, then, Hades was “down.” Jacob, upon learning what he perceived to be the death of his favorite son Joseph, commented, “Surely I will go *down* to Sheol in mourning for my son” (Genesis 37:35). Since we know that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are in the same locale, we know that “Abraham’s bosom” was

“down.” The “Paradise” to which Jesus and the thief entered was therefore “down.” The apostle confirmed this point in these words: “Now this expression, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also had *descended* into the lower parts of the earth?” (Ephesians 4:9).

The scripture then speaks of Christ’s ascension (not multiple “ascensions”). The writer of Hebrews is emphatic that Christ “entered the holy place *once* for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). The timing of this occurrence was when Jesus led the apostles to the Mount of Olives forty days after His bodily resurrection from the dead. The angels who appeared to the apostles as they were watching Jesus disappear into the cloud thus described the Lord as “this Jesus, who has been taken up into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

What happened when He ascended? The apostle Paul loosely quotes the Old Testament Psalm, “When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8). Those “captives” were the souls which otherwise would have been trapped in Hades (albeit the “good part”) forever, which He took upward with Him when He ascended. “I am,” said Jesus, as recorded by the apostle John in Revelation’s first vision, “the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Revelation 1:18). The Lord Jesus used those “keys” to open the way for the souls that were “down” to now be lifted up.

The apostle Paul had a “near death” experience, to which he referred in exhorting the brethren in Corinth. “I know a man in Christ,” stated he, speaking somewhat obliquely so as not to draw too much attention to himself, “who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a man was *caught up* to the third heaven” (II Corinthians 12:3). As he



rephrased the point, he stated it this way, "And I know how such a man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows — was *caught up into Paradise*, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak" (II Corinthians 12:4). Paradise, which used to be *down* prior to Jesus' ascension, is now *up*!

No man, said the apostle Paul, is permitted to speak of things which he has seen in the nether world. We have the writings of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles — hear them, and live!

Paradise is the place where the Christian waits for the resurrection from the dead, apart from his body. Paul wrote: "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (II Corinthians 5:8).

How can you gain Paradise? "Repent, and let each of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

"You mean that when I die," someone asks. "I don't go to heaven or hell right away?"

"That's right," the answer comes. "When you die you go to Paradise or Hades, depending on whether you have obeyed the gospel or not."

"When do I go to heaven or hell?"

The New Testament writings often speak of "the day of the Lord which comes like a thief in the night" (I Thessalonians 5:2). On this day of the Lord which comes like a thief, we are informed that the dead in Christ shall rise, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:16,17).

So when the writers of the New Testament speak of the "day of the Lord which comes like a thief" we know which day of the Lord is in view. Listen to Peter then: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up" (II Peter 3:10).

Peter clearly and plainly says that there is coming a *day* when Jesus returns that will terminate the planet earth. Furthermore, it is clear that on that *day* when planet earth is terminated, those in Christ are resurrected. Those who look for literal fulfillment of prophecy would do well to pay careful attention to II Peter 3:10.

There is another plain statement in the New Testament that is worthy of our attention concerning the resurrection of the dead. Listen to the words of our Lord Jesus Himself: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds, to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28,29). Jesus said that an *hour* was coming in which *all* who were in the tombs would come forth. This includes non-Christian dead as well as Christian dead. And Jesus said that this resurrection would occur at an *hour*. Those who look for literal fulfillment of prophecy would do well to pay attention to John 5:28,29.

After Jesus fed the five thousand with five barley loaves and two fish, He used

that event as a springboard to teaching about the Lord's Supper and participation in His body and blood. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves." After making this blockbuster statement to the Jews congregated in the synagogue at Capernaum, He superadded, "He who eats My flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the last day" (John 6:53,54). Those who are thus participating are Christians; the key point here in this discussion is that those who are true disciples of the Lord will be raised up on the last day! When the last trumpet blows and the Lord descends with a shout, all the dead will be raised, and this will be the last day; there is not a seven-year tribulation period plus another one thousand years after this.

The apostle Paul stated that he believed "everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 24:14,15). But there is an order to the "resurrection." When Jesus spoke of the events connected with the end of time, He emphasized that there was an order in which the newly resurrected ascend for Judgment. "So it will be at the end of the age," He informed us, "the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:49). He made a very similar point in another parable: "The Son of Man will send forth His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:41-43). Even if they are inside the church, having been properly immersed into Christ, but are living a corrupt or lukewarm lifestyle, they will be taken first with the rest of the wicked. As the Lord looked back on the days of the Flood of Noah's time, He spoke of the wicked in these terms: "they did not understand until the Flood came and took them all away" (Matthew 24:39). Who was "taken," and who was "left?" Clearly the "bad guys" were "taken," and Noah and family, the "good guys," were "left." "So shall the coming of the Son of Man be," noted Jesus Himself. "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left" (Matthew 24:39-41). It will be the "bad guys and bad girls" who will be "taken," and it will be the "good guys and good girls" who will be "left."

This is verified in the careful wording of the apostle Paul as he answers some questions about the resurrection of the dead and the Lord's second coming. In describing Jesus' return, he notes, "we who are alive, and *remain* until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep" (I Thessalonians 4:15). Similarly, he adds, "Then we who are alive and *remain* shall be caught up together with them in the clouds" (I Thessalonians 4:17). The reason the faithful saints are described as "those who are alive and remain" is because there will be many who will be physically alive at Jesus' second coming, but who will be taken with the wicked and will therefore not be there when the saints are to be taken up; they will not *remain*.

There is, then, an order in which the resurrected will be lifted off the earth: 1) All the spirits/souls in Paradise will come with Jesus, hit the ground, and get their

resurrection bodies; 2) all the spirits/souls of those in Hades will come to earth, hit the ground, and get their resurrection bodies; 3) everyone alive on earth will be instantly transformed; their mortal bodies will be changed into immortal bodies; 4) the non-Christians will be taken for judgment; 5) the Christians who had passed on to Paradise will be taken to appear before the judgment bar; 6) the Christians who will be still alive on earth at the Lord's return will be the last to go and appear before the judgment bar of Christ.

We have established this fact: When Jesus returns, all the dead — Christian and non-Christian — shall be resurrected, and the earth will be destroyed.

What happens after the resurrection? Read on.

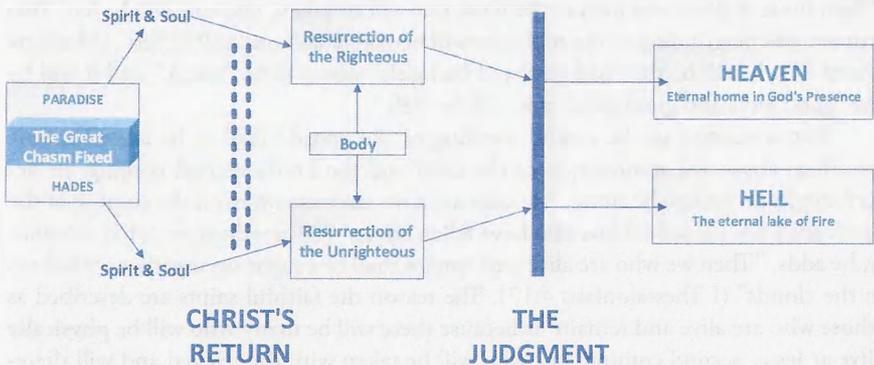
BEFORE THE JUDGMENT BAR

John described every man's fate in the closing scenes of Revelation. "And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown in the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelations 20:11-15).

All the dead — great and small, Christian and non-Christian — will appear before the great white throne. Paul warns Christians about this: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds

JOURNEY OF THE SOUL FROM THE NETHER WORLD TO JUDGMENT AND BEYOND



Note: The return of Christ causes time to stop, so judgment occurs simultaneously with the Resurrection.

in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:10).

Where will you be following your appearance before the judgment seat? If you have believed in Christ (Acts 16:31), if you have repented of your sins (II Peter 3:9), if you have confessed that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10), and if you have been immersed to have your sins forgiven and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 2:12-14; I Peter 3:21; John 3:5; Titus 3:5, and others), then your name is written in the Lamb's book of life. All you need to do from that point is to crucify yourself daily, take up your cross, and continue steadfast in the faith — not forsaking the assembling of yourself with the saints on the first day of the week as is the habit of some; and to develop your new creation in the grace of the perfect law. Then your name will remain in the book of life, and you are guaranteed your home in heaven. If you have not obeyed the gospel, you are guaranteed the entire vengeance of God on the day that Jesus returns. "When the Lord Jesus [is] revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, [He will deal] out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed ..." (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

A TASTE OF THE RESURRECTION

One of the primary purposes of Christianity is to remove fear of death from the Christian — since Jesus conquered death in His resurrection. The saint, for example, is not to fear those who can only kill the body, but to fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. The proper fear of God helps to remove fear of men and fear of death. The true children of God thus "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (I Peter 4:19).

The writer of Hebrews speaks of Christians as those who "have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:4,5). The purpose of the "taste" is to whet our appetites for the age to come, and in so doing cause departure from the earth to be, at the least, an insignificant thing and, at the most, a very joyful event.

Among the most important of tastes of the age to come is sharing in Christ's resurrection. We know that at the last trumpet we shall be resurrected — our spirits shall return with Christ and join new bodies as they burst forth from their graves. To prepare us for the security of such an event, God has designed Christian immersion. Not only are we buried with Christ in this obedience of faith, but more importantly, we are also resurrected through faith in the operation of God. "Therefore, we have been buried with Him through immersion into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

God has designed Christian immersion to bury the old man with Christ. More importantly, God has designed Christian immersion spiritually to resurrect the new

man with Christ in preparation for the actual resurrection of the body at the end of time. As He approached the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus used His conversation with Martha as a teaching moment for all the rest of us. "I am the resurrection and the life," said the Lord. "He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies." Wonderful! But then the Christ added these powerful words: "Everyone who lives and believes in Me *shall never die*" (John 11:25,26)!!

Those who deny the importance of immersion in salvation deny themselves the God-ordained taste of the resurrection which is yet to come. Those who deny the importance of immersion in salvation deny themselves the security that can rightfully belong to one in Christ, and in so doing work hard in developing man-made schemes of security, such as "once in grace, always in grace". Such man-made substitutes provide little security now, and will be chaff when the Lord threshes out the hearts of men before the judgment seat.

But for those of us who believe and know the truth, we can press forward in full assurance of faith, knowing that we have already died in Christ, and that we have tasted of the resurrection and know that it is good.

The faithful Christian has nothing to fear from death, for he knows where he is going, and he knows that nothing can separate him from the love of God.

"For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a *Spirit of adoption* as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' " (Romans 8:15). This indwelling Spirit is the guarantee of the Christian's positive resurrection from the dead (as contrasted to the "negative" resurrection to judgment which is the lot of the non-Christian). "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God," were the apostle Paul's powerful and encouraging words, "who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge" (II Corinthians 1:21,22). The term "pledge" is sometimes translated "down payment" or "earnest." The idea is that God has purchased a piece of real estate (the body of the saint) and has currently put "the earnest money down" as His guarantee that He will finish the deal at the resurrection of the dead on the last day. "You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise," asseverated the apostle Paul, "who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:12,13). The "redemption of God's own possession" is when the Christian receives His permanent resurrection body at Christ's second coming, which ultimately was what Christ purchased with His own blood.

The important practical question then is one Paul asked some disciples in Ephesus, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2). The follow-up question is equally important, "Into what were you immersed" (Acts 19:3). Those who receive the resurrection to life are the children of God. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were immersed into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:26,27). A person who is properly immersed into Christ receives the indwelling Spirit in his immersion.

There is no more important question for an individual to consider than this one, "What happens when you die?" Make certain that you are on the side, defined only by the scripture, where you will not be cast into the lake of fire, but rather share the glories of Christ for all eternity.

