

Lesson  
**7**

# What Happens after Death?

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**Purpose** To help class members understand that death is a temporary separation of the spirit from the body and that during this period of separation, spirits dwell in a place called the spirit world.

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**Preparation**

1. Prayerfully study 1 Peter 3:18–20; Alma 34:34; 40:11–14; Doctrine and Covenants 88:15–16; 138:29–34, 57. You may also want to study the rest of Doctrine and Covenants 138.
2. Copy the chart on page 35 onto the chalkboard or a piece of posterboard.
3. Materials needed:
  - a. A glove (not a mitten) for the object lesson.
  - b. A set of scriptures and a scripture marking pencil for each class member. Continue to encourage class members to bring their own scriptures to class each week.

*Note to the teacher* All of us must one day die, and many of us have loved ones who have passed on and now inhabit the spirit world. Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said that the spirit world is “a place of paradise and happiness for those who have lived righteous lives. It is not something to fear” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 89; or Ensign, Nov. 1996, 66). People who were not able to hear the gospel on earth will receive an opportunity to hear it in the spirit world. Present this lesson with reverence and caution, avoiding speculation and sensational stories.

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**Suggested Lesson Development** **Death Is the Separation of the Spirit from the Body**

*Note to the teacher* Class interest and attention are greatly enhanced when class members actively participate. Invite class members to assist you with demonstrations. Let them help with object lessons, hold up charts, or write on the chalkboard. (See Teaching—No Greater Call, 103–4.)

**Object lesson** Introduce the lesson by using the following object lesson, which is an adaptation of a presentation by Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see Conference Report, Apr. 1973, 79–80; or Ensign, July 1973, 51, 53):

Have a class member come to the front of the class. Hold up a glove and point out that it has no life; it cannot move by itself. Then invite the class member to put the glove on his or her hand.

- How might this be compared to our body and spirit?

Explain that in this example the glove represents the physical body and the hand represents the spirit. When the spirit enters the body, the body can live, work, and act. Have the class member move his or her fingers inside the glove. A spirit combined with a physical body makes a person—a living soul.

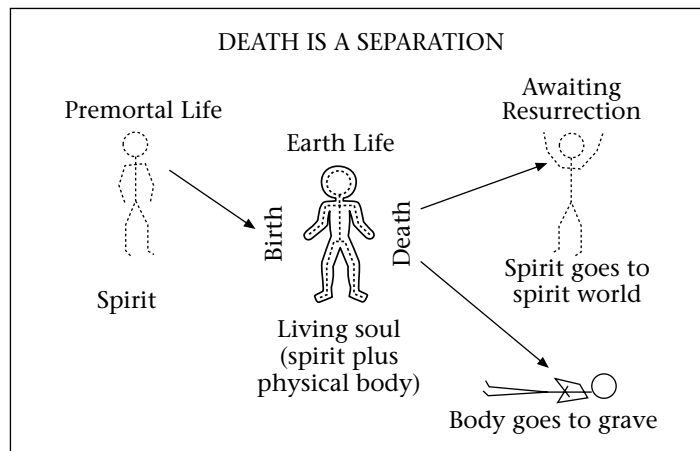
Have class members read and mark Doctrine and Covenants 88:15–16.

Point out that earth life was not intended to last forever. One day each of us will die; our spirit and body will be separated. Death is part of God’s plan. When the spirit and body are separated, the body cannot move. It has died. (Have the class member remove his or her hand from the glove.) But the spirit is still alive. (Have the class member move his or her fingers.)

Explain that as part of his Atonement, Jesus Christ overcame mortal death. Because of this, the separation of the spirit from the body will not be permanent. Each of us will be resurrected. At the time of resurrection, the body and spirit will be united forever in a perfect state. (Have the class member put the glove back on.) Explain that today you will discuss the spirit’s condition between the time of death and the time of resurrection. (Have the class member remove the glove and return to his or her seat.)

Chart

Illustrate the steps from premortal life to the spirit world using the chart below. You may want to ask class members to briefly share what they remember from previous lessons about premortal life and earth life.



Explain that in mortality the spirit and body are joined together. As shown in the object lesson, when we die the spirit and body are separated. While the body loses its life, the spirit remains alive and dwells in a place called the spirit world.

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### We Go to the Spirit World between Death and Resurrection

Scripture discussion

Explain that Alma described the conditions of life after death to his son Corianton. Have class members read and mark Alma 40:11.

- Where do we go when we die?

Quotation

Tell class members that President Joseph Fielding Smith referred to Alma 40:11 when he said: “‘Taken home to God,’ simply means that their mortal existence has come to an end, and they have returned to the world of spirits, where they are assigned to a place according to their works with the just or with the unjust, there to await the resurrection” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957–66], 2:85).

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## Our Righteousness on Earth Determines Our Place in the Spirit World

Scripture  
discussion

Have class members read and mark Alma 34:34.

- What will our personalities be like when we die?

Help class members see that our spirits will carry to the spirit world the same tendencies, appetites, and desires that we had when we lived on the earth.

Quotation

Have a class member read the following statement by President Brigham Young, second President of the Church:

“Suppose . . . that a man is evil in his heart—wholly given up to wickedness, and in that condition dies, his spirit will enter into the spirit world intent upon evil. On the other hand, if we are striving with all the powers and faculties God has given us to improve upon our talents, to prepare ourselves to dwell in eternal life, and the grave receives our bodies while we are thus engaged, with what disposition will our spirits enter their next state? They will be still striving to do the things of God, only in a much greater degree” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1941], 379).

Scripture  
discussion

Have class members read and mark Alma 40:12–14.

Explain that people who have accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ and lived righteously are assigned to a state of happiness known as paradise. People who have rejected the gospel and people who have died without a knowledge of the truth are assigned to a state of darkness called spirit prison, sometimes called hell.

- Why do you think “spirit prison” is an appropriate name for the condition of people who die without having accepted the gospel? (Because the people there are shut off from the peace and joy they would feel if they had received the truth and lived righteously.)

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## The Righteous Do the Lord’s Work in the Spirit World

Scripture  
discussion

Explain that during the three days after he was crucified, Jesus Christ visited the righteous in paradise. Have class members read and mark 1 Peter 3:18–20.

- What did Christ do among the spirits in paradise?

Have class members read and mark Doctrine and Covenants 138:29–34.

Explain that Christ appointed messengers to preach to those in spirit prison. Until that time, the spirits in spirit prison were not permitted to have contact with the spirits in paradise.

Quotation

Have someone read the following explanation by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“Now that the righteous spirits in paradise have been commissioned to carry the message of salvation to the wicked spirits in hell, there is a certain amount of mingling together of the good and bad spirits. Repentance opens the prison doors to the spirits in hell; it enables those bound with the chains of hell to free themselves from darkness, unbelief, ignorance, and sin. As rapidly as they can overcome these obstacles—gain light, believe truth, acquire intelligence, cast off

sin, and break the chains of hell—they can leave the hell that imprisons them and dwell with the righteous in the peace of paradise” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 755).

Scripture  
discussion

- Who preaches to the spirits in prison? What is their message?

Have class members read and mark Doctrine and Covenants 138:57.

- What is the duty of faithful Latter-day Saints who have died?

Point out that many members of the class will be called to serve full-time missions in this life. Since the Church is organized in the spirit world and there are still spirits there who have not heard and accepted the truth, we will also be able to serve missions after death if we have lived righteously.

Testimony

Testify that death is part of the great plan of salvation. As the glove without the hand is lifeless, so the physical body without the spirit is dead. While righteous spirits await their resurrection, they are busy carrying on the work of our Heavenly Father.

Encourage class members to live righteously now so they can enter paradise later and be able to serve the Lord in the spirit world.

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**Enrichment  
Activities**

You may want to use one or more of these activities during the lesson.

1. If *Family Home Evening Video Supplement 2* (53277) is available, show “Life after Death,” a five-minute segment.
2. Divide the class into groups of three or four people. Appoint a leader for each group and give him or her a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Have the groups pretend that they are in the spirit world and have an opportunity to write one piece of advice to their friends and family members who are still alive. Have the group leaders write down the groups’ ideas. After about five minutes, invite the group leaders to read the advice their groups have written.
3. To emphasize the importance of living righteously in mortality, sing with class members “Today, While the Sun Shines” (*Hymns*, no. 229).
  - What does this hymn have to do with a lesson about the spirit world?

Suggest that class members read the chorus of the hymn again, thinking of the word *today* as a representation of earth life and the word *tomorrow* as a representation of life after death.

- With this interpretation in mind, what work must we do “today” to prepare for “tomorrow”?