

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class

“The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?”

Introduction:

What happens when we die? We see a body buried. Is that the end of a person's existence? Since the beginning of human history cultures have held a hope of some type of existence beyond the grave. Is this wishful thinking or evidence of a natural knowledge of the God who gives life in order for it to be lived forever?

What does God's special revelation of the Holy Bible tell us about the “afterlife”? Jesus has promised us that we will live forever with Him. How does this happen? What is this like? Where are we between the time of our physical death and the resurrection of our bodies when Jesus returns at the Last Day? This study will examine what the Bible does tell us about our physical death and our life after that death.

I. The View of the Afterlife in the Old Testament

One view is that the understanding of the afterlife was consistent among God's people throughout the years before the coming of Christ: “Today (1920) a very gradual development of a resurrection faith among the Old Testament believers is generally assumed....But this opinion reveals a poor understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures and directly contradicts Christ Himself” (Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, CPH, 1953, page 535).

Another view is that the understanding of the afterlife gradually developed from a vague view to a more complete picture in the centuries leading up to the life of Christ: “For the Old Testament writers, all aspects of human existence were just different facets of the same reality...A person's bodily existence could in no way be distinguished from other aspects of the human experience...death is simply taken for granted as part of the whole business of human existence...For although many Old Testament passages seem to allude to the continued survival of dead people, there is no consistent picture...It is more likely that the idea of resurrection emerged naturally from a much earlier period” (John Drane, Old Testament Faith, Harper and Row, 1986, pages 74-75).

A. Life is Promised as Soon as Death Arrives

Genesis 3:15- What is God's promise to His people in the curse of the serpent? _____

Luther (as quoted by Pieper) “This passage at once includes deliverance from the Law, sin, and death and reveals a clear and sure hope of the resurrection and restoration in the hereafter. For if the serpent's head is to be crushed, certainly death, too, must be done away with and destroyed.” (Pieper continues) “The Christian faith is as ancient as the first promise of Christ, Genesis 3:15, and includes deliverance from death along with deliverance from the guilt of sin.” (Pieper, Vol. III, page 535)

Read Exodus 3:5-6. How does God describe Himself? _____

At this time what was the “condition” of these men (patriarchs)? _____

Matthew 22:31-32 (Jesus said) "But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

B. "Gathered to His People"

Early in the Old Testament, in the books of Moses, the death of one of God's faithful people is described as being "gathered to his people."

Genesis 25:7-8 How is Abraham described? _____

Genesis 25:17 How is Ishmael described? _____

Genesis 35:28-29 How is Isaac described? _____

Genesis 49:29-33 What instructions does Jacob give concerning his death? _____

How is his death described? _____

Numbers 20:22-29 Why would Aaron not enter the land? _____

What transition took place before Aaron died? _____

Do we ever do something similar before a person's death? _____

Numbers 31:1-2 What job does God give to Moses? _____

What will happen after that? _____ (Would you want to know?)

Deuteronomy 32:48-52 What does God tell Moses to do? _____

Why won't he enter into the land of Canaan? _____

(See Deuteronomy 34:1-8 for Moses' death.)

C. "Rested with His Fathers"

This phrase is used throughout 1 Kings to describe a peaceful death, but not necessarily a faithful death. It was used to describe the deaths of the kings of Israel and Judah whether or not they ruled well or poorly in God's sight. It was not used for kings who died in violent ways.

1 Kings 2:10 Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David.

Luther: "The fathers concluded from these passages that another life remains and that the saints do not perish like cattle but are gathered to the people in the land of the living... This serves to comfort us, lest we, like others, who have no hope, be frightened by or shudder at death. For in Christ death is not bitter, as it is for the ungodly, but it is a change of this wretched and unhappy life into a life that is quiet and blessed" (as quoted in Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, page 533).

1 Kings 11:41-43 Was Solomon a believer or an unbeliever when he died? _____

(See verses 1-6. Upon what can we base a positive or negative judgment of a person's eternal fate? Do we have the last word on that?)

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class

“The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?”

D. Sheol

This Hebrew word appears 65 times in the Old Testament. It is translated as “pit,” “destruction,” “grave” and “death.” Luther translated it with *Holle* in all but four instances. The English Standard Version simply transliterates the Hebrew into “Sheol.” “The word is still obscure. Since the derivation of the word is uncertain, the context must determine the meaning in each case” (*Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, page 792; see also *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, CPH, page 374). The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, or LXX) uses “Hades” almost exclusively for Sheol, which in the New Testament can refer to the realm of the dead or a place where unbelievers suffer.

1. The Resting Place of a Person's Mortal Remains (Death)

Job 17:13-16 What corresponds to the grave? _____, _____, _____

What is our answer to Job's question about hope? (19:25-27) _____

Psalm 18:4-5 What two words correspond to death? _____, _____

What image do the words “cords, torrents, and snares” give us? _____

Psalm 30:2-3 What does David acknowledge about the Lord? _____

Psalm 141:7-8 Where do the wicked say their bones go? _____

What other option does David give us for life? _____

Isaiah 38:9-10, 18 A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery: I said, “In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death (Sheol) and be robbed of the rest of my years?...For the grave (Sheol) cannot praise You, death cannot sing Your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness.”

2. Realm of the Dead

Sheol may mean realm of the dead, into which all enter who depart this life, righteous as well as wicked. In this sense it is a general term used very much like “hereafter” or “the beyond” in English. When the righteous are said to descend into Sheol, their fate beyond is never taken into account (*Lutheran Cyclopedia*, page 374). The following passages all use “Sheol” in the Hebrew original:

Genesis 37:34-36 Where does Jacob think that Joseph is? _____

Does Jacob expect to be there with him? _____

Job 7:9 As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave (Sheol) does not return.

Psalm 6:4-5 When is the time to “remember and praise” the Lord? _____

Psalm 31:16-17 Why should David not be “put to shame”? _____

Whom does David want to be put to shame? _____

How will they be put to shame? _____

Psalm 88:3-5 How does the psalmist describe those who “lie in the grave”?

- _____
- Psalm 88:10-13** What would be the psalmist's answers to his own questions? _____
 Is that all there is? What does the psalmist do? _____
- Psalm 89:48** Is there any avoiding of death? _____
 What attribute does the grave have? _____
- Psalm 116:3-6** What attribute does the grave have here? _____
 Where did the psalmist turn when the grave threatened? _____
 How does the psalmist describe the Lord God? _____
- Psalm 139:7-8** Where is Sheol? _____ Who is there? _____
- Proverbs 15:11** Death and Destruction are capitalized because they are spoken of as if they were people. If God can see into death, He surely knows everything about the living.
- Proverbs 23:13-14** How would parental punishment save a soul from Sheol?
 What did those who get into trouble as adults lack when they were children? _____
- Proverbs 27:20** Our own desires are compared to Death and Destruction (opposites of God's creation). What is it that we and they always want? _____
- Proverbs 30:15-16** What is the first of four things that are never satisfied? _____

3. God's Judgment

Sheol may mean the place where God's judgment overtakes evildoers. In this sense Sheol receives such as are taken away in God's anger. There is a sharp contrast between the doom of the ungodly and the glorious hope of the believer, who hopes to rest securely in the hands of God.

Numbers 16:28-34 The rebellion of Korah and others against Moses and Aaron.

- Where is Sheol ("grave")? _____ Who goes there? _____
- Deuteronomy 32:22** Where is Sheol ("realm of death")? _____
 What is associated with it? _____

Read Psalm 49:10-15.

- Verse 10:** What happens to all people? They _____ and leave _____ to others.
- Verse 11:** Though they had land named for them, what will be their house in death? _____
- Verse 12:** In this regard, to what is man likened? _____
- Verse 13:** This fate is for whom specifically? _____
- Verse 14:** What will happen to them in Sheol ("grave")? _____
- Verse 15:** What is the first word? _____ What does this tell us? _____
 What is the psalmist's confidence? _____

Read Psalm 73:23-26.

- Verse 23:** What does the psalmist recognize? _____
- Verse 24:** What will happen "afterward"? _____
- Verse 25:** What will happen to his body? _____
 How does the psalmist describe God? _____, _____

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class

"The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?"

D. Sheol (*continued*)

4. Eternal Life for the Righteous

1 Samuel 2:6 What is the order of the Lord's actions?

_____ and _____
_____ and _____

Psalm 16:9-11 (quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon, Acts 2:27)

What does David say will happen to his body at its death? _____

What will not happen to him at death? _____; _____

What are the three promises David is trusting?

Psalm 86:11-13 What is the promise of verse 13? _____

How is a life leading up to this described in verse 11? _____

What is included in that life according to verse 12? _____

Psalm 103:1-5 What will God do? _____ and _____

Revelation 2:10b "be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life."

Proverbs 15:24 Which direction is life? _____ Who is on that path? _____

Which direction is Sheol ("grave")? _____

Hosea 13:14 What verbs are used of God's action? _____ and _____

What image does "ransom" bring to mind? _____

What image does "redeem" bring to mind? _____

1 Corinthians 15:54b-55 then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

E. Skepticism

Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 To what does the author compare the fate of humanity? _____

What is the truth behind verse 20? _____

What is the direction of his "hope" for the "spirit of man"? _____

What is our answer to the question of verse 21? _____

Verse 22 is a fatalistic outlook, but what is the answer to the question? _____

Ecclesiastes 7:2 What should all remember about life (*memento mori*)? _____

Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 How are the dead described? _____

But see **Ecclesiastes 12:6-7** What is the dust? _____ Where does it go? _____

What happens to the spirit? _____

F. The Resurrection Hope

Deuteronomy 32:39 This is the conclusion to Moses' farewell sermon to the Israelites.

What does Moses say that God can claim as His unique credentials?

(Notice the contrasts of God's alien work of the law and His proper work of the gospel.)

"I put to _____ and I bring to _____,";

"I have _____ and I will _____,"; and

"No one can _____ out of My _____."

Job 19:25-27 From this passage we get the Easter hymn "I Know That My Redeemer Lives"

"Job abruptly turns from his complaints against God to commit himself to Him in a climactic declaration of unreserved trust in His power and will to deliver him. . . . Job exults in the hope of full restoration after death." (Concordia Self-Study Commentary, CPH, 1971, page 321)

"Life after death is undeniably prominent in these verses. Three times Job confidently asserts I shall see God. Mention of 'flesh,' 'eyes,' and 'heart' shows that Job thinks of his future, vindicated existence in bodily terms." (Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, 2009, page 807)

"Redeemer" is legal language. In Hebrew it comes from a verb denoting various kinds of action beneficial to a person who cannot help himself. A redeemer is one's next of kin (close relative) who a) redeems one from slavery; b) prevents the extinction of his name by marrying his widow and having a son (e.g. Boaz and Ruth); and c) avenges the death of a murdered next of kin. "God's redeeming action is undeserved kindness to men inasmuch as they are victims of forces from which they cannot extricate themselves. . . . Job is persuaded that God's redemptive power does not stop short at the grave." (Concordia Self-Study Commentary, CPH, 1971, page 321)

"Job is certain that there will be a glorious resurrection of the body on the Last Day, that the very skin that clothed him during his mortal life will again cover the flesh that has become subject to decay and corruption. From this very same body, Job knows that he will see God." (Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, 2009, page 807)

- A) Job expects to be in God's presence;
- B) God will no longer afflict Job but be his Redeemer;
- C) Job expects God to appear in his behalf even though he has returned to the dust of the ground;
- D) Job will have eyes to see God even though nothing remains of his flesh; and
- E) In this new mode of existence Job's identity will be preserved. The person at peace with God after death will be none other than the same individual who now suffers and laments.

Isaiah 25:6-8

Verse 6: "mountain"- In the Bible God reveals His glory to His people on mountains (e.g. Sinai, the Transfiguration, Zion, on which the temple was built).

What image is used in this verse to describe the Lord's presence with His people? _____

Verse 7: What is the shroud/sheet that enfolds/covers all peoples/nations? _____

Verse 8: What will God do to death? _____ **For how long?** _____

In doing so, what will God be doing for His people? _____, _____

Revelation 7:17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois Adult Bible Class

"The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?"

Isaiah 26:13-14 and 19

Verse 13: Who are these "other lords" that had ruled over the people? _____

Verse 14: What has happened to them? _____

What won't happen to these "departed spirits"? _____

What three things had the "Lord, our God" done to them?

Verse 19: What will happen to "your dead"? _____

and to "their bodies"? _____ **Where have they been? "in the _____"**

Isaiah describes this resurrection like one is waking up from sleep. We may not normally feel this way when first getting up, but Isaiah tells the newly awakened bodies to "shout for joy."

Why might Isaiah have used the image of "dew" to describe the resurrection of the body?

What is the image of the last line, "the earth will _____ to her dead."?

"Few Old Testament writers were granted this glimpse beyond the grave; the general picture of the after-life, both in Israel and neighboring lands, was of a shadowy existence in a depressing, dusty underworld; but with another characteristically vivid metaphor, the prophet visualizes life-giving and light-bearing dew penetrating as it were through the dusty earth into Sheol." (David Payne, International Bible Commentary, Zondervan, 1986, page 738)

Daniel 12:1-2

Verse 1: "at that time" goes back to 11:40 "the time of the end." This is the Great Tribulation that will take place right before the return of Christ.

What word does the angel speaking to Daniel use to describe this time? _____

What word tells us that good news is coming? _____

How does the angel describe "your (Daniel's) people"? _____

The book (of life) is a common biblical image for the faithful. To have one's name written in this book means salvation. Ultimately, Jesus Himself is the Book of Life.

What will happen to these people? _____

Verse 2: How is physical death described?

"Multitudes who _____ in the _____ of the _____?"

What image is used to describe their resurrection? _____

There are two destinations. What will happen to some? _____

What will happen to the others? "_____ and everlasting _____"

Hosea 6:1-3

Verse 1: Hosea calls upon God's people to repent and return to Him. He gives good law and gospel reasons for the people to do this.

What is the bad news? "He has _____ us to _____" but,

What is the good news? "He will _____ us."

What is more bad news? "He has _____ us" but,

What is more good news? "He will _____ up our _____."

Verse 2: The parallelism of Hebrew poetry uses the number “two” in one line followed by the number “three” in the next line.

What will the Lord do “after two days”? He will _____ us.”

What will the Lord do “on the third day”? He will _____ us.”

Why does the Lord do this? “that we may _____ in His _____.”

This passage, which is the Old Testament Reading for Proper 5 in year A, is perhaps the biblical basis for this statement in the Nicene Creed, “And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.”

Excursus: “The Hebrew Word Nepesh”

The Hebrew word nepesh is translated some twenty different ways in the King James Version. Depending on its context, it can mean “life,” “soul,” “creature,” “person,” “appetite,” or “mind.” It means the whole self, a unity of flesh, will and vitality. Nepesh is frequently used in connection with the emotional states of joy and bliss. Nepesh with the notion of “life” refers to the “I” that hungers and is filled, loves and hates, is joyful and sorrowful, etc. Many passages refer to the “saving” of a man’s nepesh “life.” In all these passages “life” is equivalent to the person. A total of 755 occurrences of the noun nepesh have been counted in the Old Testament, and of these it is rendered in the Greek translation some 600 times by the word psyche. Thus in its most synthetic use nepesh stands for the entire person. (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Moody Press, 1980, pages 589-590)

G. Unusual Cases

Genesis 5:21-24 Enoch

In this genealogy listing Adam’s offspring, we are amazed by the long length of life. But one member of the family had his time of life seemingly cut short. Ironically, this same person is the only one who is described as having “walked with God.” The only other place in the Bible where this phrase is used is in the next chapter of Noah (6:9).

Verse 24: What happened to Enoch who “walked with God”?

“then he was no _____, because God _____ him _____.”

The only other place in the Bible where God is said to “take” someone is of Adam being placed in the Garden of Eden (2:15). The uniqueness of this event inspired considerable interest in Enoch in later Jewish generations inspiring the books 1, 2, and 3 Enoch.

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who please God.

Standing halfway between Adam and the Flood, this translation of Enoch constitutes a most welcome testimony to the prospect of life eternal, both to the older generation as well as to all those who were to follow as his younger contemporaries... It was the first definite indication of immortality offered in the Scripture when God took Enoch. (William Leupold, The Exposition of Genesis, Wartburg Press, 1942, pages 243-244)

Here is significant evidence that already at the time of the Old Testament God’s people were aware of the fact that there is another life beyond the grave. God’s taking Enoch must surely have strengthened the faith of those Old Testament saints in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. (John Jeske, People’s Bible Commentary: Genesis, CPH, 1992, page 72)

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois Adult Bible Class

"The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?"

G. Unusual Cases (*continued*)

Genesis 22 (Hebrews 11:17-19) Abraham's "Sacrifice" of Isaac

Abraham's willingness to obey God's hard instruction (it seems that way to us, but child sacrifice was a part of the religions of Abraham's neighbors) stems from his faith that God could raise the dead (verse 5). God had promised Abraham many descendants. Isaac was the son of that promise. "Since the Word of God determines what a man is, Isaac, as designated for sacrifice by God's command, was already among the dead" (Concordia Self-Study Commentary, page 245).

Since Isaac was as good as dead because of God's command, that Abraham got him back is a figurative resurrection. God did not demand for Abraham to do what He Himself would do later with His one and only Son upon the cross. The Angel of the Lord who prevents Abraham from carrying out his sacrifice of Isaac (verse 11) is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God. Notice the interposing of the Angel of the Lord and the Lord in Genesis 22:15-16.

1 Samuel 28:3-20 Saul, the Witch of Endor, and the Spirit of Samuel

King Saul is desperate for a Word of God before his battle with the Philistines who have entered deep into Israel and threaten to cut the country in two. God has stopped revealing Himself to this king who had disobeyed His Word previously. Saul's promise to the witch in verse 10 is ironic since consulting the dead was forbidden by God, as Saul himself recognized in his earlier, faithful days when he expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land. Also he takes an oath invoking the name of God (Second Commandment issue).

Verses 11-12: What does the woman's reaction tell us about the reality of her profession?

"The shock of the moment of revelation caused the woman to realize she was involved in something more powerful and threatening than she had supposed" (Lutheran Study Bible, 2009, page 481).

Verses 13-14: How does Saul know that the spirit is Samuel? _____

1 Samuel 15:27-28 As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you."

Verse 15: What does "Samuel's" question tell us about his condition? _____

Is this the devil's trick or is this really Samuel's spirit?

"The long-standing issue with this text is whether the spirit was truly Samuel's spirit or the work of an evil spirit, which the Lord compelled to speak the truth" (Lutheran Study Bible, 2009, page 482).

Verses 16-19: What three pieces of evidence might tell us that this is really Samuel?

Verse 17: A repeat of God's _____ (see 1 Samuel 15:28 above)

Verse 18: A review of Saul's _____

Verse 19: A prophecy of God's _____ that will come _____.

What pieces of evidence might tell us that this is not really Samuel but a work of the devil?

Samuel does not tell Saul to _____ before it is too late (maybe already is).

"You and your sons will be with me" If this were Samuel does he simply mean the place of the dead or would disobedient Saul and his sons actually go to heaven anyway? Perhaps this shows that it is a spirit from the devil and he means that Saul and his sons will be in the same place of punishment that he is.

God does not _____ this way for it is contrary to His _____.

“God permitted the practice of forbidden necromancy to bring Saul a message from dead Samuel. However, divine intervention in this particular instance does not sanction attempts by spiritists to penetrate mysteries that God has reserved for Himself” (Concordia Self-Study Commentary, 1971, page 203)

Verse 20: What is Saul’s reaction to the message of this spirit? _____

2 Kings 2:11-12 *Elijah’s Bodily Ascension into Heaven*

The transition from the prophetic ministry of Elijah to Elisha takes place. On a final journey to bid farewell to his friends and associates, Elijah tries to separate himself from his follower Elisha or was testing his determination to remain with his teacher. Sensing what was about to happen, Elisha insists on going with Elijah, cherishing every last moment with him.

Verse 11: Where did Elijah go? _____ **How did he get there?** _____

Verse 12: What is Elisha’s reaction to what he saw? _____

“Elisha confessed that Israel’s true strength and glory were not in war horses and military prowess, as Israel’s kings believed, but in the Word and faith of her prophets” (Lutheran Study Bible, page 580).

When will we see Elijah again in the Bible? _____

Summary of Old Testament Information:

There is something far more important about life and death than simply being alive or being dead. According to biblical usage, ‘life’ and ‘death’ are not equivalent to living and dying. These terms refer respectively to existence under God’s favor and to existence under His wrath. . . . An individual may be viewed under the category of ‘death’ long before biological death has occurred. On the other hand, the one who has ‘life’ has passed out of the realm of ‘death.’ If he has ‘life,’ he no longer views his physical death as belonging to the realm of ‘death,’ i.e., under the wrath of God. The believer has ‘life’ even in the midst of biological death. Therefore the believer looks at his death and dying as belonging to the category of ‘life’ under the grace and blessing of God. (Paul Schrieber, “Choose Life and Not Death”)

It is more likely that the idea of resurrection emerged naturally from a much earlier period. Some of the oldest poetry in the Old Testament seems to imply resurrection. . . . It certainly seems likely that this later articulation of a resurrection belief emerged from the earlier faith of Israel, rather than coming in from some other source, as was once believed. . . . The idea that resurrection life could have a distinctive and different quality is not found in the Old Testament. Nor is the belief that resurrection signified the defeat of death. Both those developments were to come later, and grew out of the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus. (John Drane, Old Testament Faith, Harper and Row, 1986, pages 75-76.

The Old Testament plainly does not understand the grave as ending all, as liberalism often teaches, but neither is life after death as prominent or central as it became after Christ’s death, at least not in any explicit way. Perhaps we can summarize by saying that the Old Testament simply assumes immortality (though not in the Greek sense) rather than resurrection—but not ultimate cleft should be made between the two.” (Horace Hummel, The Word Becoming Flesh, CPH, 1979, page 210)

Critics are often loathe to concede any type of Old Testament belief in life after death except for perhaps the most shadowy type of existence in Sheol, and with that presupposition give a minimalistic reading to passages which, at very least, are capable of more positive interpretations. Possibly the distinction between “immortality” and “resurrection” summarizes most of the difference between what is at least explicitly stated in the earlier and later texts, but the conservative would be very much concerned to accent the continuities as well. (Hummel, *ibid*, page 557).

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
Red Bud, Illinois
Adult Bible Class
“The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?”

Excursus: Purgatory

The 16th century Reformation of the Christian Church began with dissatisfaction over the selling of indulgences in Germany to raise money so that Albrecht (Albert) of Mainz could pay off the bank loan he took to buy his archbishop position and to help build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. A Roman Catholic monk of the Augustinian order and doctor of theology at the University of Wittenberg named Martin Luther issued a challenge for academic debate by posting 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on All Hallows' Eve in 1517. Reproduction of these statements by means of social media (the printing press) struck a nerve throughout Germany making Luther the leader of a reformation movement.

Indulgences were pieces of paper that offered the forgiveness of sins based upon the amount of offering given to the Church. They could be purchased for those who already had died. This only could work based upon the teaching of purgatory. This is a time of torment and a period of purification for the pious to pay for their venial sins or who need to complete the punishment due for their already-forgiven sins before entering into heaven. “All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Doubleday, New York, 1994, page 291). This doctrine was formulated by the Roman Catholic Church especially at the Councils of Florence (1438-45) and Trent (met in three separate sessions between 1545 and 1563). This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead. “The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead” (with a quote of support from the church father John Chrysostom) (ibid, page 291).

This catechism and the Brief Catechism for Adults: A Complete Handbook on How to Be a Good Catholic (1993) base this teaching upon this passage from the Apocrypha:

2 Maccabees 12:39-45 On the next day, as had now become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kindred in the sepulchres of their ancestors.⁴⁰ Then under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen.⁴¹ So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the things that are hidden;⁴² and they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened as the result of the sin of those who had fallen.⁴³ He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of

two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. ⁴⁴ For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. ⁴⁵ But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

“The Roman purgatory, to which Rome consigns the souls of the believers for the purpose of suffering temporal punishments still due, is pure invention, for by their faith in Christ the believers, as Scripture teaches, possess not purgatory, but eternal life...through His *satisfaction vicaria* Christ has purchased for all men the full remission of sins and complete salvation and that man possesses this remission of sins and salvation the very moment he comes to faith in Christ as his Savior through the working of the Holy Spirit” (Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics Volume III, CPH, St. Louis, 1953, page 512-13).

“Lutherans regard purgatory as unscriptural, insulting to Christ, indefensible, mercenary” (Erwin Lueker, editor, Lutheran Cyclopedia CPH, St. Louis, 1954, page 652).

John 3:18 (Jesus said) “Whoever believes in Him (the Son) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

John 3:36 (Jesus said) “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

John 5:24 (Jesus said) “I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
Red Bud, Illinois Adult Bible Class
"The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?"

II. The View of the Afterlife in the New Testament

A. Resurrection in Jesus' Teachings

1. Matthew 22:23-33 The Test of the Sadducees

The Sadducees were an elite religious group who controlled temple worship and were funded by the money paid there for animals to be sacrificed. They were in tight with Romans. They recognized only the Books of Moses as Scripture and did not accept the oral traditions of the Pharisees.

They test Jesus with an absurd-sounding scenario. The practice they describe is called Levirate marriage (after a Latin word meaning "brother-in-law"). It was common among ancient cultures in that area. The passage they refer to is from Deuteronomy 25. This practice insured that the family name, line and property would always run through the first-born son even if he died without a son of his own. The Sadducees think for sure the case they describe will stump Jesus. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and were looking for a way to discredit that teaching.

Verse 25: How does Jesus respond to them? _____

Why are they in error? _____

Verse 26: Jesus does not argue the reality of the resurrection with them. He simply states that the resurrection will happen. **What won't be part of our afterlife?** _____

In the resurrection our earthly relationships will be replaced with the even more important spiritual and heavenly relationship of being brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus speaks of angels which the Sadducees did not believe in either. To support the teaching of the resurrection, Jesus refers to a passage the Sadducees should recognize and accept, the account of the burning bush from Exodus 3. The Lord describes Himself to Moses as the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." While these patriarchs were physically dead, God is still their God, thus they must still be living in some way with Him.

Verse 32: How does Jesus describe His Heavenly Father? _____

2. Luke 16:19-31 Lazarus and the Rich Man

The question is whether this is a parable of Jesus or His description of something that really happened. The main reason this might really have happened is that if it is a parable, it is the only one where Jesus names a character.

Verse 22 What happened when Lazarus died? _____

"This was the place of blessedness to which the righteous dead go to await future vindication. Its bliss is the quality of blessedness reserved for people like Abraham" (Concordia Self-Study Bible, page 1581).

Verses 23-24: What was the fate of the rich man? _____

This is where the wicked dead go to await the final judgment.

What shows that the rich man has awareness of his condition?

Verse 25: What is the contrast of their existences? _____

Verse 27: The rich man expects Lazarus to be at his beck and call. What does he want Lazarus to

do? _____

Verse 29; What is Abraham's first answer? _____

Verse 31: What is Abraham's second answer? _____

There will be no visitors from the dead to bring messages of the afterlife. For example, such a warning did not work when the actual Lazarus rose from the dead in John 11. That miracle of Jesus just convinced the Jewish leaders all the more that they had to get rid of Jesus.

B. Resurrections in the Gospels

Three times during His earthly ministry Jesus raised a person from the dead. While each of these resurrections brought joy to the family, we wonder if it wasn't a "demotion" for the life of the person returned to earth. Yet the main purpose of these miracles was to give glory to God and serve as previews of Jesus' own resurrection from the dead.

1. Luke 7:11-17 The Young Man of Nain

Nain was a village a few miles south of Nazareth in Galilee. This is then in Jesus' home territory. The death of this young man, an only son, meant that his widowed mother was left with no visible means of support for her life.

Verse 12: How else is this person described? _____

Verse 13: What is Jesus' reaction? _____ and His message? _____

This is the first time in his gospel that Luke refers to Jesus as "the Lord." The "coffin" was an open stretcher with the corpse exposed. Jesus' touching of it shows that He is willing to become ritually unclean if it means helping someone in need (Numbers 5:2-4).

Verse 14: What does Jesus say? _____

Verse 15: What two things does the dead person do showing that he is alive?

How did the dead person hear Jesus' command in order to respond to His words?

Verse 16: What is the crowd's reaction to Jesus' miracle? _____

As part of their prophetic ministry both Elijah (1 Kings 17) and Elisha (2 Kings 4) raised only sons from the dead.

2. Luke 8:49-56 Jesus Raises a Young Girl

Verse 49: What is the diagnosis of Jairus' daughter? _____

What did they think Jesus could do for her now? _____

Verse 50: How does Jesus encourage Jairus in the face of this sad news? _____

The Greek original behind the verb translated "will be healed" also means "to be saved."

Verse 52: How does Jesus describe the girl's condition? "not _____ but _____."

To Jesus, the Lord of life, death is as temporary a condition as sleep is for us.

Verse 54: What does Jesus say to the girl? _____

Verse 55: What happened? "her spirit _____" From where? _____

What does the girl do proving that she is alive? _____

How did the dead person hear Jesus' command in order to respond to His words?

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class

“The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?”

II. The View of the Afterlife in the New Testament

B. Resurrections in the Gospels (*continued*)

3. John 11:38-44 Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

Having been told of Lazarus' illness, Jesus intentionally delayed going to his house until after Lazarus had died.

Verse 4: What three things does Jesus say about Lazarus' illness?

Verse 11: How does Jesus describe Lazarus' condition? _____

What will Jesus do about this? _____

Verses 14-15: Now what does Jesus say to the disciples about Lazarus? _____

Why is Jesus "glad" he was not there? _____

Verses 21 and 32: How do Martha and then Mary describe Lazarus' condition? _____

Verse 37: What does the crowd know about Lazarus' condition? _____

Verse 39: What evidence does Martha have that Lazarus is dead? _____

Verse 40: Jesus actually had said this to the disciples in verse 4.

What purpose does Lazarus' death serve? _____

Verses 41-42: What does Jesus do? _____ Why? _____

The theme of John's Gospel is that Jesus is the Son of God and authorized agent of the Father.

Verse 43: A skeptic has said that this was a set up which is why Jesus called Lazarus by name. But Jesus uses Lazarus' name specifically or he would have raised the entire cemetery!

How does Lazarus hear Jesus from inside the tomb? _____

4. Luke 23:39-43 Jesus Promises Paradise

One criminal is sinful humanity reduced to one: he mocks Jesus' suffering.

The other criminal is repentant humanity reduced to one; he recognizes Jesus' sinlessness.

Verse 42: What does this man ask of Jesus? _____

What does he believe Jesus will do? _____

Verse 43: What does Jesus promise him? "be with _____ in _____"

"Paradise" is a Persian loanword that means "park." It was used in Judaism to describe the abode of the redeemed between death and resurrection.

2 Corinthians 12:3-4 And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

Revelation 2:7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

When does Jesus say that this promise will be fulfilled? _____

5. Matthew 27:50-53 Those Raised When Jesus Died

Verse 50: What does it mean that Jesus “gave up His spirit”? _____

The way Matthew describes Jesus’ death shows that He died of His own will. He gave up His life for us. Throughout His trial, suffering and death Jesus was in control of all that was happening to Him. The following verses appear only in Matthew’s Gospel. He writes His account of Jesus for fellow Jewish Christians who lived in and around Jerusalem. If this event did not happen, then Matthew’s Gospel would be the most unlikely one to include it, since his readers were close enough in time (30-35 years) to call it into question and dispute it. The readers of the other three Gospels were too far removed in space (Mark and Luke) and time (John) to have disproven it.

Verse 51: What two things happen here when Jesus dies?

The tall, thick curtain in the temple of Jerusalem divided the larger Holy Place from the smaller Most Holy Place which originally had contained the Ark of the Covenant. Only the High Priest would go into this part of the temple and only on the Day of Atonement to sacrifice for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. The curtain tearing is a miracle itself (“from top to bottom”). Like the rending of a garment in an act of sorrow, it is God’s way of showing His grief over the death of His Son. “The old system of sacrifice, priesthood, and temple worship ended; Jesus’ sacrifice opened the way for every repentant sinner to enter into God’s presence” (Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, page 1770).

Hebrews 10:19-20 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body... ”

Verse 52: What two other things happened when Jesus died?

How long had these people been dead? _____ (unlike the young man, girl and Lazarus)

“Their resurrection demonstrated the purpose of Christ’s death: to bring eternal life to those doomed to die” (Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, page 1648).

Verse 53: What is the first thing these resurrected “sleeping saints” did? _____

What two other things did they do? _____

But when did they do those two things? _____

What might they have been doing in the meantime? _____

There are no references to this event in Jewish history or tradition. There are no other Bible passages that refer to it (no mention by Paul in his list of Jesus’ resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15). “It was the earthquake that opened the tombs, Christ’s resurrection made the rising of the saints possible. Matthew’s own reticence suggests that he himself had no clear understanding of what happened” (International Bible Commentary, Zondervan, 1986, page 1152). “The shaking of the earth is a frequent feature in many of the Old Testament appearances of God; here God is manifesting Himself, in the death of the Servant the arm of the Lord is being revealed; the saints proceeding from their tombs and appearing in the holy city indicate that Christ’s death is the victory over death, that He is the firstborn from the dead” (Concordia Self-Study Commentary, CPH, 1971, page 40). Some try to explain this by saying that the “holy city” is the “new Jerusalem” of Revelation 21, so that these resurrected saints actually went into heaven. However, this runs contrary to the plain sense of Matthew’s words. “Although much remains obscure here, this was a clear manifestation of the bodily resurrection of the righteous that will one day happen because of Christ’s death and resurrection” (H.N. Ridderbos, Matthew, Zondervan, 1987, page 537).

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class

"The Intermediate State—What Happens When We Die?"

II. The View of the Afterlife in the New Testament (*continued*)

C. The Rest of the New Testament

1. Acts 7:59-8:1 The stoning of Stephen

v. 59 What does Stephen expect the result of this stoning to be? _____

v. 60 How does Luke describe Stephen's end the first time? _____

v. 1 How does Luke describe Stephen's end after mentioning Saul? _____

2. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 Our Earthly Home is a Tent

v. 1 What are the contrasts? "earthly" _____

"tent" " _____ / _____

"destroyed" _____

vv. 2-3 What image does Paul use? _____

v. 4 How does Paul describe how we are "in this tent"? _____

What will happen to "what is mortal"? _____

Psalm 69:15 Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me.

Proverbs 1:11-12 If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit."

Isaiah 25:7-8a On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; He will swallow up death forever.

1 Corinthians 15:54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

v. 5 What is God's guarantee ("deposit") of this life to come? _____

3. Philippians 1:20-24 Depart and Be with Christ

Paul writes from Rome to Christians in the Greek city of Philippi, where he had established the first Christian congregation in Europe over 10 years earlier. He is under house arrest awaiting trial before the Roman emperor on account of his preaching of Jesus. This is one of Paul's four "Captivity Letters."

v. 21 "To live is _____ and to die is _____." (The Greek word means "profit.")

v. 22 Why should we not be in a hurry to get to heaven? _____

v. 23 What will happen to Paul when he "departs"? (The Greek word means "to break camp")

_____ How does Paul describe that? "which is _____ by far."

"Better" than what? _____

v. 24 What does Paul expect will happen? _____

Why? _____ How so? _____

4. 1 Peter 3:18-19 Preaching to the Souls of the Dead

This is a preaching of judgment, not a preaching of the Gospel. This took place between Christ's death and resurrection. This is Christ's descent into hell as we confess in the Creeds. It is His victory parade in the "hometown" of His defeated enemy. "Christ descended into hell to declare His victory over death and all evil forces. His power surpasses all others. Scripture does not teach that He offered these spirits a second chance for salvation" (Lutheran Study Bible, page 2155). Since Peter continues with a reference to Noah, these "'spirits in prison' are those 'sons of God' who sinned in Genesis 6:2, i.e. angelic beings as in Job 1:6; 2:1; Daniel 3:25, 28. 2 Peter 2:4f. seems decisive for this interpretation" (International Bible Commentary, Zondervan, page 1559).

5. Revelation 6:9-11 The Souls of the Slain Under the Altar

v. 9 For what was an altar used in the Old Testament? _____

Why had they been slain? _____

v. 10 For what are they waiting? _____

v. 11 What are they given? _____ What does this signify? _____

What must happen before their request is answered? _____

Conclusion:

"What Will Happen When We Die?" Lutheran Study Bible, page 1750

"Instead of thinking about Judgment Day as the first time a distinction is made between the righteous and the wicked, we should see it as the final and full awarding of rewards and penalties. Judgment Day is about the fact that we, in our bodies, will receive the things done in the body. Those who have done evil in the body will receive condemnation. Those who, in the body, have believed in Christ, have been forgiven of their sins, and have new life by God's Spirit, will receive rewards. Judgment Day is the full and final awarding of rewards and penalties, not the beginning of that awarding."

Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, pages 511-512

"Holy Writ reveals but little of the state of the souls between death and the resurrection. In speaking of the last things, it directs our gaze primarily to judgment Day and the events around it...Of the souls of the believers we are told not merely in general that they are in God's hand (Acts 7:59; Luke 23:46), but also in particular that they dwell with Christ and in Paradise. The 'being with Christ' or 'in Paradise' of the departed believing souls must certainly be an augmentation of the communion with Christ which Christians enjoy here on earth...These texts surely make it evident that the departed souls of the believers are in a state of blessed enjoyment of God, even though we know nothing further as to the manner of their blessed communion with God."

page 515 "Before leaving the subject of the souls of the departed, we record the following facts: 1. Departed souls do not return to this world. 2. There is no Scripture warrant for attributing to the souls of the departed a direct knowledge of particular things and happenings on earth. 3. Scripture offers no hope for the conversion of departed souls."