

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Were to Die Tonight?

Luke 16:19–31



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In this series on the “what ifs” of life, we’ve come face to face with the possibility of losing everything, failure, being lied to, having a permanent disability, and even a situation in which our worst enemies stalk us from the shadows. Just recalling these topics can make us *shudder!*

Thankfully, our mighty God has walked with us into each fearful circumstance, shining the light of His Word and inspiring steady faith. “Don’t be afraid,” He reassures us, “for I am with you. . . . I will hold you up with my victorious right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

In our final, climactic study, we venture through the iron gate of our hometown cemetery into the most terrifying of all fears: death. Here, we peer into the darkness of our own grave as we ask the question: *What if you were to die tonight?*

Oh, how we need God’s reassuring hand and the light of His Word to help us answer this question!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Secular wisdom stands helpless at death’s threshold, unable to unlock the mysteries of the afterlife. The Scriptures, however, lead us through the veil and illumine a realm beyond our world, revealing what life is like on the other side of death.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

One of Chuck Swindoll’s recommended Bible study tools is a chart. Charts help us visualize and consolidate passages into a map to guide our understanding of God’s truth.

The chart by Chuck Swindoll on the following page illustrates the Bible’s teaching on what happens to believers and unbelievers after they die. Let’s study this chart in detail and, afterward, read an instructive story from Jesus about the contrasting fates of two men who died.

Quotable

*God’s written
Word is the
most compelling
information to
prepare us for life
after death.*

— Charles R. Swindoll

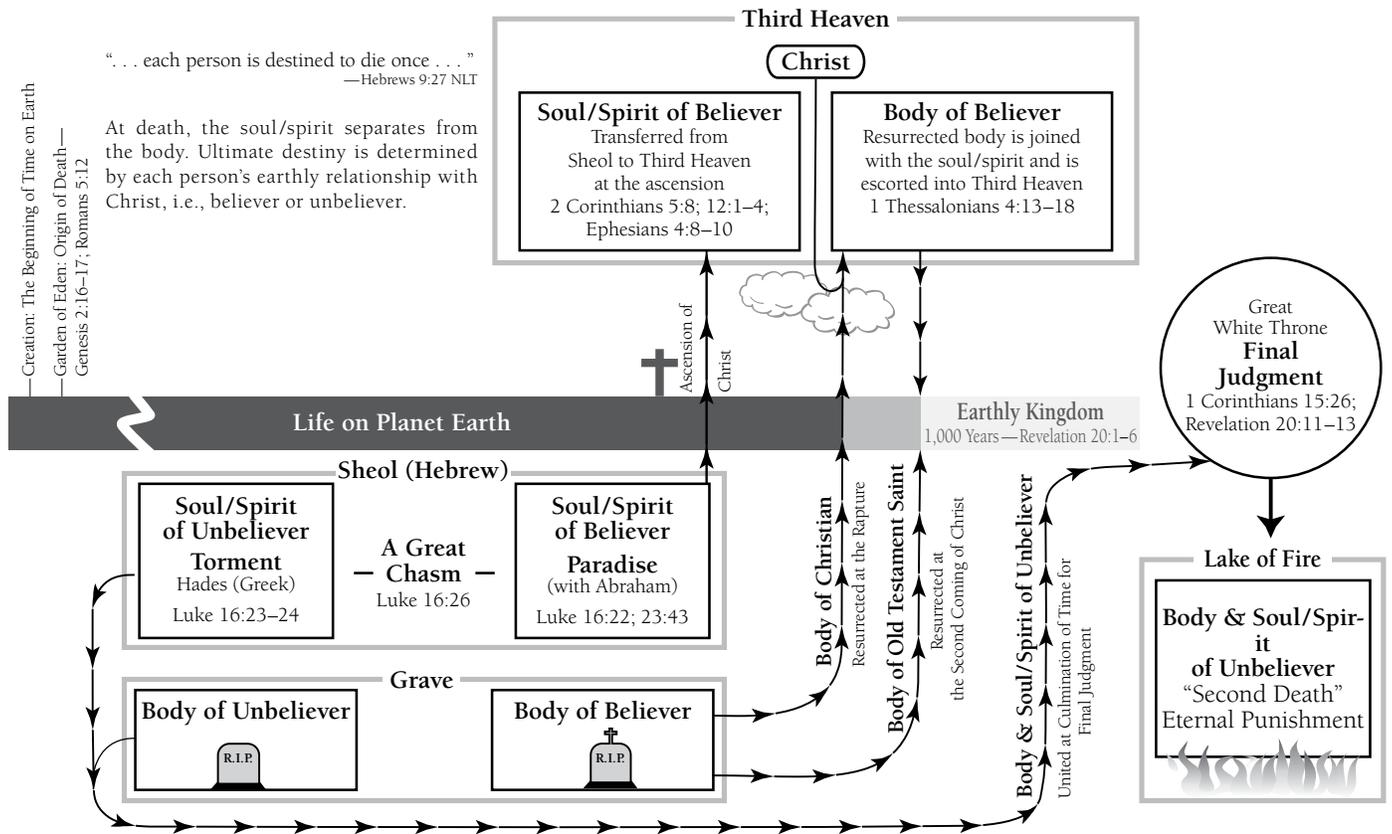


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When People Die . . . What Happens?



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A General Understanding of the Life Beyond

When did the seed of death first enter the soil of human history, and what was the bitter fruit (Genesis 2:16–17; Romans 5:12)?



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What happens when we die? Our soul/spirit (our *intangible* part, the real *us* that lives on) separates from our body. Our body (the *tangible* part) dies and decays.

In the chart, the thick black line represents time before and after Jesus' death on a cross and resurrection three days later, history's pinnacle events that give hope to every person who has ever lived! What did Christ accomplish for us through the cross and the empty tomb? Look up the following verses, and write down what they say.

1 John 2:2

Acts 2:24; Romans 6:9

Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8–9

On the cross, Christ gave Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, and then He *conquered death* by rising from the grave. He offers eternal life to all who receive His gift through faith. By faith in Christ, we cling to the hope that “God will raise us from the dead by his power just as he raised our Lord from the dead” (1 Corinthians 6:14; see also 15:23; 2 Corinthians 4:14).

When will God raise us from the dead? And what about those who reject Christ's offer of salvation? To find the answers, follow the timeline on Chuck Swindoll's chart, and fill in the following blanks.



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First, let's look at the timeline prior to the cross. At death, the bodies of Old Testament *believers and unbelievers* went into the _____.

Where did the soul/spirits of dead Old Testament *unbelievers* go? _____

And where did the soul/spirits of dead Old Testament *believers* go? _____

The Hebrew word for the place of the dead is _____. It is a single destination, but its two parts are divided by _____.

The Destiny of Unbelievers

What is the ultimate destiny of unbelievers? Find the boxes “Soul/Spirit of Unbeliever” and “Body of Unbeliever” on the lower left side, and follow the arrowed line to the circle “Final Judgment” and box “Lake of Fire.” Read Revelation 20:11–15, and write down what you discover.

The Destiny of Believers

In stark contrast to the destiny of unbelievers is the destiny of believers. Find the two boxes titled “Soul/Spirit of Believer,” one below and one above the timeline. The box above the timeline represents heaven where Christ is—which Paul called the “third heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4. The box below the line represents the Old Testament believers who died before Christ. Christ transferred their soul/spirits to heaven when “He led captive a host of captives” (Ephesians 4:8 NASB) at His ascension.

What happens to believers' soul/spirits after death? Read 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23, and write down the phrases that indicate that we go directly to Christ's presence in heaven when we die.



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What happens to believers' bodies after they go into the grave? Those Christ-followers who died after the death and resurrection of Christ are part of His church. Write down what happens to these believers' bodies, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.

When Christ gathers or “raptures” His church, He will give them new bodies—which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 51–57. What do these verses say?

What about the bodies of Old Testament believers? They will be part of the resurrection that John refers to in Revelation 20:1–6. What do these verses say?

We've zoomed through a lot of biblical theology! Now let's take a seat in Jesus' audience and listen in as He gives us a rare peek into the afterlife through His story of The Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31.

A Story of Two Men Who Died

As the curtain opens on Jesus' story, we see an opulent estate, where a rich man enjoys a luxurious lifestyle, while Lazarus, the beggar at his gate, hungers for the scraps that feed the rich man's dogs. Read the first scene of the story, Luke 16:19–21. What key words and descriptors do you observe?



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In the second scene, the fortunes of both men reverse as their souls pass through the portal of death. Read Luke 16:22–26, and describe what you see. Where do these men fit in the chart above?

The third scene contains the moral of Jesus' story. Read Luke 16:27–31, and write down the lesson that Jesus is teaching.

A Summary of Lessons Learned

Chuck's summary includes three points about the precious value of God's Word to help us understand the ultimate issues of life, death, and the life to come:

- *God's Word is the most important evidence.* Nothing else is as effective in convincing people of the truth. Even a miracle won't soften a person's heart like God's Word will.
- *God's Word is the most compelling information to prepare us for life after death.* The Bible is more compelling than people's opinions, superstition, or any worldly philosophy.
- *Those who ignore the Word of God in life will be rejected by the God of the Word in eternity.* This is a heavy truth to bear. The writer to the Hebrews clearly sets before us both the warning of judgment and the promise of salvation:

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:27–28)



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Bring It Home

Ask yourself the question that began our study, “What if you were to die tonight?” Would you spend eternity with Christ in heaven?

If you’re not certain that death would usher you instantaneously into the presence of Christ, please make certain right now by trusting Christ as your Savior. Answer yes to Jesus’ question in John 11:25–26.

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (NASB)

Yes, I believe!

Now, with eternity in your heart, spend your life with eternity in view. Don’t be like the foolish rich man, who lived in luxury during his days on earth but was destitute for eternity. Instead, store up treasure in heaven by helping those in need—the Lazarus who lies at your gate. And when the “what ifs” of life threaten you, don’t let fear control you. Instead, “Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3)—safe and secure forever.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the life You offer . . . abundant life . . . a life of forgiveness filled with purpose and meaning. Take all of my fears and superstitions, and fill my emptiness with hope when the bottom drops out or sickness comes. I turn to You. I put my faith in Your Son, Jesus. And I rest in the promise of Your Word both now and forever. Amen.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



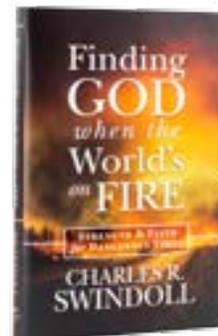
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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