

Enduring Hope

From a human perspective, death is permanent. A final period. An end from which there is no hope of return. But the consistent testimony of Scripture is different. Death is a sleep—a temporary silence, not a final end, nor an entrance into heaven or hell. Though the sleep of death seems final, it will end in a miraculous resurrection. The great hope of the Christian is the resurrection at the second coming of Christ.

Paul writes, *“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed... at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible”* (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). He continues: *“This mortal must put on immortality”* (v. 53). Immortality is not something we already possess—it is something we are given at Christ’s return.

Jesus affirmed this clearly: *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth”* (John 5:28–29). Paul says, *“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ will rise first”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The Bible speaks clearly of a coming time of judgment—an appointed moment when every person will receive their reward or condemnation (Acts 17:31; Romans 2:5–6). Does this mean that St. Peter is stationed at the pearly gates, admitting souls one by one into heaven? No, the Bible describes multiple phases of judgment, with the final phase occurring after the millennium. Revelation 20:12 paints the scene: *“I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened... and the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”* This judgment takes place after the resurrection of the wicked (John 5:29; Revelation 20:5). There is no biblical room for these souls to already be suffering in hell prior to this event. Judgment and reward come after the resurrection—not before (2 Timothy 4:1, 8). God’s justice is not arbitrary or immediate at death—it is deliberate, thorough, and transparent, rooted in His love and righteousness.

If souls go directly to heaven or hell, why would Christ need to return? Why raise the dead at all? The Bible’s picture is far more consistent and hope-filled: the dead sleep in peace, awaiting the return of the Life-Giver.

What are Ghosts?

If the dead are unconscious, where do ghosts come from? The Bible warns of evil spirits—fallen angels who deceive and impersonate the dead.

When King Saul consulted the witch of Endor, a spirit claiming to be the prophet Samuel appeared (1 Samuel 28). But the Bible had already declared that the Lord had stopped speaking to Saul (1 Samuel 28:6). This was not Samuel, but a demonic impersonation.

Satan himself can appear as an *“angel of light”* (2 Corinthians 11:14). Revelation warns of “spirits of demons, performing signs” (Revelation 16:14). Apparitions, hauntings, and ghostly messages are not spirits of the dead—they are the deceptions of the enemy. The Word of God is our only sure guide!

ANCIENT WORLDS *of the* BIBLE

Study Guide 9

by Pastor Daniel McFeeters

Petra: Spirits and Haunted Tombs

Petra is breathtaking—with towering red rock cliffs, narrow canyons, and ancient tombs carved into the mountainsides. Candles light the trails at night, as haunting flute melodies echo through the narrow canyons. But beneath the beauty lies a darker mystery.

Approaching the Siq (the narrow canyon that enters the city of Petra), several imposing square stones seem to guard the pathway. These monuments, built by the Nabateans nearly 2,000 years ago, are called *Djinn Blocks*. Local lore says they were dwellings for spirits—*djinn*—the original “genies” of Arab mythology. These were not the friendly, wish-granting beings of modern lore, but unpredictable shape-shifters, sometimes helpful, sometimes dangerous. Even today, some believe these spirits linger, guarding the tombs and wandering the desert at night.

The Nabatean culture of Petra isn’t unique. The Greeks feared vengeful ghosts of the unburied dead. Egyptians sealed kings in pyramids filled with food, furniture, and even servants for the afterlife. Cultures across the world have always feared death—and wondered what lies beyond.

Do souls live on after death? Do they haunt old homes, guard ancient graves, or guide the living? Is death the end—or just the beginning of a grander and more mysterious existence? Many Christian traditions say the soul goes immediately to heaven or hell. Others claim the dead can still interact with the living. But what is the truth?

What does the Bible teach about the nature of humankind and death? Are spirits still among us? Do ghosts of the dead still haunt these ancient tombs?

Join us as we explore these questions—against the haunting backdrop of Petra’s tombs—and discover what Scripture reveals about life, death, and what lies beyond.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

The Soul & Death

The Bible begins by defining human life not as a combination of body and immortal soul, but as a union of body and breath. Genesis 2:7 states, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” In Hebrew, the word translated “soul” (nephesh) simply means a living being. Man became a soul—he was not given one. Life is the result of body + breath; death is the reversal of this process. As God declared after the Fall, “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

The Old Testament plainly teaches that death is a state of unconsciousness. “The dead know nothing... Their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished” (Ecclesiastes 9:5–6). Psalm 146:4 says, “His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” Job 14:10–12 observes, “Man dies and is laid away... man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep.”

Yet the faithful in the Old Testament looked forward to a future hope. Job affirms, “I know that my Redeemer lives... in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:25–26). Ecclesiastes 12:14 speaks of the judgment to come, not immediate reward or punishment after death.

The New Testament agrees. Jesus said plainly, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps... but I go that I may wake him up” (John 11:11–14). Sleep is the consistent metaphor for death in Scripture (see 1 Corinthians 15:20, 51; Acts 7:60). Jesus didn’t teach that Lazarus had gone to heaven—He said Lazarus was asleep. Peter said plainly of David, “He is both dead and buried... David did not ascend into the heavens” (Acts 2:29, 34).

Paul, too, affirms this view: “If the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen... Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Corinthians 15:16, 18). According to Scripture, the dead are not in heaven or hell, but resting in unconscious sleep, awaiting the resurrection on the last day.

This view affirms the biblical truth that we are whole persons, not separable souls. Immortality is not natural to man, but a gift “to be sought” (Romans 2:7) and granted by Christ alone (2 Timothy 1:10).

SCRIPTURE: *“For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing... Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished”*
— Ecclesiastes 9:5-6

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed... at the last trumpet... and the dead will be raised incorruptible”
— 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

REFLECTION: What does it mean that the Bible describes death as a “sleep”? How does this understanding affect the way we grieve, hope, or think about those who have died?

Have modern Christian traditions drifted from the plain teaching of Scripture on this topic?

EXPERIENCE: Have you ever heard of someone claiming to see or speak to the dead? How did it make you feel? What protection does the Bible offer us against spiritual deception in the last days?

QUESTION: Why does the Bible warn against communication with the dead (see Deuteronomy 18:10-12)?

QUESTION: If the soul does not go to heaven or hell immediately at death, what does that say about God's justice and mercy?

RESPONSE: Will you choose to trust in God's Word over human tradition or emotion? Do you desire to rest in the blessed hope of Christ's return and the resurrection He has promised?

