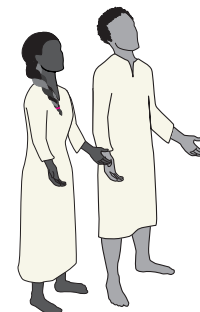


Part 1: Until Jesus Comes Again

Patiently Waiting

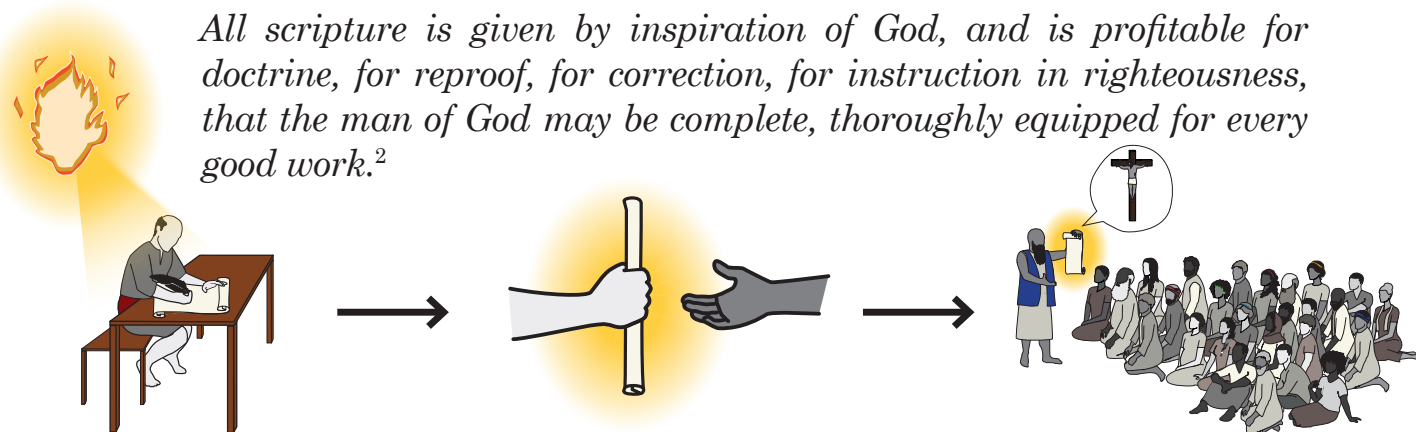
The church continued to grow despite persecution and faithfully took the good news all over the world. The devil lost his hold on the world when Jesus died and resurrected. However, he was (and still is) a deceiver. The great adversary of God's people adapted to the Christian Age. Through his evil influence, governments and individuals persecuted the church. Christians wait patiently for Jesus' return someday and live a lifestyle of faithfulness unto death.¹



The New Testament Written Down

Many Jews, Gentiles, and even the Roman government did not like Christians. Many were killed or persecuted for their faith. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles and other New Testament men of faith to write down the Gospel of Jesus and Christian teachings so that the Word of God could be passed on to all nations. In addition to four gospel accounts of Jesus' life, they wrote letters of Christian encouragement and instruction to different churches. These letters are also known as *the epistles*. These epistles are meant to teach all Christians how to love and obey God, serve others, and stay faithful. The Bible says:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.²



With the New Testament written down, copies passed from church to church. The church of Christ had begun, had grown, and continues to grow to this day!

¹ See *Christian Basics: What Do We Do After We Are Saved?*

² 2 Timothy 3:16-17; For more information about how we got the Bible, please consider *Pure and Simple Bible: The Bible Series*.

Some Depart the Faith

Sadly, there is not only good news to tell about the Christian Age. Satan knew that their devotion to Jesus' good news was strong. The devil used the same strategy that He tempted Eve with in the garden of Eden. He cast doubt on God's message. Through evil influence, false teachers and selfish Christians began to try to change the beliefs and practices of the church.³ The apostle Paul warned:

*“Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron...”*⁴

Faithful Christians stood up for what was right. They refused to be deceived by Satan nor agree with these false teachers. Because the false teachers would not quit, they departed from the faith and began churches of their own. Even though Jesus said that He would build the church⁵, others have created churches to meet their own desires.⁶ To this day, groups that do not obey what God commands or follow the teachings of a man are not part of the church that Jesus built. They take Jesus off the throne of their heart, and reign as kings themselves.



Faithful Christians Carry On

Even though the devil is busy influencing people into sin and spiritual death, Christians fight back by bringing the good news of Jesus: salvation and godly living. This spiritual war between Jesus' good news and Satan's evil influence will continue throughout the Christian Age. Through godly living, caring for the poor and weak, and sharing the gospel, Christians can expose sin and Satan for their evil ways.

The Christian faith is centered on *evangelism*, meaning *the sharing of the good news of Jesus*. Christians often move to new places and take the gospel with them. As the church grows around the world, more people are faithfully obeying Him. Jesus commissioned that His gospel be taken all over the world. He said:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*⁷

³ See *Christian Basics: Deception*

⁴ 1 Timothy 4:1-2

⁵ Matthew 16:16-18

⁶ See *Christian Basics: Six Common Misconceptions About Christianity*

Jesus gave a very specific command for Christians: *Go and make disciples of all nations*. Through salvation and edification (stated by Jesus as "baptize them" and "teach them"), people all over the world are faithfully awaiting the day that Jesus will come again. Until then, Christians remain faithful by spiritually growing through the Bible, godly living, and sharing the gospel with others.



Faithful to Death

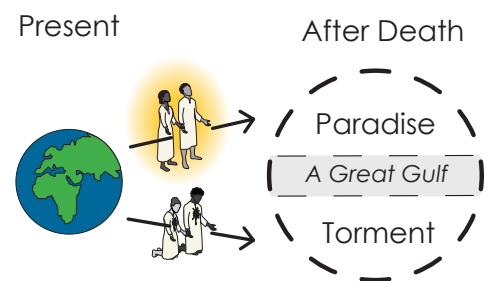
Christians have waited for Jesus' return for a long time. God has told us to be patient, because time is not the same to Him as it is to us.

*But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*⁸

When Jesus said He is coming *soon*, it is not referring to measurable time, but a Heavenly guarantee: He *will* come again. Knowing this, Christians do their best to be faithful to God. A life spent in devotion to God is worth an eternity of reward in Heaven!⁹ At the end of our life, what happens if we die and Jesus has not returned? What has happened to all those who have died before our time?

Mankind has devised answers for this question that are plentiful and diverse. Some people believe that we will simply cease to exist. They think that this life is all we have. Others believe that life is one great cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. The ideas above are a sample of the plethora of ideas from the construct of man, not God. The Holy Spirit revealed in the Bible what will happen if we die before Jesus returns again.

The Bible says that once we die, our chance for redemption has passed. If we are faithful to Him, He will be faithful to us. If we have denied Him, He will deny us.¹⁰ The Bible teaches that when we die, our soul goes to a waiting place called Hades.¹¹ Hades is a realm where the dead wait for the Day of Judgment. Jesus waited in Hades for three days from the time of His death to the moment of His resurrection.¹²



After His ascension, Jesus now reigns in Heaven with God the Father.¹³ Therefore, Hades is not Heaven. There is a great gulf that separates the righteous and the unrighteous in Hades. This gulf is so wide that none can cross to the other side. The righteous dwell in a part of Hades called Paradise where there is peace and comfort. The unrighteous dwell in a part of Hades that is a place of torment and pain.¹⁴ While the living await Jesus' return on the earth, the dead wait in Hades until Jesus comes again.

⁷ Matthew 28:19-20

⁸ 2 Peter 3:8

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:17

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:11-13

¹¹ Luke 16:22-23

¹² Acts 2:31

¹³ See Revelation 4-5

¹⁴ Luke 16:19-31

Part 2: An Eternal Reward

The End of the Age

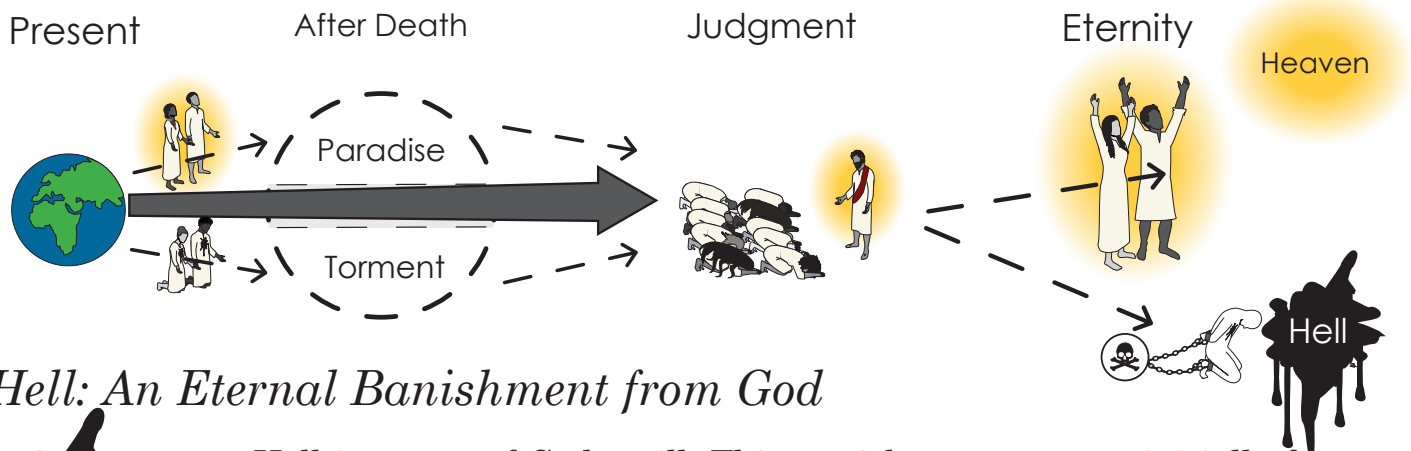
The Christian Age will continue until the Lord Jesus returns to bring judgment on the world. God is patient. He wants all men to be saved.¹ Eventually, there will come a time when God will decide that He has been patient long enough. He will begin the end of time by sending Jesus back. No one knows the exact time of Jesus' return except God the Father.² The promise we have is that Jesus will return, and until He does, we should live for Him!

The Bible says Jesus will come like a thief in the night. This means that no one will anticipate the time. He will appear in the sky with angels and all of mankind (both living and dead) will be called to the judgment. When all are assembled, all people will bow and confess that Jesus is Lord.³ After this assembly comes judgment and an eternal reward.



The Judgment

Everyone who has ever lived, from the very first man to you and me, will face judgment. The Bible says that the books will be opened and our lives will bear witness for us. Our life will either demonstrate faithfulness or rebellion to God.⁴ The blood of Jesus will cover the sins of those who have faithfully obeyed His gospel. The names of those who are saved will be found in the book of Life. Those names that are not found will be cast into eternal Hell.⁵ This Judgment is a sentencing. No one will be able to argue their case before God. None will be able to change the sentence they receive. God will sentence each soul for the life lived (either in faith or in rebellion).



Hell: An Eternal Banishment from God



Hell is a part of God's will. This punishment was not initially for man; God designed Hell for the devil and his fallen angels.⁶ Hell became necessary for man after the rebellion in the Garden of Eden.⁷ While some prefer not to think about Hell, people must realize what lies ahead, if they do not repent. Hell has a threefold purpose: punishment, destruction, and banishment from God.⁸

¹ 2 Peter 3:9

² Matthew 24:36; 2 Peter 3:10-13, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

³ 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, Philippians 2:10

⁴ See *Christian Basics: Judgment: Who Will Be Judged?*

⁵ Revelation 20:11-15

⁶ Matthew 25:31, 2 Peter 2:20-22

⁷ 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, Romans 6:23

The Bible uses the five physical senses to describe Hell (hearing, touch, taste, sight, and smell). These are intended to be examples of a *spiritual* future. Our minds may think about these senses in a physical way, but the Bible uses them to describe a spiritual punishment:

- **Hearing:** Constant weeping and gnashing teeth in pain will be heard in Hell.⁹
- **Touch:** Eternal fire, pain, and worm that continually eats the souls in Hell.¹⁰
- **Taste** (or lack thereof): Hell is compared to unquenchable thirst.¹¹
- **Sight** (or lack thereof): Hell as a place of total darkness.¹²
- **Smell:** The constant rot and burning will fill the nostrils of those in Hell.¹⁰

Who Will Be in Hell?

Satan and his fallen angels will be cast into Hell.¹³ Beyond these spirits, who will be sent there? While no human is the judge of another's soul, we should understand what the Bible teaches: the way to heaven is difficult, and the way to Hell is easy.

*“Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, there are few who find it.”*¹⁴

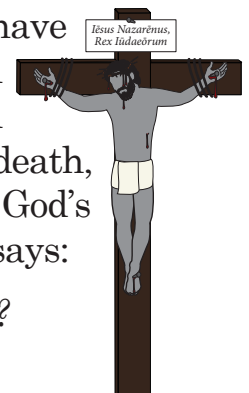
Some believe that Hell is reserved for the most terrible sinners. Who gets to decide which sins are terrible and which ones can be overlooked? The Bible teaches that all sins—that have not been forgiven—are punishable in God's judgment.



This is why Christians take the good news all over the world. Anyone *can* be saved.¹⁵ However, Jesus' death doesn't mean everyone *will* be saved. It means that we have the *opportunity* to be saved, if we are willing to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ! What about good and moral people who do not believe in God and obey Jesus' gospel? The Bible teaches that being a good person does not get rid of sin. Only God's grace and an obedient faith in Jesus Christ can save us from Hell.¹⁶

Jesus Paid the Price

Hell is a terrible reward for the unrighteous. However, those who have faith do not face the threat of Hell. It was taken care of in God's plan for redemption. Jesus took away this future for anyone who believes and obeys. Jesus faced the *punishment* of sin for us.¹⁷ Jesus' sacrifice ended in death, the *destruction* of His body.¹⁸ Jesus was momentarily separated from God's fellowship, meaning He was *banished*.¹⁹ Thank God for Jesus! The Bible says:



*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*²⁰

⁸ 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7, Revelation 20:15

⁹ Luke 13:27-28

¹⁰ Mark 9:43-48

¹¹ Luke 16:24

¹² Matthew 8:12

¹³ Revelation 20:10

¹⁴ Matthew 7:13-14

¹⁵ Galatians 3:26-28

¹⁶ John 14:6, Acts 5
4:12, 1 John 5:12

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁸ Mark 15:42-47

¹⁹ Matthew 27:4-6

²⁰ Romans 7:24-25

Heaven: An Eternal Home with God

There are many descriptions of heaven in the last book of the Bible, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (commonly referred to as *Revelation*). This Christian prophecy tells of the struggle between good and evil for the hearts of mankind. It ends with the victory of Jesus over the devil and the beginning of an age called Eternity. The book of Revelation says:



And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”²¹

We know that heaven is a place where all the symptoms of sin are taken away. There will be no more pain or suffering. People will not lose loved ones to death. Hatred, evil, and all the devil’s greatest weapons of darkness will not exist. We will live as we were meant to be: in perfection and in God’s presence! The Bible says:

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month.²²

The tree of Life, God’s gift to Adam and Eve so long ago, is planted in Heaven. It symbolizes a complete restoration of the relationship between God and man! God’s faithful shall live forever and ever in perfection with the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus, and the Father.

Are You Ready?

In the very last verses of the Bible, Jesus speaks. The man writing was the apostle John. Jesus says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” John was so excited to know this that he responded by declaring, “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”²³

Are you ready for Jesus to come back? That question has eternal consequences, and we hope that you are ready. This series has covered over a thousand pages of information from the Bible in a few brief studies. While there is more information in the Bible, all should be able to appreciate one very important point: Jesus came to the world to redeem sinners, among whom we all are included.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. -John 3:16

²¹ Revelation 21:3-5

²² Revelation 22:1-3

²³ Revelation 22:20

²⁴ See *Christian Basics: The Story of the Bible*