

FOUNDATION 2: THE SOUL AND AFTERLIFE

When God created mankind, He created them in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). While there are several things involved in this, we must remember that God is Spirit (John 4:24). This fact that mankind is created in the image of God helps us understand that people are also spiritual beings. Therefore, it is critical to recognize that you are more than a physical being. There is a greater part to your existence. Understanding this essential foundation will help you recognize the true nature of your existence, what happens after your earthly life ends, and the purpose of your life on earth.

LUKE 16:19-31

This passage (whether a parable or a real-life situation) demonstrates the universal reality of death (Hebrews 9:27) and what the soul experiences immediately afterward. Notice that both the rich man and the poor man experienced physical death. At death, the soul (spirit) separates from the physical body (the physical tent it is currently housed in, 2 Corinthians 5:1-4; James 2:26). At this separation, the physical body begins the process of turning back to dust (Genesis 3:19) and the spirit goes into a spiritual realm (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Notice clearly that death is not the end of a person's existence. Instead, the spirit is pictured as going to a place called Hades (the realm of the dead). This is where the dead continue to exist and wait for Jesus's return (Revelation 20:11-15). Consciousness in this realm is evident in the rich man seeing (v. 23), hearing (vv. 25-26), speaking (v. 24), feeling (v. 24), remembering (v. 28), etc. In this place (Hades), there are two distinct sections where people experience different things. First, there is a place of torment (where the rich man went), depicted by fire and agony. Second, there is a place of comfort (where the poor man went), which is here referred to as Abraham's side/bosom (v. 22) and elsewhere referred to as Paradise (Luke 23:43; Acts 2:25-31). Between these two sections is a great gulf (chasm) that cannot be crossed (v. 26). Therefore, what you will experience after death cannot be changed and relates to how you live on earth (vv. 25; Galatians 6:7-8).

MATTHEW 24:36-44

While the first half of this chapter discusses the impending destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (vv. 1-35, which would take place in 70 A.D.), the second half of this chapter appears to be discussing when Jesus will come in final judgment. At this time, the cosmos and the earth will pass away (v. 35; 2 Peter 3:7-13). Regarding this time, no one except the Father knows when it will be. Instead of being able to predict Jesus's coming based on various signs, Jesus said His coming will be like the flood that destroyed the world in Noah's generation (Genesis 6-8). The day He comes will be like any other day, with people doing the same things people do every day (e.g., work, school, eating, sleeping). Therefore, His coming will catch many people unprepared for the judgment that will follow and people will be suddenly separated from one another (Matthew 25:31-46). Since Jesus's final coming can occur at any time and end every opportunity for people to get right with God (Matthew 25:1-13), it is critical for you to always be watchful and ready for His coming! Please note that the resurrection of all the dead will also happen when Jesus comes again (John 5:28-29).

MATTHEW 25:31-46

When Jesus comes, every person (those who were alive on earth and those who were in Hades) will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for how they had lived on the earth (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12; Hebrews 4:13; Ecclesiastes 12:14). Jesus will judge each person with complete fairness and repay each one for what he/she had done while on this earth (including but not limited to how he/she treated others; Romans 2:6-11). Every person will be separated into one of just two categories in this judgment. Those placed on the right hand of Jesus will be invited into the eternal kingdom of God and rewarded with eternal life in Heaven (vv. 34, 46). Those placed on the left hand of Jesus will be separated from God and sentenced to spend eternity in the punishment of Hell fire with the devil and his angels (vv. 41, 46). In this, you must consider the reality of spending eternity (a time that never ends) in either punishment or comfort!

REVELATION 21:1-4, 21-27

This chapter gives greater insight (in highly symbolic language) into God's people being eternally glorified and at home with God after the final judgment is complete (Revelation 20:11-15). Elsewhere, the hope of God's people is more directly stated as being in Heaven (where God dwells, John 14:1-6; 1 Peter 1:3-9)! What is described is an entirely new order of things (a

new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells, 2 Peter 3:10-13; with all else being cast into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8). This ultimate order of things in this Heavenly realm pictures God as dwelling with His people in intimate fellowship. Furthermore, all the negative aspects of this current order (tears, pain, grief, crying, death, evil) will have no place in this new order. The city is described in beautiful and magnificent ways that surpass anything known on this earth (vv. 9-21), with the greatest piece being the intimate fellowship with God.

MARK 9:43-48

This text gives greater insight into the eternal consequences of living contrary to the will of God. Jesus specifically identifies the place of this punishment as Hell. The Greek word used (Gehenna) referred to the Valley of Hinnom that was located south of Jerusalem and was a garbage dump during the time of Jesus, where all manner of filth was taken and burned. However, as Jesus used this word, He clearly was using that physical place to depict an eternal place of punishment. Notice that Hell would be fire that is never quenched (put out; Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8). The picture of the worm that never dies adds to the picture of continual destruction and decay. Jesus emphasizes that this place of punishment is so devastating that a person should do everything possible to not sin against God to avoid going there (even if it means taking radical steps to get away from or avoid sin)!

CONCLUSION

You have been created in the image of God as a spiritual being who temporarily lives inside a physical body. When you die, your physical body will decay, but your spirit/soul will continue to live on in the place called Hades (the realm of the dead), in either comfort or torment (depending on how you lived on earth). When Jesus comes, the dead will be raised, this physical universe will be destroyed, and everyone will stand before Christ and be judged for how they lived on this earth. Those who had lived righteously will spend eternity in Heaven. Those who had lived wickedly will spend eternity in Hell. Therefore, as you embrace these foundational Bible truths, you must determine to develop a spiritual focus during your earthly life to prepare for eternity (Romans 8:5-8; Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 2:1-11; 12:1-8, 13-14; Luke 12:13-21; Galatians 6:7-8).

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

What happens when you die?

What is Hades, and what is experienced in Hades?

When will Jesus return?

What will happen at Jesus's return?

What will happen on Judgment Day?

What will Heaven be like?

What will Hell be like?

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