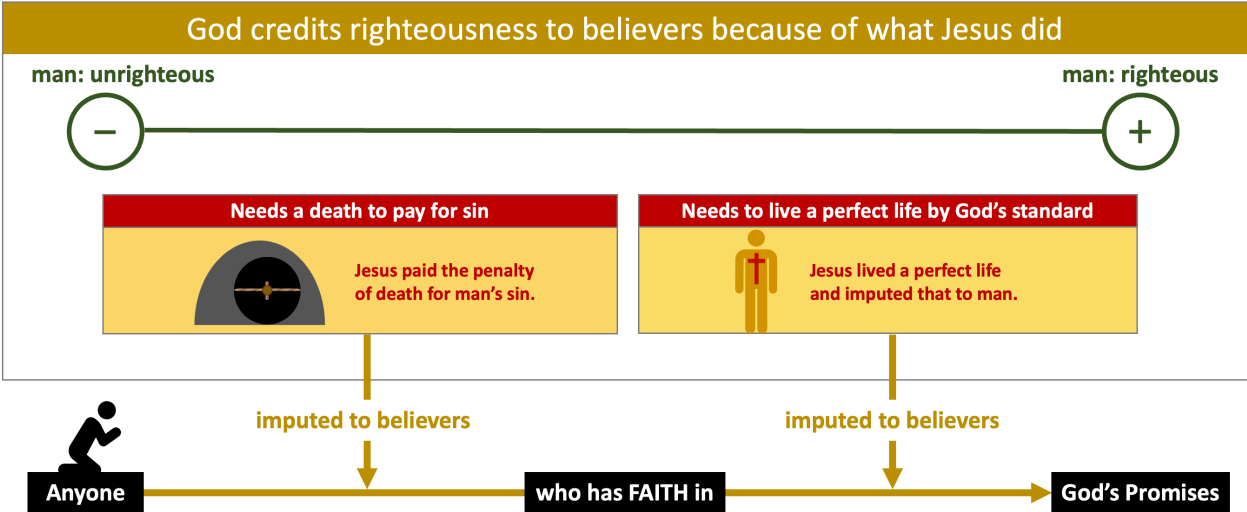


19. The Present Age – Part 1

Previously...

In order to save mankind from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death in the lake of fire, Jesus came to live a perfect life and then to be the substitute sacrifice in place of mankind. Anyone who puts their trust in Jesus for salvation can benefit from what He did.



But Jesus did not die and then stay dead. He resurrected on the third day as proof that all He had said about Himself was true: He was God, He was the promised Saviour and He would defeat death for mankind.

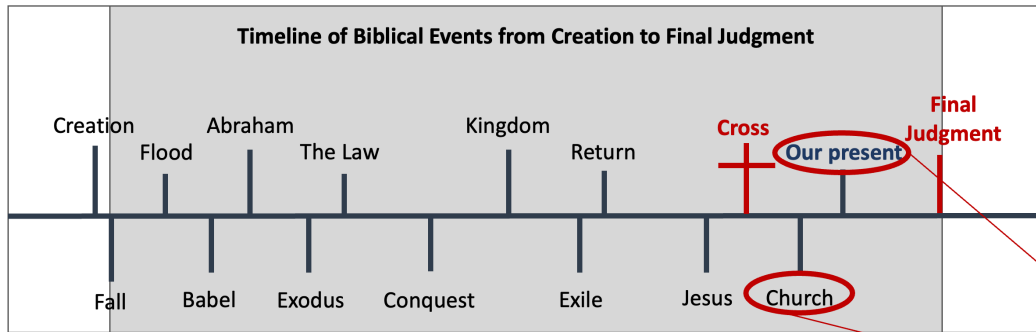


For 40 days, He showed Himself to people. He spoke with them and ate with them. More than 500 people saw Jesus.

Over a period of 40 days, Jesus appeared to:

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| Mary Magdalene, Mary, Joanna, Salome | 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus | 11 disciples | James | 7 disciples | 11 disciples | 500 followers |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Peter | 10 disciples | | | | | |

But more happened after that.



- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 How the world came to be | 2 Why there is evil in the world | 5 God revealed His standards | 6 God taught about Himself | 9 The Saviour's work | 10 The present age |
| 3 God judged the evil world | 4 God's plan to reach the world | 7 How God's people failed | 8 God's rescue plan | 11 How the world ends | 12 God's invitation |

However, before we learn about what happened after Jesus' 40 days on earth in His resurrection body, there is something important that we need to know.

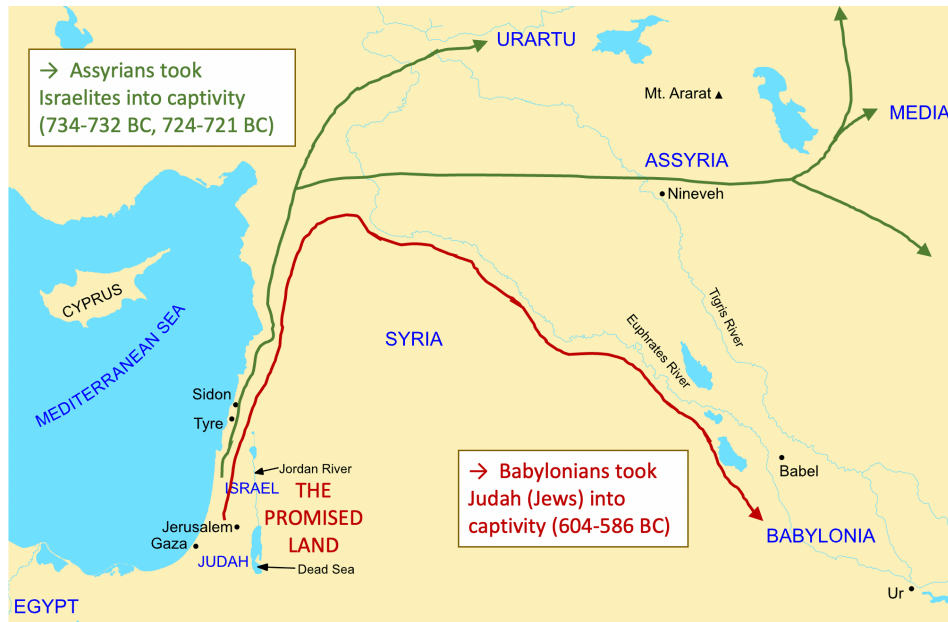
THE OFFER TO RESTART THE KINGDOM REJECTED

When Jesus came, aside from living a perfect life and dying for mankind, He had originally come to also restart the Kingdom of God on earth with national Israel.

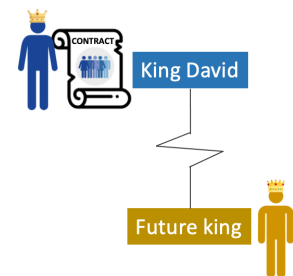
God had initially formed the nation of Israel to record His history and truth and to share it with the world. Israel was supposed to be a live example of a counterculture, living by God's righteous standards. Through watching and interacting with Israel, the people of the world were to come to know Yahweh.



But instead of being a good model, Israel rebelled against God. So Yahweh put an end to the visible Kingdom of God on earth. He sent the Assyrians and the Babylonians to exile Israel and Judah from their land. And Yahweh put an end to the monarchy.



But Yahweh had previously also made an unconditional contract with King David. Yahweh promised that some time in the future, a son (or descendant) of David would become king and rule from Jerusalem forever.



So, since the time of the exile, the Jews had been longing and waiting for a son of David and the return of their kingdom.

After Jesus' baptism, when John the Baptist announced that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus started talking about restoring the Kingdom of God (note that the phrase "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" mean the same thing).

Matthew 4:17

From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

In fact, some people rightly recognised that Jesus was really the Son of David. He was the one whom Yahweh had promised to King David. And the people were not quiet about it. In fact, on one occasion, crowds were literally shouting this title over Jesus.

Matthew 21:9

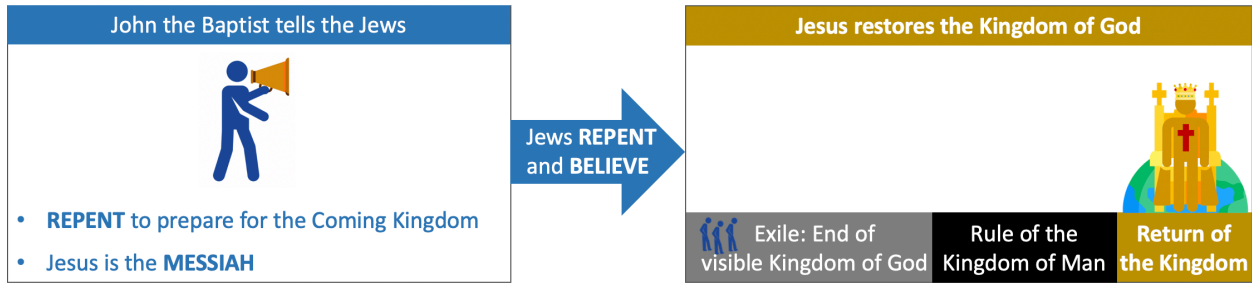
Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

"Praise God for the Son of David!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Praise God in highest heaven!"

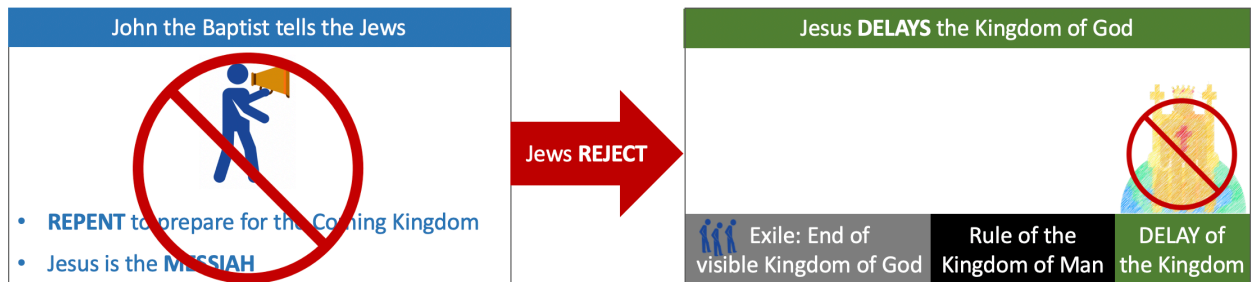
If the Jews, as a nation, had repented of their wickedness and believed in Jesus, He would have ushered in the Kingdom of God at that time.

What should have happened

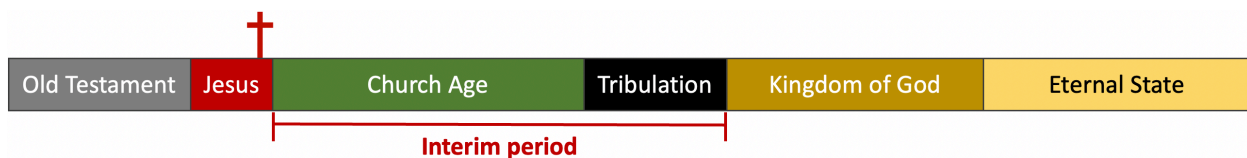


However, while some Jews did believe in Jesus, most, including the religious leaders, rejected Him. Jesus would not usher in the Kingdom of God if the people were still rebellious and hard-hearted towards Him.

What happened instead



After the Jews rejected Jesus, Jesus told His disciples what would happen next. He would introduce an interim period before the actual return of the Kingdom of God. This interim period would include, among other things, the church age and a time of trouble for Israel (known as the Tribulation).




However, Jesus did not abandon rebellious national Israel. In fact, when He died on the cross, He also did something for them that Yahweh had earlier spoken about through the prophets in the Old Testament.

Recall that in all of Israel’s history, they had never been able to obey God’s law consistently.

So Yahweh promised them that He would one day make an unconditional New Covenant, or a New Contract with them. This contract would affirm the “worldwide blessing” promise that Yahweh made to Abraham.

Yahweh was promising that one day in Israel’s future, He would do something extraordinary to help them get rid of their sin.

Abrahamic



Unconditional

- Land
- Descendants
- Worldwide blessing

Genesis 12:1-3, 7

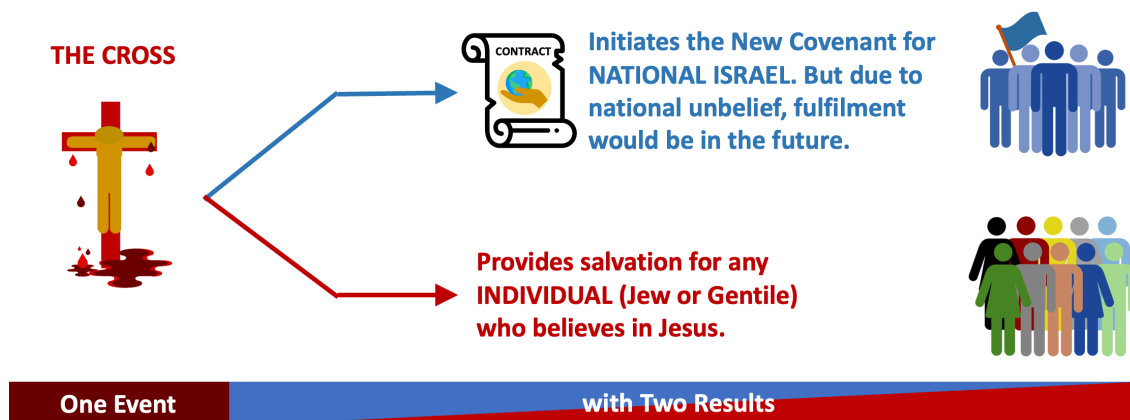
New Covenant Promises

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p style="font-size: 2em; color: #c08000;">I</p>  <p style="color: #c08000; font-weight: bold;">God will forgive Israel’s sins.</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: #c08000;">II</p>  <p style="color: #c08000; font-weight: bold;">God will put His law into Israel’s heart.</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: #c08000;">III</p>  <p style="color: #c08000; font-weight: bold;">God will regather Israel to the Promised Land forever.</p> |
|--|---|---|

We have already seen how, when Jesus died on the cross, He made it possible for any person, whether Jew and Gentile, to be saved from eternal death and be reconciled to Him when they put their faith in Him.

At the same time, His work on the cross made it possible for God to fulfil the New Covenant for national Israel at a later stage. In the future, God would cause national Israel to turn their hearts towards Him and put their faith in Him. He would then reintroduce the Kingdom of God on earth.

The cross is a single event that produces two results.



With this background, we will now move ahead to see what happened after the resurrected Jesus spent 40 days on earth.

JESUS ASCENDS, THEN SENDS THE HOLY SPIRIT

After giving His disciples further instructions about what to expect in the church age as well as what they were to do, Jesus visibly ascended into heaven. This is what Luke, a doctor and believer in Jesus, recorded.



Let's turn to our Bibles and read Acts 1:3–11.

(The leader reads aloud. For reference, the verses are also here.)

Acts 1:3–11

³ During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

⁷ He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰ As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

The delay of the Kingdom of God

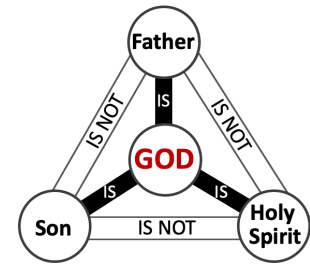
When Jesus came back to life after His death on the cross, the disciples wondered if He would, at that point, reintroduce the Kingdom of God on earth. But Jesus told them the timing of that event was not for them to know. Jesus was confirming the delay of the return of the kingdom. But He said more.



Baptised by means of the Holy Spirit

Jesus said they were to stay in Jerusalem where, in a few days, they would be baptised by means of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Yahweh. Jesus was telling them that the Spirit of Yahweh would come upon them. (We will discuss what this means in the next lesson.)

And then Jesus told them their job: they were to tell people everywhere about Him and what they had seen Him do. Essentially, Jesus was telling them to share the good news with all mankind that they could now be forgiven of their sins and be reconciled to Yahweh.



Jesus ascends

Jesus then visibly ascended into the clouds in full view of His disciples. Two angels who were standing by told the men that in the future, Jesus would return the way that they had seen Him leave. He would descend visibly through the clouds and would be seen by people.



What Jesus did when He got to heaven

Before Jesus went to the cross, He told His disciples one thing that He would do after His ascension into heaven: He would send the Holy Spirit to them. Jesus knew that His time with His disciples was short, and He wanted to assure them that in dying on the cross, He was not abandoning them.

Rather than being physically present with them, He would be with them through the Holy Spirit. And He said the Holy Spirit would never leave them, but would teach them truth from God and be their guide. This was what He said.

John 14:15–18

¹⁵ “If you love me, obey my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. ¹⁷ He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. ¹⁸ No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.

What Jesus was saying was that in place of His physical presence with His disciples, He would send the invisible Holy Spirit to live inside them. This was why the Spirit would never leave them.



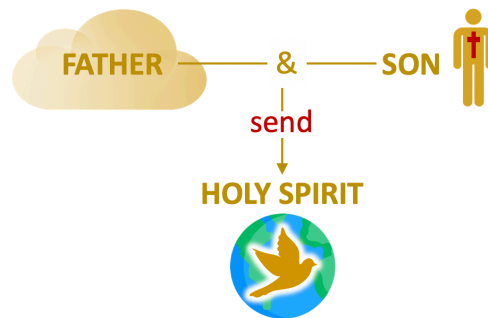
People who do not believe in Jesus would not have the Holy Spirit in their lives. However, believers in Jesus would know who the Spirit is and would have Him in them.

In this way, Jesus was not abandoning His disciples upon His death. Rather, His Spirit would be in them forever.

This was why Jesus told His disciples that while it was good for Him to physically be with them, it would be even better when He left to be with the Father in heaven. Because then, together with the Father, Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to earth to live inside believers.

John 16:5–7

⁵ “But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. ⁶ Instead, you grieve because of what I’ve told you. ⁷ But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate won’t come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.



Jesus told them all these things before He died. And 10 days after His ascension, Jesus did exactly what He said He would do.

Jesus sends the Holy Spirit



Let’s turn to our Bibles and read Acts 2:1–16.

(The leader reads aloud. For reference, the verses are also here.)

Acts 2:1–16

¹ On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place.

² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

⁵ At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶ When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

⁷ They were completely amazed. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee, ⁸ and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! ⁹ Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene,

visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!” ¹² They stood there amazed and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.


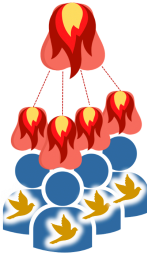

¹³ But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!”

¹⁴ Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, “Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. ¹⁶ No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

What was going on here?

The supernatural sending of the Holy Spirit

Three miracles happened one after another.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>1. Where the disciples were gathered privately, there was suddenly a noise similar to a hurricane or tornado.</p>  | <p>2. Then something that had the brightness and movement of fire appeared. It was described as glowing “pieces” shaped like human tongues that split apart and settled on each one of them.</p>  | <p>3. When this happened, the disciples instantly received the ability to speak a human language that they had never learnt.</p>  |
|---|---|---|

What was Yahweh doing?

Unlike Jesus, who has a physical body, the Holy Spirit is invisible. So, while Yahweh knew whom He had sent the Holy Spirit into, people wouldn’t be able to tell. But Yahweh wanted to make it very clear that, as promised, He had indeed sent the Holy Spirit into believers of Jesus. So He caused the disciples to each speak in a human language that they had not learnt before.

Notice that people from at least 12 different language groups were present that day and each heard the wonderful things of God in their own language.

But why exactly this sign? Why get the disciples to speak in another language? Yahweh was saying that He wanted His Word to go out in a way that anyone could understand, in their own language!

God's truth, although originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, was meant for everyone and should be made clear in whatever language necessary. It was as if God were reversing the effects of Babel.

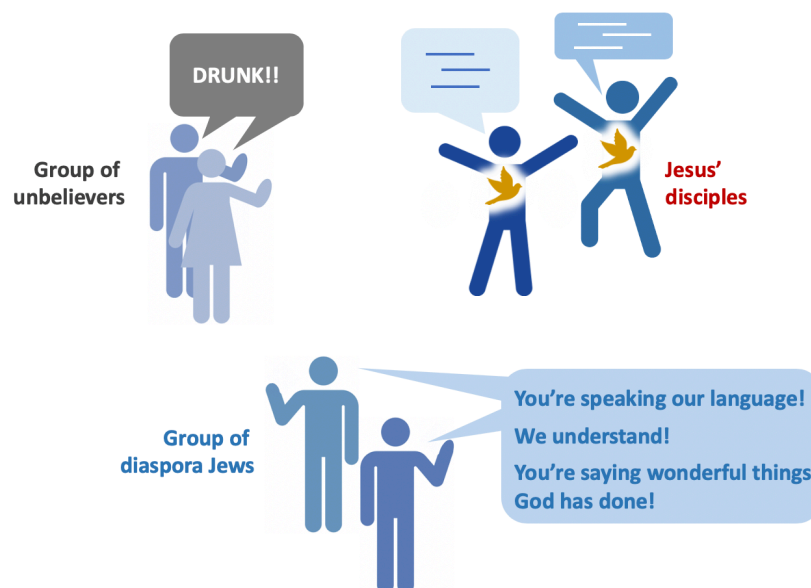


This event was indeed a miracle because the Bible records only three instances where Yahweh proved to different categories of people that He had sent the Holy Spirit by allowing the believers to speak in another language. Once people understood that Yahweh was proving that He had sent the Holy Spirit, these occurrences petered out.

Two different reactions to the coming of the Holy Spirit

One group of people gathered that morning heard the good news about Jesus in their own language. After Peter's explanation of what was going on, many of them became believers in Jesus.

Another group had already made up their minds about Jesus and refused to believe in Him or that Yahweh was doing something supernatural that morning. So even though they were physically present, they just concluded that the disciples were drunk. They rejected what Yahweh was showing them.



The Holy Spirit starts the Church

That was how Yahweh started the church on earth.

The church is the group of believers in Jesus, all of whom have the Holy Spirit living inside them.



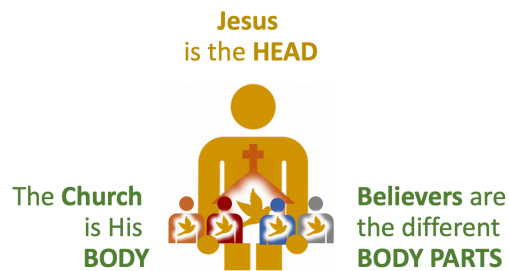
The church is neither a building nor an organisation. The church is also not the nation of Israel. The church is not a political entity, a state or a country. It has no king or central government.

While the church started in Jerusalem with the coming of the Holy Spirit, in a very short time, God showed His real intention for the church: it was to be an international body of believers from all nations, tribes and language groups.

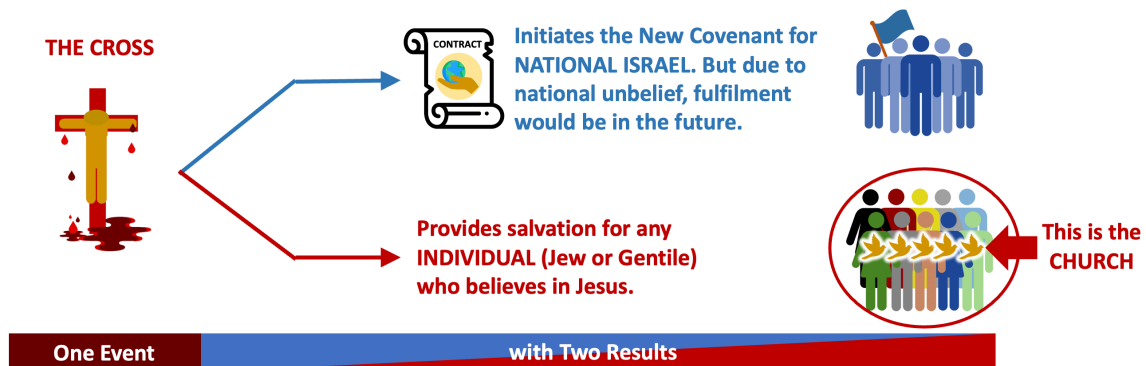
In fact, the Bible describes the church in a very unique way. The Bible compares the church with a body and calls the church the body of Christ.

Colossians 1:18a

Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.



When the Jews rejected Jesus at His first coming, Jesus delayed His programme with the nation of Israel. Instead, through His death, He offered salvation from eternal death to anyone who puts their faith in Him. Jesus puts everyone who believes in Him at this time of the “church age”, into the church.



What is the job or mission of the church? Before His ascension, this was what Jesus said to His disciples.

Matthew 28:19–20

¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

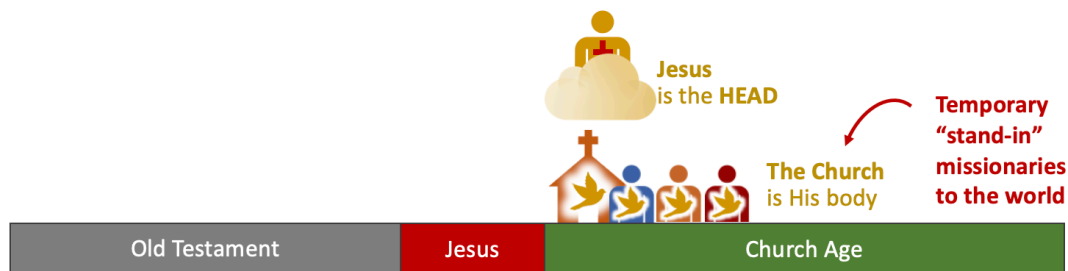
Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The nation of Israel was supposed to tell the world about God and His history and truth so that all mankind would have the opportunity to be saved from eternal death.



But because they rebelled against God, Yahweh now chose temporary “stand-ins” for the job. The church is that stand-in. So, during the church age, Yahweh would use believers of Jesus to share the good news about Jesus (often called the “gospel”) to everyone in the world.



However, the church age would not go on forever. It will end at some point in the future and Yahweh will turn His attention back to the nation of Israel again. Why? It is because God made unconditional promises to them. Yahweh is not just a promise-maker, He is a promise-keeper. He cannot go against His own character. He will never break His promises.

Meanwhile, during this church age, Yahweh is working very directly and intimately with His church, with the people all around the world who put their trust in Him.

What happened next?

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit lives in people who believe in Jesus. But is that the only change that happens to a person who believes in Jesus? No. Actually, the Bible talks about a totally new spiritual reality. In the next lesson, we will learn more about what happens when someone trusts in Jesus.



Bible reading for review

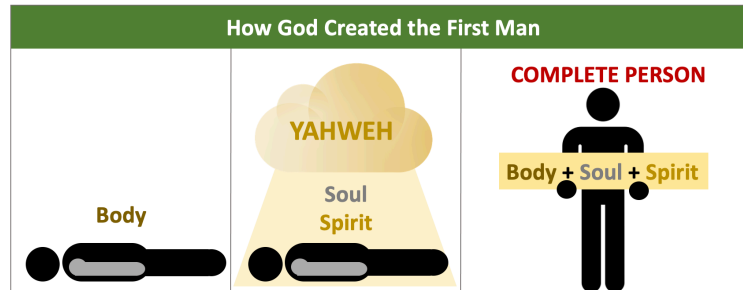
Acts 1:1–11, 2:1–47

Where do people go when they die?

As we have already learnt from when God created humans, a complete person is one with both a physical body and an immaterial side.

Genesis 2:7

Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

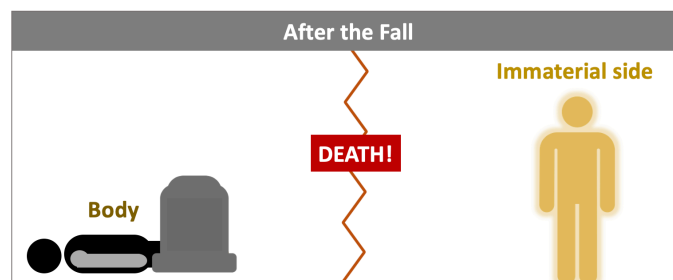


Because of the Fall, all people die physically. Their mortal bodies will fail at death but the immaterial part of them, will continue to exist.

Recall what Yahweh said to the first man Adam after he had sinned.

Genesis 3:19

By the sweat of your brow
will you have food to eat
until you return to the ground
from which you were made.
For you were made from dust,
and to dust you will return.”

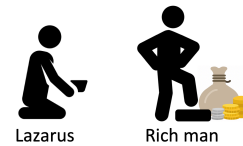


Upon death, a person's body stops working but the immaterial side of the person carries on.

Where does this immaterial side go?

1. Before the Cross

Jesus provided some details about where a person's immaterial side goes after death. He recounted the true events about two actual people: a man named Lazarus and an unnamed rich man. In this account, it's important to know that Lazarus was a believer while the rich man was not.



Luke 16:19–31 (NIV)

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

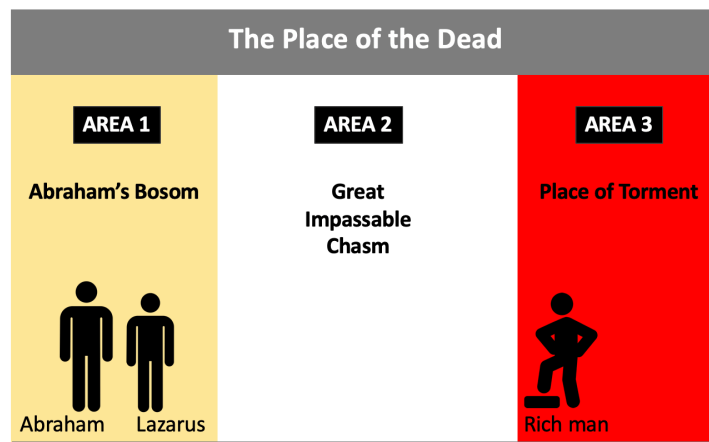
²⁵ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

²⁷ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

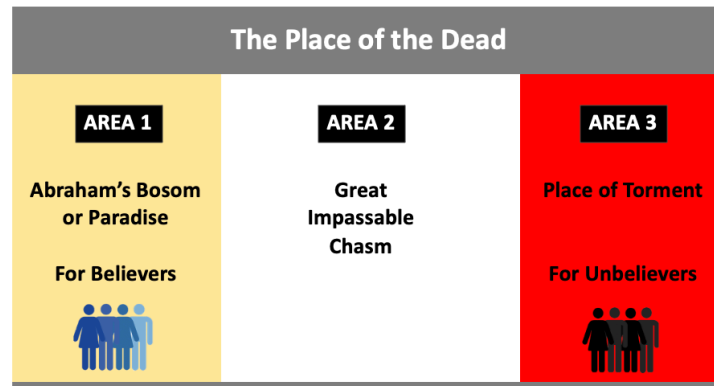
²⁹ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

³⁰ “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

³¹ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”



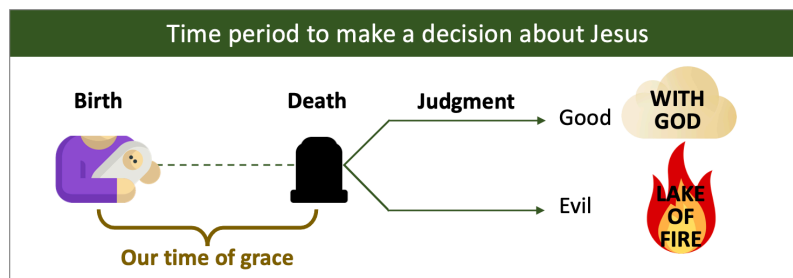
Before Jesus died on the cross, everyone who died would go to the place of the dead (called “*Sheol*” in Hebrew or “*Hades*” in Greek). In the place of the dead, there were several different areas.



- “Area 1” was where Abraham was. Since Abraham was a believer, this tells us that believers who died would go to this area. This area is often called “Abraham’s bosom” or “paradise”.
- “Area 2” is known as the “great impassable chasm”. It prevented people from Areas 1 and 3 from crossing over.
- “Area 3” is known as the “place of torment” where unbelievers, like the rich man in this account, were placed.

Notice how believers were comfortable and secure in Area 1 while unbelievers were trapped and tormented in Area 3.

By relating the account of where the rich man (the unbeliever) and Lazarus (the believer) went to after their deaths, Jesus wanted people to know that the time when people could make their decision, about whether to trust Yahweh or not, was when they were alive.



Once the rich man and Lazarus were dead, they could not change their decisions about God’s offer of salvation. Their “grace period” to decide if they believed God or not was limited to when they were alive.

How would people know about God’s offer of salvation? They had “Moses and the prophets”.

This phrase refers to the Bible that God had carefully recorded and preserved for all mankind. (Moses and the other prophets wrote down what God wanted to record.) In other words, God’s Scripture contained all the information people needed to learn about God’s salvation plan. God had made His Bible widely available so people were not left without information.



The reason why the immaterial sides of believers were also in the place of the dead was because Jesus had not yet come to earth to accomplish His work of dying on the cross as mankind’s substitute. Jesus had not yet paid for their eternal sin penalty nor had He given them His righteousness.

Though these believers before Jesus came to earth trusted Yahweh for salvation, they had to wait in the place of the dead till Jesus actually finished His work of dying on the cross.

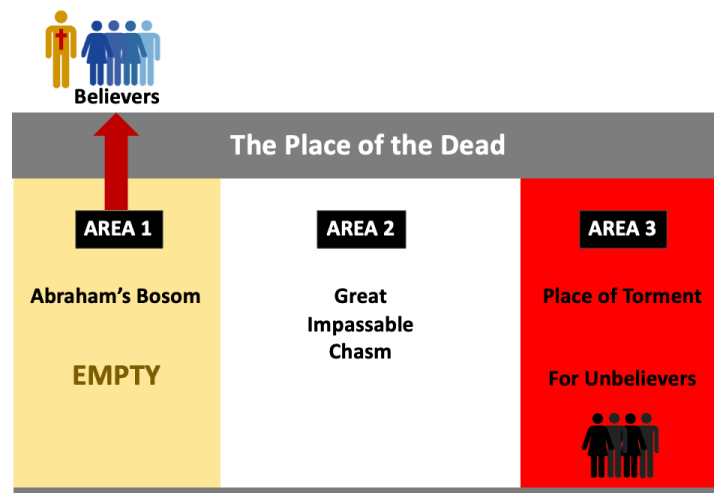
Once He did, Jesus declared that His work was completed.

John 19:28–30

²⁸ Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. ³⁰ When Jesus had tasted it, he said, “It is finished!” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.



After He finished His work on the cross, He cleared out Area 1, that is, the section of the place of the dead where the believers were waiting, and brought all believers with Him to heaven.



2. After the Cross: Believers

After Jesus completed His work on the cross, He resurrected and then ascended to heaven. From that point on, things changed.

Now, when believers die, instead of going to the place of the dead, they go straight to heaven to be with Jesus. Now that Jesus has paid mankind's eternal sin penalty and provided His righteousness for people, believers can be face to face with God.



The Bible records the following incident about Stephen, a faithful believer who came to faith after Jesus ascended to heaven. He was falsely accused of blasphemy (the offence of saying incorrect things about God) and was questioned by the Jewish religious authorities.

But Stephen not only responded well to the accusations, he scolded the hard-hearted Jewish leaders for rejecting their Messiah. They became so angry that they ended up stoning Stephen to death.

Acts 7:54–60

⁵⁴ The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand.

⁵⁶ And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

⁵⁷ Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him ⁵⁸ and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

When Stephen died, his immaterial side went to be with Jesus in heaven. All believers who now die will also go to Jesus in heaven. Another of Jesus' disciples, Paul, confirmed this truth.

2 Corinthians 5:6–8

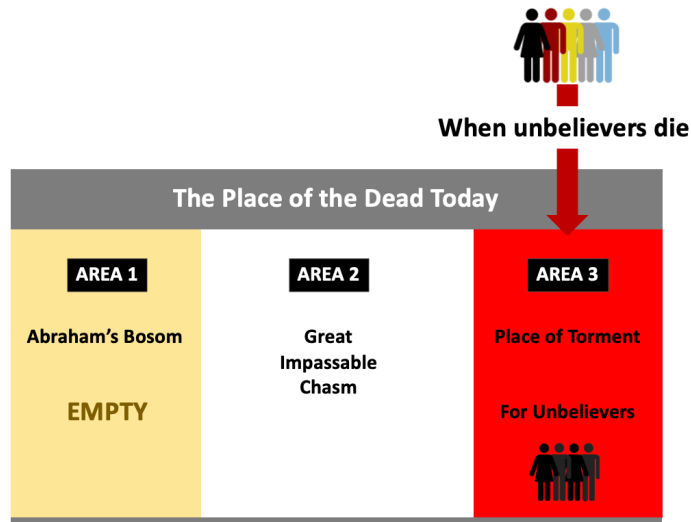
⁶ So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. ⁷ For we live by believing and not by seeing.

⁸ Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.

Paul said that while believers were alive, they were not physically with the Lord Jesus. But when believers died, they would lose their mortal bodies ("be away from these earthly bodies") and their immaterial sides would be with Jesus in heaven ("we will be at home with the Lord").

3. After the Cross: Unbelievers

Today, for those who do not place their trust in Jesus for salvation, when they die, their souls will still go down to the place of the dead.



There, they will have no further opportunity to change their minds about Jesus. The Bible tells us that each person only dies once.

Hebrews 9:27

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment,

Once a person who has rejected Jesus goes to the place of the dead, they will realise their eternal destiny is now fixed.

But how long will unbelievers be held in the place of the dead? The Bible tells us it will be until the final judgment. At the final judgment which happens at the end of mortal history, Jesus will act to separate good and evil permanently. He will empty the unbelievers from the place of the dead and judge them.

Revelation 20:11–13

¹¹ And I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. ¹² I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were judged according to their deeds.

We will discuss more about these future events in upcoming lessons.