**Appendix 3. The Dead are Dead**

The Bible teaches that when a person dies, they are totally without life, dead in every way, and will not be alive again until they are raised from the dead at the Rapture or a resurrection. Death is a huge topic, and many books have been written about it. This short appendix will attempt to enlighten the reader on the Scriptures and basic topics regarding the state of the dead.

**Table of Contents**

**•** [Introduction](#tocdest3_3_1_1_1) **•** [Vocabulary](#tocdest3_3_1_1_2) **•** [In the Beginning…The Devil’s Lie](#tocdest3_3_1_1_3) **•** [The Origin of Christian Tradition…The Immortal Soul](#tocdest3_3_1_1_4) **•** [The Bible Teaches the Dead are Dead](#tocdest3_3_1_1_5) **•** [Death is the absence of life](#tocdest3_3_1_1_6) **•** [Is death just separation from God?](#tocdest3_3_1_1_7) **•** [Dead people are indeed “lifeless.”](#tocdest3_3_1_1_8) **•** [Death is like “sleep”](#tocdest3_3_1_1_9) **•** [Could anyone go to heaven before Jesus died on the cross?](#tocdest3_3_1_1_10) **•** [Is anyone in heaven now?](#tocdest3_3_1_1_11) **•** [The Bible’s testimony about people: they die and are dead.](#tocdest3_3_1_1_12) **•** [Raising people up from the dead: the resurrections](#tocdest3_3_1_1_13) **•** [After Resurrection Comes the Judgment](#tocdest3_3_1_1_14) **•** [Why people think the dead are alive – ghosts and apparitions](#tocdest3_3_1_1_15) **•** [Why people think the dead are alive – near-death experiences](#tocdest3_3_1_1_16) **•** [Trust the Bible](#tocdest3_3_1_1_17)

**Introduction**

When a man or woman dies, they are dead in every way: body, soul, and spirit. They are not alive in heaven or the Lake of Fire, which is often wrongly referred to as “hell.” Although right now every dead person is totally dead, in the future God will raise the dead. Each person will be raised either at the Rapture or one of the resurrections, depending on when they lived and whether or not they were saved. Then, when the person is raised from the dead, they will be judged by Jesus Christ (John 5:22-27; Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10). Knowing that when a person dies, they are dead in every way is very helpful in understanding the Bible and life properly.

Knowing that dead people are truly dead:

* Affirms the value of life over death and shows why death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). If the soul is immortal and good people go immediately to heaven, then death is not such a bad thing after all.
* Shows why resurrection is so important.
* Exposes the Devil as a liar when he contradicted God and told Eve that she would not die (Gen. 2:17 vs. Gen. 3:4).
* Exposes the appearances of dead people as demonic manifestations and shows why trying to contact dead people is an abomination to God (Deut. 18:9-14).
* Keeps people from being deceived by the advice given by demons pretending to be dead people and “spirit guides” that manifest themselves in séances and such.
* Helps us understand the Bible when it says things like dead people are in Sheol and there is no knowledge in the grave.
* Shifts people’s belief about the timing of when saved people are reunited with their dead family and friends from the time of a person’s death to the time of the Lord’s return, and thus magnifies the Hope of the Lord’s return and the restoration of the heavens and the earth.
* Explains why the Bible says Christians are eagerly awaiting the coming of the Lord instead of the day of their death (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 5:7, 8; Rev. 22:12, 20).

**Vocabulary**

If we are going to understand the Bible, we must understand the vocabulary it uses. Sadly, many biblical words, such as Hades or Gehenna, have been misunderstood, and so the biblical definition must be set forth and understood.

* **“Dead, Death.”** “Dead” means “without life,” and when a person dies, they are without life. This simple concept has been badly twisted due to traditional teachings such as the “immortal soul,” and as a result, most Christians do not believe a person is dead when they die. This appendix briefly sets forth that when the Bible says a person dies, they are indeed “without life” of any kind.
* **“Gehenna.”** The word “Gehenna” came to be used for the Lake of Fire into which the unsaved are thrown after they are judged. The unsaved eventually burn up in the Lake of Fire. [For more on Gehenna, see commentary on Matt. 5:22, “Gehenna.”]
* **“Hades.”** (pronounced 'hay-dees). Although in colloquial English “Hades” is just another name for hell, in the New Testament it is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Sheol*, the state of being dead. It is translated “the grave” in the REV. [For more information on Hades, see Word Study: “Hades.”]
* **“Hell.”** In orthodox Christianity, “hell” is a very hot and fiery place where the Devil and his demons live and where the souls of unsaved people go to be tormented forever. There is no such place. The word “hell” can be confusing in English versions, especially the older ones. For example, in the King James Version, the word “hell” is used to translate four different words: *Sheol*, *Gehenna*, *Hades*, and *Tartarus*. Furthermore, the word “hell” has so many inaccuracies associated with it that it is better not to use it at all, but use the proper biblical vocabulary. However, although “hell” is not used in the REV Bible, it is used in this appendix because it is so prevalent in Christian thought.
* **“Sheol.”** Sheol is the Hebrew word for the state of being dead. People who die are “in Sheol,” that is, they are in the state of being dead, and they are not alive in any way or form. [For more on Sheol, see Word Study: “Hades.”]
* **“Soul.”** The word “soul” is mainly used in the Bible for a person or for the natural life force that animates a body and dies when the body dies. Neither the phrase “immortal soul” nor the concept of an “immortal soul” is in the Bible; it comes from Greek mythology. [For more information on the soul, see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]
* **“Spirit.”** The word “spirit” is used in a number of different ways in the Bible. Sometimes it is used as another word for “soul” because soul is a type of spirit. The Hebrew and Greek words translated “spirit” have many different meanings. [For more information on “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**In the Beginning…The Devil’s Lie**

The belief that when a person dies, they are not totally dead started in the Garden of Eden when the Devil lied to Adam and Eve. God told Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die (Gen. 2:17), but the Devil said that he would not die (Gen. 3:4). Who was correct, God or the Devil? According to traditional Christianity, God was wrong and the Devil was right! If there is an “immortal soul,” like so many churches teach, then people do not ever die. Their body dies, but “they” go on living in an immaterial state in heaven or hell.

Today, many people believe that when a person “dies,” only the body dies, but the person’s soul or spirit lives on. If we take the time to study the idea that people live on after they die, we can see why the Devil and demons promote that people go on living after their body dies. One reason is that it waters down the value of being alive. If we are actually alive but just in another form after we “die,” then dying is not that bad after all. But death is that bad! There is nothing more precious than life, and the Devil knows that and wants us to treat this life lightly and give it up cheaply. The Bible says death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). It is hard to see how death could be an enemy if it sent us to a better place and allowed us to be with Jesus and those who have gone before us.

Another reason the Devil promotes that people are actually alive as a soul or spirit after they die is that if people are alive, they can speak to us. The Devil and his demons do a very good job of impersonating dead people in séances and various types of appearances, and they use those appearances and similar strategies to feed untrue and even harmful information to people. There are a lot of people who knowingly or unknowingly disobey God’s command in Deuteronomy 18:11 and try to contact the dead, even though it is specifically stated to be an abomination to God. Since dead people are dead, it is only demons impersonating the dead that ever answer those who are seeking advice from dead friends or relatives. The truth is that even if the dead were alive, they would never disobey God and contact the living.

**The Origin of Christian Tradition…The Immortal Soul**

One way the Devil has been successful in fooling people into believing the dead are actually alive is by promoting the belief in an “immortal soul.” According to the teaching on the “immortal soul,” the soul of a person is immortal and lives on after the person dies. The soul is not immortal.

* The phrase “immortal soul” does not appear in the Bible.
* The Bible says the soul can die and be destroyed (cf. Matt. 10:28).
* The souls of dead people are not in heaven or hell now; they are dead, lifeless, “in Sheol” (Job 14:13; Ps. 6:5; 31:17; Eccl. 9:10).

This appendix can only give an abbreviated history of how the Christian tradition began that souls were immortal, but certainly, a major way that the tradition started was with the Greeks. Historians have documented that the concept of people being alive in Sheol started at least as early as the Babylonian Captivity (c. 586 BC), but it was Greek influence that inculcated the belief among many Jews and then the Christians. The Greeks believed in an “immortal soul” and that no one actually died. According to Greek mythology, people live on as disembodied souls after their body dies. In that sense, the ancient Greeks believed exactly what most modern Christians do.

In 332 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, which had a huge population of Jews, and the people in Egypt began speaking Greek, even the Jews there. Many of those Jews took on the beliefs of the Greeks, including the immortal soul, and when the Jews in Egypt translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek, making the version we know today as the Septuagint, they translated the Hebrew word *Sheol,* where everyone was dead, as *Hadēs*, where everyone was alive. Thus, by a translator’s decision, the Jewish translators in Egypt made the dead people in *Sheol* alive in *Hadēs*.

The Septuagint said that dead people were in *Hadēs*, where, according to Greek beliefs, those souls were alive. So the Septuagint, along with Greek cultural influence, became major reasons that by the time of Christ, many Jews, including the Pharisees, believed that a person’s soul lived on after they died. Then, soon after the death of Christ, many Greeks were converted to Christianity, and they brought their mythology about the dead being alive with them into the Church. These new Greek converts were supported in their belief that the souls of the dead were alive by the Septuagint they were reading, and also by the fact that, as New Testament books were written, the word *Hadēs* was used to describe the state of being dead, like it was in the Greek Old Testament. Eventually, the Greeks and the Greek-speaking Jews who were converting to Christianity dominated the Church to the point that it became Christian tradition that the “immortal soul” lived on after the body died, and that is still the teaching today in spite of the fact that it is not what the Bible actually teaches.

**The Bible Teaches the Dead are Dead**

Many verses of Scripture show that the dead are not alive now, but dead in the grave awaiting the resurrection. A selection of them is below:

**Job 7:21 (ESV):** “Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be.” [Job did not think he would be with God after he died, instead, he said he would “not be.”]

**Job 10:20-22 (ESV):** 20“Are not my days few? Then cease and leave me alone so that I may find a little cheer 21before I go—and I shall not return—to the land of darkness and deep shadow, 22the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order, where light is as thick darkness.” [Job was a godly man, but he certainly did not believe he would go to a “good place” after he died. He would be in the “thick darkness” of death.]

**Job 14:12 (ESV):** “so a man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep.” [The resurrection will not occur until this present evil age is over and there is a renewed heaven and earth, cf. Isa. 65:17.]

**Psalm 6:5 (ESV):** “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?” [The dead do not remember or praise God; they are “in Sheol,” that is, in the state of being dead.]

**Psalm 30:9 (ESV):** “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?” [The “pit” was an idiom for the grave and death. The person who dies turns to dust and does not praise God.]

**Psalm 49:12 (ESV):** “Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish.” [When it comes to living and dying, people are like animals—we age and die. Unlike animals, people will be resurrected and judged.]

**Psalm 49:15 (ESV):** “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah.” [When a person dies, his “soul” is in Sheol, the state of being dead, but one day God will raise the dead and judge them. Righteous people will be ransomed from death by the blood of Christ and will live forever.]

**Psalm 88:11, 12 (ESV):** “Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?” [Death is called “the land of forgetfulness” because the dead know nothing.]

**Psalm 94:17 (ESV):** “If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.” [Death is called “the land of silence” because there is no activity and no noise.]

**Psalm 115:17 (ESV):** “The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence.”

**Ecclesiastes 9:4-6 (ESV):** 4“But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.” [Dead people “know nothing” because they are dead, and they will not share in what is done “under the sun” because the dead are not raised until this present evil age is over and the next age begins.]

**Ecclesiastes 9:10 (ESV):** “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”

**Isaiah 26:19 (ESV):** “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” [The dead are now in the dust and awaiting the resurrection.]

**Isaiah 38:18 (ESV):** “For Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness.” [The dead do not praise God and they do not hope.]

**Ezekiel 37:12 (ESV):** “Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.” [“People,” not just bodies, get up from the dead].

**Daniel 12:2 (ESV):** “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” [It is the “people” who are dead in the dust now, not just their bodies.]

**Daniel 12:13 (ESV):** “But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.” [Daniel would die and have no consciousness until his resurrection, at which time he would receive his reward.]

**John 5:28, 29 (ESV):** 28“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” [At the resurrection, the people who are now dead will get up and be judged.]

**Death is the absence of life**

Death is the absence of life. When the Bible says that people die and are dead, it does not mean that only the body is dead; the whole person is dead in every way. In the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would “die” (Gen. 2:17). Adam and Eve would have lived forever had they not sinned, but because they disobeyed God, they died.

God did not say to Adam and Eve, “If you can keep from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then you will live here in Eden forever in your human bodies, but if you eat of that tree you will still live forever but it will be either in a good place (heaven) or a bad place (hell).” God said they would die, be lifeless, and that is what happened, but they are not dead if they are alive somewhere.

**Is death just separation from God?**

It is sometimes taught that “death” means “separation,” and that people who are dead are not “lifeless,” but are separated from God. That teaching is not biblically correct. First, it is wrong to assert that the words for “death” in Hebrew or Greek just refer to separation. “Dead” means “dead.” Death does have an aspect of separation to it because when a person dies, they are indeed “separated” from God as well as everything else in life. But the word “dead” does not mean “separated.” Instead, when a person is dead, they are separated from God and life by virtue of the fact that they are dead. It is just as Scripture says, “The dead do not praise the LORD” (Ps. 115:17 ESV).

The Bible uses the same Hebrew and Greek words for the “death” of humans as for the death of animals. There is no special word for the “death” of people that means “separation,” and a different word for the death of animals that means “death.” Thus, there is no factual basis for saying that the word “death” means “separation” when referring to a person but actual “death” when referring to an animal; death is the same for all of them (Ps. 49:12; Eccl. 3:18-21). “Death” is the total absence of life for humans and animals.

**Dead people are indeed “lifeless.”**

The Bible has many verses that show that when a person dies, they are dead in every sense of the word and not alive in any form. Living people can think, but dead people “know nothing” (Eccl. 9:5; Ps. 146:4). In fact, “their love and their hate and their envy have already perished” (Eccl. 9:6). Thus, death is referred to as “the land of oblivion” (Ps. 88:12; cf. HCSB). Living people have hope, while dead people know nothing and have no hope. That is why the Bible says “a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Eccl. 9:4). In death, “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom” (Eccl. 9:10; cf. Ps. 6:5). There is no profit in the death of a believer because when a believer dies, they are no longer able to praise God or testify about Him (Psalm 30:9; 88:10; 115:17; Isa. 38:18). The dead person has no consciousness and the body decays and disappears, so Job correctly said that when he died, “I shall lie in the earth; you [God] will seek me, but I shall not be” (Job 7:21). People die just as animals do (Ps. 49:12-14), but God promises that people will be raised from the dead. In fact, the reason people have to be raised from the dead is that they are dead, not alive. If they were alive, why have a resurrection?

When we believe verses like those just pointed out above, that dead people have no knowledge in the grave and do not praise God, it helps us understand what happens to the “soul” or “spirit” of a person when they die. The soul (which is sometimes referred to as “spirit”) is not alive apart from the body, it is not a ghost-like thing; it is the life force that God created for humans and animals. The body needs soul to animate it, but when the body dies, the soul, the life force, is gone (for more on soul, see Word Study: “Psuchē”).

Understanding “spirit” is more complicated than understanding “soul” because “spirit” is used both of the “soul” (because “soul” is a type of spirit) and of the gift of spirit that is born in Christians when Christians are born again. But the conclusion is the same: God never designed “spirit” to be alive without the human body. It is not a living ghost-thing. When used of the gift of spirit, “spirit” gives spiritual life to the believer, and when the believer dies, the spirit simply goes away, back to God who gave it. The spirit given to the believer was not alive as an immaterial ghost-like thing before God gave it, and it does not change into one when the believer dies. It just “goes back to God” just like it came from Him (for more on “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma”).

**Death is like “sleep”**

“Sleep” is a common biblical euphemism and metaphor for death, and the Bible compares death to sleep many times (cf. Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 7:39, 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20; 1 Thess. 4:13). For example, Psalm 13:3 says, “Consider, *and* answer me, O Yahweh, my God. Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” Job said, “But man dies and is laid low. Yes, man breathes his last *breath*, and where is he? …so a man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more they will not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep” (Job 14:10, 12).

It can be very comforting to believers to realize that in death, just like in deep sleep, there is no awareness of the passage of time. When a believer dies, “falls asleep,” the next thing they will see is Jesus and other believers. Tradition teaches that when a person dies, “they go to be with Jesus.” While it is not true from a time perspective that the believer is with Jesus the moment they die, from the perspective of the person who died, the instant they close their eyes in death is the instant they see Jesus. The dead person is not aware of the time that passes between their death and their resurrection. There is no netherworld, no purgatory, nothing like that, so to the person who died, there is just death and then immediate resurrection.

Thus, the experience of people who die is different from the experience of the people who are alive. The experience of the family, friends, and other people who are alive on earth is that the person who died and is buried in the ground is dead, asleep, and is no longer afflicted by the troubles of life, while the living struggle on in day-to-day life. In contrast, the experience of the people who die is that they close their eyes in death and are instantly awake in the resurrection. The dead person has no awareness of time or the struggles of the living. Believers close their eyes in death and instantly see Jesus. They may have been dead for thousands of years, but to them, the instant they die is the instant they see Jesus.

Imagine the joy of the resurrection! For example, an elderly, sick person who has been troubled throughout life closes their eyes in the sleep of death and then to them they are instantly awake with Jesus in a wonderful new body like Jesus’ body (Phil. 3:21). The person’s old body was corrupt but they are raised in “incorruption,” they died in “dishonor” but they are raised in “glory,” they died in “weakness” but will be raised in “power” (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Promises like these are why believers need not fear death.

Death is like sleep in many ways, which is one reason the Bible uses the term “sleep” to describe death. Nevertheless, even though death is called “sleep,” that metaphor, like all metaphors, is imperfect. There are similarities between death and sleep, but there are also big differences. We will examine the similarities first.

1. Both death and sleep are overpowering forces. People cannot prevent their death, and they cannot help falling asleep when they are tired. Even if people try to force themselves to stay awake, eventually sleep will overpower them.
2. There is no awareness of time in either death or deep sleep; time passes without the person being aware of it.
3. No productive work can be done by the person when they are dead or asleep.
4. In both death and sleep, there is a continuity of the person. When a person falls asleep, they are the same person when they wake up. The process of sleep did not change the person into somebody else. Similarly, the person who dies and is resurrected is the same person. At the resurrection, people will remember who they are and what they did in this life. Jesus Christ is our best example of someone having continuity of being after his resurrection. Jesus was the same person after his resurrection as he was before it, he just had a different body and more capabilities. But he knew who he was and he knew his friends and family, and everyone who is resurrected from the dead will know those things too.
5. Both death and sleep come to an end. A person’s state of death ends when they are resurrected, just as their sleep ends when they wake up.

Now that we have seen the similarities between sleep and death, it is important to note the differences. In sleep, the person’s bodily functions continue, and they will wake up on their own when their body is rested. In contrast, when a person dies, their body is dead and their soul and spirit are gone. The person cannot wake up on their own but stays dead until the resurrection when God gets them up from the dead.

The sleep of death is sometimes referred to as “soul sleep.” However, it is not the “soul” that “sleeps”; according to the Bible, it is the “person” who sleeps. The phrase “soul sleep” is not in the Bible but was a term that was popularized by John Calvin (1509-1564), who used it in a pejorative way, criticizing the belief. Calvin believed that the soul lived on after a person died. Due to the pejorative nature of the term “soul sleep,” people who believe the soul ceased to exist when the body died generally refer to their belief in other ways, including “materialism,” “conditional immortality,” and since the 1970s, “Christian mortalism.” Some of the great people of Christianity believed the soul did not live on after a person died, including William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, and Martin Luther.

**Could anyone go to heaven before Jesus died on the cross?**

It is often taught that Enoch, Moses, and Elijah went to heaven to be with God. However, that cannot be true. First, the Bible never says they went to God’s heaven. That is an assumption. Although 2 Kings 2:11 says that Elijah went by a whirlwind into “heaven,” a whirlwind cannot reach God’s heaven; the “heaven” that Elijah was carried into was the air, the same “heaven” as in phrases such as “the birds of heaven” (Job 12:7), or “the rain of heaven” (Deut. 11:11). Hebrew uses the word “heaven” of both God’s heaven and the air above us. But more to the point is that no one—no one—could go to heaven before Jesus Christ died and paid for their sins.

If even one person could go to heaven without having Jesus pay for their sins, then anyone could go to heaven without having Jesus pay for their sins because God is not a respecter of persons; He does not play favorites. The simple fact is that the only reason believers can go to heaven and be in the presence of God is that they have had their sins paid for by Jesus Christ, so no one went to heaven before Jesus died on the cross, and that included Enoch, Moses, and Elijah, and no one is in heaven now because the resurrections have not occurred yet.

It is sometimes taught that some people do not go to heaven or hell when they die, but go to a different place, for example, some people believe some of the dead go to purgatory. However, there is no biblical evidence for any of those places. The biblical truth is both clear and simple: dead people go “to Sheol,” the state of being dead. They then stay dead until they are raised in a resurrection, and at that time they are judged and either receive everlasting life and live forever with Christ or they are thrown into the Lake of Fire and are eventually consumed (Rev. 20:11-15).

**Is anyone in heaven now?**

Although the Bible specifically mentions a large number of people who die, not one of them is said to be in heaven except Jesus Christ who was taken to heaven. The biblical evidence is that even by the time that the Gospel of John was written, no one was in heaven but Jesus. John 3:13, which was not spoken by Jesus but was written down by the apostle John (see commentary on John 3:13), says, “And no one has gone up to heaven, but he who came down from heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.” The Gospel of John was written no earlier than AD 50, but the evidence more strongly supports that John was written between AD 70 and AD 100. In any case, by the time John was written some of the early Christians had died, including Stephen and the apostle James (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6). Surely if saved people went to heaven when they died then John 3:13 should say that, and not say that no one was in heaven but Jesus. The reason that John 3:13 says no one is in heaven but Jesus is that every person who has lived and died is still dead and awaiting the Rapture or a resurrection.

There is not one person in the Bible who is clearly said to have gone to heaven, hell, or any other place except into the grave when they died. There is not one verse that says, for example, “And David died and went to heaven.” Not one verse.

Hundreds, even thousands, of people died in the Bible, so for the Bible to not even say that one of them went to heaven or the Lake of Fire when they died is quite strong evidence that people do not go to those places when they die. Instead, people go to Sheol, the state of being dead, when they die, just like the Bible says. People die and remain lifeless until God raises them from the dead at a resurrection, and it is at that point that each person will be judged and then granted everlasting life or everlasting death. In fact, when we look at what the Bible says about the great men and women who died, the universal testimony is that they are dead and awaiting the resurrection.

**The Bible’s testimony about people: they die and are dead.**

The most common statement in the Bible about people whose lives come to an end is that they just “die.” Nothing is said about them, or their “soul” or “spirit” going to heaven or hell or someplace else and continuing to live there after they die. No verse says that any person in the Bible went to heaven or hell when they died; they die and are dead.

If the Bible teaches that people die and are dead, then it makes perfect sense that it would just simply say that people “die.” But if the Christian tradition that people live on after they die was true, then it does not make sense that the Bible never specifically says that (the parable of Lazarus and the rich man is a parable and is explained in commentary on Luke 16:19). If tradition is true, then to comfort us it would seem that the Bible would at least name some people who died and went to heaven. But it does not. The Bible just says that a person dies because that is the end of their life until God raises them from the dead.

**The “meeting house” of death (Job 3:11-19):** Job 30:23 says that death is the meeting house for all the living. Everyone dies and goes to Sheol, the state of death, and awaits their resurrection and Judgment, so death is rightly referred to as the meeting house for everyone. Job said a similar thing in Job 3:11-19. In Job chapter 3, Job was in intense grief over the loss of his children, servants, and wealth, and in great pain from the sores on his body. He wished to die and mentions all the people who have gone before him into death and are now resting, sleeping, and at peace in death. Job mentions all the people who are together in death: kings, counselors, leaders, stillborn babies, the wicked, the weary, prisoners, and slaves, and then says, “the small and the great are there.” What Job said is certainly accurate if everyone is dead and lifeless when they die. However, if some people go to a good place and others go to “hell” when they die, then what Job said is not correct, for many evil kings, leaders, prisoners, and slaves, and certainly “the wicked” would not be asleep and in peace but would be suffering in the Lake of Fire.

**Adam and others:** People die and are dead when they die, so it makes sense that when people die, the Bible often just says that and adds no more. Adam “died,” Seth “died,” Enosh “died,” Kenan “died,” Mahalalel “died,” Jared “died,” Enoch died (Heb. 11:13), Methuselah “died,” and Lamech “died” (Gen. 5:5-31). This list could be expanded multifold through the Bible, but the point is that God simply says the people “died” because that is what they did. They died and then were dead. No verse says anything like, “Adam died and went to heaven” because that is not what happened. Adam died and was dead.

**Job:** Job spoke a lot about his death, and never indicated that he would go to a good place, such as heaven, or to a bad place, such as hell, when he died. Instead, he said in different ways that he would be dead. He said he would be “lying down” in death and be sleeping (Job 3:13). He said that when he died, “I will not be,” which would be true; Job would be dead, and as a living being, “he would not be.” Furthermore, he spoke of going to Sheol, the state of being dead (Job 7:8-9), and that Sheol would be the “house,” where he was (Job 17:13). He also said to God, “I know that you will bring me to death, to the meeting house for all the living” (Job 30:23). Furthermore, Job stated that everyone would be together in death when they died (Job 3:13-19; 14:12). That statement would not be true if some people went to heaven and others went to “hell.” At the end of his life, the Bible just says, “So Job died.” Job is now where he said he would be, “in Sheol,” the state of being dead, waiting for the resurrection.

**Abraham:** As great as Abraham was, at the end of his life the Bible just says that he died and was “gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8). The phrase “gathered to his people” means he died and joined his ancestors, and that phrase is significant in the study of what happens at death. For one thing, the phrase “gathered to his people” shows that the Bible is consistent in saying that all people, good or bad, are in the same place when they die. Abraham’s ancestors, and thus the “people” he was gathered to be with, worshiped gods other than Yahweh (Josh. 24:2). Because Abraham’s ancestors were idol worshipers, it is likely that on Judgment Day some of them will be saved while others will not be. But where could all of Abraham’s ancestors be together such that Abraham could be gathered to them? There is only one place where all of Abraham’s ancestors, good or bad, will be, and that place is the grave, Sheol, the state of being dead. Abraham is not alive somewhere. He is dead along with his ancestors, and all of them are awaiting the resurrection.

The phrase “gathered to his people” also often had the connotation that there was a family tomb or family grave site of some sort. For example, when Jacob died, he was “gathered to his people” and buried in the same burial cave as Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and his wife Leah (Gen. 49:29-33). Also, the phrase “gathered to your fathers” was used of dying as well as the phrase “gathered to his people” (cf. Judg. 2:10; 2 Kings 22:20; 2 Chron. 34:28).

**Jacob:** When Jacob was told by his sons that Joseph was dead, he said, “I will go down to Sheol to my son [Joseph], mourning” (Gen. 37:35). So, Jacob acknowledged that Joseph was in Sheol and he would go there too when he died. Jacob did not think he was going to go to heaven or any other place than death. He said, “when I sleep with my fathers, you are to carry me out of Egypt and bury me.” Jacob did not speak of being alive after death. He said, when “I” sleep and bury “me.” When he died, he was “gathered to his people” (Gen. 49:33). Then, when Joseph died, the Bible simply says that he died (Gen. 50:26; Exod. 1:6).

**Hezekiah:** When the great Judean king, Hezekiah, was dying from a sickness, he did not talk about going to heaven or to a good place. He said, “I must enter the gates of Sheol. …I will not see Yah…you [God] will make an end of me” (Isa. 38:10-13). Then, when Hezekiah was healed, he said, “You [God] have delivered my soul from the pit of oblivion,” and he praised God, saying, “For Sheol cannot praise you. Death cannot celebrate you. Those who go down into the pit cannot have hope for your faithfulness. The living *person*, the living *person*, he gives you thanks, as I do this day” (Isa. 38:17-19). Hezekiah knew that if he died he would be in Sheol, the state of being dead; he had no delusions about going to a good place. He called death “oblivion,” and when he did not die but was healed he praised God for it. When Hezekiah eventually died the Bible simply says that he “slept with his fathers” (2 Kings 20:21; 2 Chron. 32:33).

**Daniel:** The last verse in the book of Daniel records the angel talking to Daniel about his death, and the angel says, “But you, go *your way* until the end; and you will rest, then you will stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.” (Dan. 12:13). The angel did not tell Daniel he would go to heaven or any other place, just that he would “rest,” which is a word associated with resting in death (cf. Job 3:13, 17).

**Lazarus:** When Lazarus died, Jesus simply said, “Lazarus is dead” (John 11:14). No one—not Jesus, Martha, or Mary—indicated in any way that Lazarus was in a good place or alive in any way. In fact, when Jesus spoke to Martha about raising Lazarus, she said, “I know that he will rise up in the resurrection at the last day.” Martha knew the simple truth that Lazarus was dead and would not be alive again until the resurrection.

**Jonah:** Jonah was a prophet of God who tried to protect Israel by running from God (see commentary on Jonah 1:3). But when he was thrown into the sea, and thought he would die, he said, “I have been banished from your [God’s] sight, yet I will look again toward your holy Temple.” Jonah did not think he would die and be in heaven or hell, he thought he would be dead and out of God’s sight until God raised him from the dead, at which time he would again see the Temple.

**Jesus Christ:** When Jesus appeared to John many years after his resurrection, he said, “Do not be afraid! I am the first and the last, and the Living One, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever” (Rev. 1:17-18; cf. Rev. 2:8). Jesus’ statement that he was dead but now was alive would be nonsensical—even disingenuous—if Jesus never really died, but only his body died. If that were the case, then Jesus’ statement, “I was dead,” was not true. The fact that Jesus was dead, dead in every sense of the word “dead,” but now is alive forever is what shows Christians that they need not fear death. Like Jesus, they may be dead someday, but they will be raised and be alive forever.

**Raising people up from the dead: the resurrections**

The orthodox Christian tradition is that the body dies but the soul (or “spirit”) lives on and goes to heaven or hell. But the Bible teaches that “people,” not just “bodies,” are dead. When a person dies, they die in every way, body, soul, and spirit, and are not alive in any form or place. Then, at the resurrection, the person, not just their physical body, comes to life. It is because dead people are totally dead that 1 Corinthians 15:18 says that if there is no resurrection, the people have “perished,” that is, they have come to an end and exist no more. The Bible does not say that if there is no resurrection the person’s “body” has perished, it says the “person” has perished, and that is because without a resurrection the person would stay dead forever. The reason there has to be a resurrection at all is that all the people who died are dead; they are not alive in any form, so they have to be raised from the dead in order to be judged and then either given everlasting life or sentenced to everlasting death.

Many verses speak of the resurrections, and it is at that time that dead people will be given life again and raised from the ground. Isaiah 26:19 speaks of the earth giving birth to her dead. Daniel 12:2 speaks of the dead people who are now sleeping in the dust of the earth awakening to the Judgment. Revelation 20:4 speaks of the first resurrection and says of the dead, “they came to life.” Psalm 49:15 says that God will redeem people from the grave. Ezekiel says that the people of Israel, not just their bodies, come up out of the grave (Ezek. 37:9-14). Jesus taught that the people in the grave would hear his voice and get up (John 5:28, 29). There is not one single verse that says at the resurrection only the “body” gets up and then it rejoins the soul at that time.

In his vision of the future, the apostle John saw the second resurrection and saw that “the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged” (Rev. 20:13). The dead people John saw were not in heaven or hell, they were in the grave and in the sea—many people have died at sea and their bodies have never been recovered—and all of those people were resurrected to life and then were judged for what they had done.

There are three major resurrection events in the Bible: the Rapture of Christians, the First Resurrection, and the Second Resurrection. The Rapture occurs before the other two resurrections, and then the first and second resurrections are separated by 1,000 years (cf. Rev. 20:4-7).

The Rapture applies only to the Christian Church, and so it is not mentioned in the Old Testament or the Gospels. At the Rapture, dead Christians are raised from the dead and meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The First Resurrection comes after the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-20:5), and it is called “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5-6), “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29), and “the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). In the First Resurrection, all the righteous people who died from the time of Adam and Eve through the Battle of Armageddon will be raised from the dead except for Christians because they will have already been raptured to be with the Lord. Then after 1,000 years comes the second resurrection, which is called “the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29 ESV), and “the resurrection of the unrighteous” (Acts 24:15) because most of the people who are raised at that time will be judged and found to be unrighteous. This second resurrection is described in Revelation 20:11-15.

For the purpose of this appendix, the important thing to notice about the Rapture, the resurrection, and people getting up from the dead is that it is “people” who get up from the dead. The Bible never describes a human body being raised and then reuniting with the person’s soul that has been alive during the time the body was dead. The “people” are dead and God raises them from the dead. Furthermore, the people come up out of the grave in their physical bodies; the future resurrection is not a “spirit” resurrection, it is living bodies that come up from the grave (cf. Job. 19:25-27; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2; Hos. 13:14; Matt. 12:42; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:20-22, 42-49, 52; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 20:4-5, 12-14).

**After Resurrection Comes the Judgment**

It is because people are dead and not alive in any form that we eagerly await the coming of Jesus, who will raise the dead. Also, it is because people are dead and will be raised at either the Rapture or the first or second resurrection that the Bible speaks of “the Day of Judgment” (cf. Matt. 10:15; 11:22; 12:36; 2 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 4:17). God will raise large categories of people all at the same time—first the Christians in the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18), then the righteous in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6), then the unrighteous, along with some righteous people who died during the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:11-15). There will be a literal “Day of Judgment” for each category of people.

When God raises people from the dead, they are judged for everlasting life and rewards. The most basic and important thing people are judged for is whether they are saved and get to live forever, or whether they are condemned to the Lake of Fire (cf. Rev. 20:15).

According to Christian tradition, people go immediately to heaven or hell when they die. But that would mean that each person is judged right when they die. The fact that a person would “go to heaven” or “go to hell” when they die means they have already been judged and given the sentence of life or death. But if people are judged right when they die, then there would be thousands of individual judgments occurring each day, because across the globe, thousands of people die every day. But the Bible never teaches that. The Bible teaches there is a Day of Judgment for the different groups of people: the righteous and the unrighteous.

Jesus said, “the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have practiced evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29). Note that Jesus said the dead are in the grave now, and they will all come out and be judged at that time when he calls them to come out. People are not judged when they die; they are judged when they are raised from the dead at the resurrection they are in.

Similarly, when Jesus was speaking about the sign of Jonah to the unbelieving Jews, he taught that there is a day of judgment coming in the future. He said, “The men of Nineveh will stand up at the Judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, *someone* greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up at the Judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, *someone* greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12:41-42). The people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba) had been dead for many hundreds of years, but they had not yet been judged—that will happen at the resurrection. Furthermore, the generation Jesus was speaking to, “this generation,” would soon die, but they too will not be judged until their resurrection and Judgment Day. At that time, they will all be resurrected and judged.

The book of Revelation says Judgment Day is in the future. It says when this present evil age comes to an end, it will be “the time for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to give the rewards to your servants the prophets and to the holy ones” (Rev. 11:18). Right now people who have died are in the ground and awaiting resurrection, but at some point in the future will come “Judgment Day,” and it will be “the time for the dead to be judged.” Some people laugh at the idea of a Judgment Day, but Judgment Day is coming; the Bible guarantees it.

**Why people think the dead are alive – ghosts and apparitions**

One of the reasons many Christians do not believe that the dead are actually dead is that sometimes “dead people” appear to people. We call these encounters “apparitions” or “ghosts,” and while it might be possible for God to make a vision of a dead person appear or the voice of a dead person to be heard, this would only occur on the rarest of occasions because God was the One who forbade us to speak to the dead (Deut. 18:10-13).

However, demons can and do impersonate the dead to further the Devil’s teaching that dead people are actually alive. Demons can affect the environment and cause noise or movement, cold or hot spots, or “hauntings,” and in basically that same way they can cause “ghosts” of different clarity to appear, including impersonations of dead people. Examples of this in the Bible include Job 4:15 and 1 Samuel 28:13-19 (what appeared to the medium at En-dor was not Samuel, but a demon. A medium cannot make a godly man come from the dead and speak to the living in disobedience to God. The demon is called “Samuel” because it impersonated him so well).

So many people have seen ghosts or apparitions that a 2009 Pew Research Center survey showed that 18% of U.S. Americans claim to have seen a ghost, and a 2013 Harris poll showed that 42% of U.S. Americans believe in ghosts, and in many countries of the world, these figures would be much higher. Although some sightings are not legitimate, many are by people who are credible witnesses who had no reason or desire to see a ghost. Demons have an agenda to make people believe that death is not really death, so they appear to people as ghosts or apparitions, or they make things happen that cause people to believe dead people are alive. Seeing ghosts or experiencing paranormal spiritual occurrences is a major reason many people believe that humans live on in some form after they die.

**Why people think the dead are alive – near-death experiences**

Another reason people believe that the soul or spirit goes on living after a person dies is because of what is referred to as “near-death” experiences. In these experiences, people who have clinically “died,” or been close to death, have seen what they report as the afterlife. There are a number of explanations why this could happen, and near-death visions can come from God, demons, or our own minds.

God can and does raise the dead, and although there is no record of a “near-death” experience in the Bible, it is possible that a person would die and God both raise him from the dead and give him a vision of part of our glorious future life. God has given people visions of the life to come. Abraham, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul, and John are some of the people who were given extraordinary information or visions about the future life. So, it is quite possible that some of the people who have had “near-death experiences” have had God-given visions of the next life to help them and others overcome their fear of dying and encourage them concerning the Hope. The mistake these people make is that they assume they would go to this future place right away. But the vision of God never promises that. The vision John had of the future that he wrote in the book of Revelation seemed very real to him, but he did not experience it the moment he died; John is dead and his vision is still future.

Another reason people could have “near-death” experiences is due to demonic visions. Demons can give people hallucinations and visions, and it makes perfect sense that they would do that as part of their overall agenda to promote that people are not actually dead when they die. Also, part of the Devil’s agenda is to make God seem cruel and thus cause people to misunderstand God, or be afraid of Him, or even ignore the things of God altogether. Some of the more terrifying visions of hell that some people claim to have seen clearly contradict the loving nature of God. The Bible describes Gehenna as a lake of fire into which the unsaved are thrown and then burn up, not as a multi-level torture chamber.

Still another reason some people have “near-death” experiences is simply due to how the mind works. We are all familiar with the “dream-like” state that can occur to a person just before they fall asleep or just when they are waking up, at which time the mind can blend thoughts and dreams, and thought-images can seem very real and yet not be. Most people have ideas about the next life that have been implanted in their minds from their religion or movies, books, or just the culture they live in, and it is reasonable that many times these would surface if the body was close to death or the mind thought death was imminent. We have instruments that can measure the activity of life in a person, the electricity the body produces, brain wave activity, etc., but no scientist would say that our instruments are sensitive enough to pick up the exact moment of death—they are not that sensitive. So, a third cause of “near-death” experiences is simply the mind imagining those things at a time when it is not fully capable of separating fact from fiction, imagination from reality.

It is also important to note that not one person in the Bible who was raised from the dead said anything about the afterlife. This includes people who had been dead for hours or days, such as the Shunammite woman’s son (2 Kings 4:35), the man from Nain (Luke 7:15), the synagogue leader’s daughter (Mark 5:42), or Lazarus, who had been dead four days (John 11:39, 44). If they experienced anything good or bad after they died, it surely seems they would have talked about it. The fact that they did not talk about what they experienced, combined with the fact that no one asked them about it, is good biblical evidence that nothing happens in death—no thoughts or experiences—there is just the absence of life (Eccl. 9:10).

**Trust the Bible**

The Bible is full of examples of people, like Eve, who trusted what they thought and felt more than they trusted God’s Word, with disastrous results. God has made it clear in His Word that when a person dies, they are dead. We dare not abandon the clear teaching of Scripture because of what we see in the physical world, especially when the Devil has such a clear agenda to get people to believe that people do not really die when their body dies. There are godly explanations for what we see, including near-death experiences.

**Verses that are not written about in this appendix**

There are verses in the Bible that are important to the study of the state of the dead that are not covered in this appendix. For more information, read the commentary in the REV that is associated with those individual verses.

[For information about the translations “hell” and “Hades,” see Word Study: “Hades.” For information on people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not burning forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on the soul not being immortal and not being like a “ghost” inside the human body, see Word Study: “Psuchē.” For more on what happens to “spirit” when a person dies, see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more on necromancy, communicating with the dead, and why it is an abomination to God, see commentary on Deut. 18:10 and 18:11. For more on a person’s death being really death and not just partial death, see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:20. For information on Jesus’ not having to be God to die for the sins of mankind, see commentary on Matt. 27:50.]

**Selected Bibliography**

Burch, Helaine. *Asleep in Christ*. New Berlin, WI: Bible Search Publications, 1999.  
Buzzard, Anthony. *What Happens When We Die?* Restoration Fellowship, 2002.  
Date, Christopher, Gregory Stump; and Joshua Anderson, editors. *Rethinking Hell*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014.  
Froom, LeRoy Edwin. *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, Vols. 1 and 2, 1966.  
Graeser, Mark H., John A. Lynn, and John W. Schoenheit, John. *Is There Death After Life?* Indianapolis, IN: Christian Educational Services, 1993.  
Hatch, Sidney. *Daring to Differ: Adventures in Conditional Immortality*. Sherwood, OR: Brief Bible Studies, 1991.  
Prestidge, Warren. *Life, Death, and Destiny*. Auckland, New Zealand: Silverdale Printing Services, 1998.