

the
shock
of your
life

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ADRIAN HOLLOWAY

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contents

Acknowledgements	7
Preface	9
1. Horrified – the Non-Christian	11
2. Gutted – the Lukewarm Christian	49
3. Ecstatic – the Red-Hot Christian	81
4. Glorified – the Christian in Heaven	119
What Next?	147
Now Read This . . .	149

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This book was born out of a visit to the Brownsville Assembly of God Church in Pensacola, Florida, where for the first time I found myself in a 'revival'. Like many around the world, I am so grateful for the faithful prayer and witness that God has established there.

Where I have unknowingly repeated the words of other writers and preachers, I apologize.

I might be expected to dedicate this book to everyone who longs for a revival of biblical Christianity to sweep the United Kingdom, and for the church to be restored to a New Testament pattern. But this book is actually dedicated to anyone reading this who doesn't know what I'm talking about.

preface

The first time I opened the Bible to read it for myself, I promise you I heard a little voice say, 'You've just become the saddest teenager in Britain! Who reads the Bible? Get a life.' I was 16 years old.

If you're more likely to fly to the moon than read the Bible then this book is for you.

You're about to read a dramatized summary of what the Bible says will happen to you when you die. In each chapter, I've made up a story around ten points which appear in **bold type**. Most of the information in bold type is agreed by Christians everywhere to be the plain basic teaching of the Bible.

Be warned though – this book is an attempt to get you to read the Bible for yourself. And you'll notice, where the Bible is quoted directly, that a reference is given in a footnote. This consists of the name of the original 'book' in the Bible (which you'll find listed on the Contents page at the front of the Bible), followed by the chapter number in that book, followed by the verse number in that chapter. So 'Hebrews 9:27'

means 'the book of Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 27.

I hope you find reading this book a rewarding experience – one way or another, you are in it.

Adrian Holloway

1

horrified - the non-christian

How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?
And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
(Romans 10:14)

'For heaven's sake, Daniel, come on, we're not going to be late!' That's how my mum woke me up on 10th July 2000. Weird to think how normal a day it was. Mum was giving me a lift to college and I was always late getting up. It's the mind-numbing predictability of it all that still gets me. I've since thought that Mum probably said exactly the same thing the previous year at exactly the same time in the morning. You'd think the day you die would have some sort of spooky build-up with spooky music, but I got dressed watching *The Big Breakfast*.

Seventeen years old, doing English, History and Media Studies A levels. Perhaps someone at the local paper is writing

up the story right now. I bet they'll publish an old school photo of me which I really hate. I've got bad hair in it, a wonky tie, and look like low-life scum. The stark caption underneath will read 'Daniel (17):' with the inevitable adjective 'tragic'. I hope someone at my funeral says my ambition was to be a writer. Anyway, I'll settle for a mention on the early evening news.

How did I die? In the back of the car, sitting next to my sister who was reading a *Simpsons* book, while I half-listened to some sad local radio phone-in my mum wanted on. Ten minutes into the journey – sometime after 8.30 in the morning – I was dead. We were hit by a lorry on a dual carriageway. I can draw you a map if you like.

The next thing I knew – I'm not exaggerating – the next thing I knew I was on this sort of conveyer belt hurtling forward. It was really quick. And I got a buzz out of it – even though I was dead! This was a revelation in itself! Anyway, it felt like I was back playing *Grand Theft Auto* on PlayStation the night before, except that instead of thrashing through an urban jungle, I was on a hospital trolley steaming down a corridor, slamming through swing doors. I wasn't in any pain at this point, by the way.

Here's the freaky bit – I don't know whether that was me in the hospital or not. All I know is that the next thing I was conscious of was standing in a bright yellow room! This was really real. I had my normal body with no injuries, the clothes I was wearing in the car when we crashed – and there before me was ... him!

I don't know why I feel so embarrassed to describe him. He looked cool. He was at least seven feet tall, suntanned and dressed in a single white robe. It sounds a bit gay but he looked really impressive. He wasn't really smiling, but I sensed he was a smiley person. I could imagine him in real life as a ... sort of kind headmaster. But was this real life?

He told me to stand up.

'Daniel,' he said.

For the first time in my life, in death in fact, I felt like I was in a film. I also wanted to laugh. 'You know my name?'

'Daniel ...'

'Is all this real?' I interrupted. 'It seems real. Where am I? Who are you?' At this point I was ready for anything. I half-expected him to say he was from the planet Krypton. On the other hand, I was also rifling through *X-Files* episodes in my mind.

'Daniel, I want you to listen carefully to me. What I am about to say to you is the truth. You are dead and you're going to experience what happens when you die, just like everyone else.'

I slumped down cross-legged on the floor. He sounded very serious. I was struggling. I asked, 'Is it good? I mean, will I be OK?'

Silence.

Then I asked, 'Am I going to go back as something – be ... what's it called, reincarnated?'

'Follow me, Daniel,' the angel replied, as if auditioning for a take-me-to-your-leader bit part in the original *Star Trek*.

'You are going to see many things. What you don't understand, I will explain to you. We must go.'

It was almost comical, apart from the fact that I felt totally out of my depth and scared. 'And who are you?'

'I am an angel, Daniel.'

'F*** Me!'

A flash of anger came over the angel's face. I'd never felt guilty about swearing until that moment. But the whole reality of it all was beginning to kick in, and I was half-pleased to have met an angel and half-terrified about the fact that I felt totally unprepared for whatever was going to happen next. My stomach suddenly began churning and almost immediately I vomited in the corner. I was now really scared.

The angel got up and opened a door. A wall of noise from outside hit us. There were loads of people right in the doorway, talking to each other, shouting, laughing, some even dancing round in a circle like Morris Dancers – except, they didn't wave hankies and they were Indian-looking.

Safety in numbers, I thought. This cheered me up slightly. Leaving my diced carrots on the floor, I got up and, feeling very groggy and embarrassed, followed the angel out of the room.

Then we saw a panoramic view that took my breath away! As far as the eye could see there was what I can only describe as a human snake. What was I supposed to make of this? 'So now I'm with the entire human race, or so it looks?' I blurted out.

'These people are queuing up, waiting to be judged,' the angel said, as I looked down the line at thousands of people.

Now it began to hit me. This is what happens to people

when they die! It's something I'd never really thought about. Come to think of it, I don't even know that I'd ever so much as talked to anyone about it.

'This must be religious?' I asked the angel.

'What do you mean?' he replied.

'I mean, is all this religious or is it real?'

'These people are real, and God is going to judge them, so I suppose you'd say ...'

'Religion is real.' I finished his sentence. Which I don't think I normally did, but I felt nervous. I felt nervous because looking at these people queuing up was making me nervous.

'Daniel, there's so much to say about all this. **I'm going to try and summarize things under ten headings for you, so listen up. The first thing, which I hope you've understood already, is that God is real.**'

(Internally I registered the first really positive feeling I'd had since getting into the car that morning, which still seemed only a few minutes before. You see I am pretty sure I believed in God. I thought to myself that this could only do me good.)

'And the second is that we are all accountable to him.'

'What does that mean?'

'These people are about to find out, and so are you!'

As we looked at the queue close up, I began searching for a familiar face. I didn't recognize anyone. I can't think why I found that strange.

After some hours going along the queue (or was it minutes, I'm not sure what the deal was with time), I heard English

spoken for the first time. Four men all laughed out loud at the same time as if one of them had just told the punchline of a joke. And get this! ... They were talking about Premiership football! I felt quite at home! They didn't seem too bothered about this 'accountable' business.

'They think God's just like them,' the angel said. 'These are some of the God-will-forgive-me-that's-his-job brigade. They half-expect to find God reading *Esquire* magazine, and cracking open the lagers.' It bugged me that the angel seemed totally tuned in. What did God know about me? It didn't bear thinking about, so I tried not to.

After some time walking up by the side of the queue, we reached the front. People were stepping forward one at a time onto a white escalator.

Then it was our turn.

'Daniel, look at me for a second,' the angel said. 'Daniel, the Bible describes the scene you are about to see. A man called John saw a vision of it and wrote it down. It's in one of the books of the Bible, Revelation.'

I'd heard of Revelation, 666 and the number of the beast. Again, I hoped this might score me some points in the scheme of things. But what was the scheme of things?

The angel produced a black, leather Bible from a box that he picked up. As he began to read, we were rising up through shining whiteness. There was a sort of stadium in the distance.

As we got closer, it looked more like a theatre or a posh courtroom with a brilliant light at its centre.

The angel read from his Bible:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.¹

I can't regurgitate my reaction to this very clearly, because I simply lost control of myself. I do remember shouting. I think I also started hitting myself. Anyway, just at the moment he finished reading about 'the lake of fire', while I was screaming 'F*** No!' or something similar, we arrived at the upper perimeter of the courtroom.

And I thought dying in a car crash was the shock of my life! Right now, I felt like the insides had been ripped out of me. My name wasn't going to be in the 'book of life' – I'd never even heard of it!

'This is it, the final judgement', the angel said.

1. Revelation 20:11-15.

I was just shouting, 'No, please, no' again and again at the angel as a shuddering noise went through me. I was shaken like a rag doll and then ...

There before me was the most amazing sight I had ever seen. A blast of brightness hit us, as if we'd suddenly been brought face to face with the sun. I wanted to melt, but I remained conscious and could still see.

Here's the stunning thing about it all – the source of this light was a person! A young man, seated on a white throne on a raised platform. There was a surging power about him. The very atmosphere around him throbbed like a rocket on a launch pad. There were other ... er ... beings behind him to either side. I could see that books were lying open, just as the angel – I mean the Bible – had said. I wondered again about this 'book of life'.

I looked at the young man and then turned face down on the ground. I asked, 'Who is he?'

'The man on the throne is God's Son, Jesus Christ, who has been given authority to judge by his Father. This too is explained in the Bible.'¹

'But how many people realize this?'

The angel replied, 'God has assured everyone that this is the case by raising Christ from the dead. The Bible says that God *has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.*'²

1. John 5:27; Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1.

2. Acts 17:31.

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about ... I don’t know the Bible ... Look ...’ I hauled myself up to about the angel’s chest-level. ‘Does everyone get judged? Even people like me who aren’t religious and don’t know anything about the Bible?’

‘Yes,’ the angel said. ‘Look, I said I would summarize everything in ten points. **Well this is a third point: There is a final judgement for all – no matter who you are or what you believe.** We are now at the end of all time. The earth as you knew it has been ... er ... sort of recycled and upgraded. Everyone who ever lived on it is being judged here. **A fourth point is that Jesus Christ is the judge at this final judgement. Fifth: everyone is judged by their deeds as recorded in books.**

‘Come on,’ the angel said, suddenly animated, pointing to the centre of the courtroom, ‘I particularly want you to see what’s about to happen. Let’s watch Christ judging these people. Christ himself described what we’re about to see when he was on the old earth. Listen carefully.’

In front of the judge, who I now recognized as being Jesus Christ, were a small group of people. They seemed so puny and weak and yet, with great boldness, they spoke to Christ on the white throne as if they had been his friends. They said, ‘*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?*’

And then he replied, ‘*I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*’¹

They were stunned. I was too. They stood there speechless,

1. Matthew 7:22–23.

horrified – just staring. And with a sweep of his arm he sent them away.

‘But these people were religious!’ I protested.

‘Yes they were,’ the angel replied.

‘Doesn’t that count for anything?’ I asked.

‘Daniel, what did I read you from Revelation? Remember? All of their deeds are recorded in books. Just think about that for a moment. Everything you have ever done, Daniel, is recorded in those books.’ He pointed at the books as if I wasn’t worried enough by the sight of them. ‘Besides, these people, Daniel, may have been prophets, but Jesus said they were false prophets.’¹

I said nothing. It was the first time I’d shut up. I immediately thought about Sarah Calder. She was the girl I’d lost my virginity with. I felt so guilty about it because all the kids at school said I’d hurt her. I was sort of blacklisted for a whole term because of it. Here I was, dead, thinking about Sarah Calder!

‘Just things we’ve done?’ I asked, desperately hoping for some reassurance but expecting none.

‘No. Christ said, *I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.*’²

‘But I can never remember all that!’

‘No, but God can, and it’s all written down in the books.’

Those books again.

1. Matthew 7:15.

2. Matthew 12:36.

'Is there anything that he will overlook,' I asked, 'sort of pass over?'

'No,' the angel replied, '*God will judge men's secrets.*¹ Christ said, *There is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed.*² In fact, Christ said that words you have whispered will be *proclaimed from the roofs.*³ **My sixth point is that everything you've done, thought or said is recorded in the books, and everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard.**'⁴

'And everyone's going to know what I've done?'

'Exactly.'

'This is a total disaster! Is there any good news?'

'Yes, I mean, from your point of view, the fact that every judgement God makes is entirely fair is good news.'⁵

A pause.

'Look for a moment at Christ on the white throne.'

As I did, I felt a sense of awe; in fact I bowed down on my knees as I looked at him.

'How could a being as pure as he is allow your wrongdoing into heaven?'

This was a piercing question. It was also the first mention of heaven, and the thought of it seemed so sweet, but I actually found myself totally in agreement with the angel. There was no way that someone like me could dwell with

1. Romans 2:16.

2. Luke 8:17.

3. Luke 12:3.

4. Romans 3:23.

5. Genesis 18:25; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 9:8; Romans 2:11.

such a perfect being as the man seated on that throne.

I was still downhearted, but as I looked at Christ, any sense of being aggrieved left me. Here was my Creator. I pictured myself, unborn, miniature, in the womb. How helpless and totally dependent I was then and am now. In between were 17 years of me fancying myself. All my life, every breath – it was all provided by this awesome Creator who was now going to hold me to account for it. For a second, I managed to put my feelings in one compartment of my brain and the rest of me in another. My conclusion? This was common sense!

After all, had I lived for God? ... No.

Had I sought him? ... No.

Had I even thanked him for giving me life? ... No. I had just grabbed my chance to enjoy myself and got on with the serious business of doing what I wanted to do. With these thoughts in my mind, I looked back at Christ on the white throne. There was no injustice here. However I was still not facing up to the full reality of my own fate. *'I never knew you. Away from me.'*¹ was surely what he'd say to me.

Somehow, though, I clung to a crumb of comfort, and this was it ... I was a spectator at this judgement – I hadn't joined the queue yet!

From our vantage point just above the back row of the courtroom, we had so far seen numerous people come and go. Everyone had been sent away by Christ with chilling words. They each departed in some agony or distress. I shuddered to

1. Matthew 7:23.

think of it ... 'The lake of fire?'

I don't know how many people we saw judged. Perhaps it was about three hundred while we were watching. One by one they came in. The things they said to Christ became predictable. These people had genuinely believed they were good enough to go to heaven. And I could hear my voice echoing each appeal they made to the throne. And every time Christ's final reply was the same.

'But I spent twelve years looking after my disabled mother,' was a heart-wrenching one from a black lady.

*'I never knew you. Away from me.'*¹

Another woman in tears said: 'I always put the children first.'

'I never knew you. Away from me.'

'I've done the best I could.'

'I never knew you. Away from me.'

'I never killed anyone.'

'I never knew you. Away from me.'

After hearing Christ's reply, one Spanish- or Italian-looking man was about to say something like 'Come off it!' Then he stopped himself. His reaction had been instinctive, impulsive. He checked himself and looked at the throne. I did too – pure and white. Christ wasn't a referee you could shout and swear at. This was no Sunday morning park kick about. Our Spanish friend crumbled in awe. He fell on his knees, not in pleading, but in regret. It was too late to change anything.

1. Matthew 7:23.

I could picture him on Waterloo station having just run for the last train home only to see it pulling away without him.

Others craned their necks trying to see what was in the books. What a leveller this judgement was! Some of them were rich I suppose, but the rich were treated just the same as tramps. I felt some sort of satisfaction in the marvellous equality of it all. Power and influence counted for nothing here, and all were treated alike. But where were these people going next? Where were my family and friends headed? The 'lake of fire'?

Just as I was trying to imagine it, there was an eruption of noise. Everyone was on their feet and trumpets sounded.

'What's going on now?' I asked the angel.

'A wonderful triumph, Daniel. This young girl's name has been found written in the book of life.'

'What?' I stared at her. She was Asian, and her face shone. She reminded me of a kid in GCSE Geography.

Then Christ said to her, '*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*'¹

'He hasn't said that to anyone else yet, has he?'

'This is the first one since you've been watching, Daniel. **What you are seeing here illustrates my seventh point. Everyone deserves the punishment of death because everyone has sinned against God, but those whose names are found in the book of life will escape death. In fact, they go to heaven!**

1. Matthew 25:34.

‘What? How come?’

‘OK – I need to explain point seven. For now, just consider that this young woman knew Christ would say this to her because she’d read it in the Bible!’

The angel was already turning to the page – I was spell-bound.

‘Daniel let me read part of this to you because it describes what you are seeing. Christ called himself the Son of man, and he said, *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”*’¹

‘So what has this girl done that gets her accepted?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing?!’

‘This girl hasn’t done anything to make herself acceptable to God.’

‘Then why is she accepted?’ I asked more out of envy than curiosity.

‘She has been accepted because someone else took the punishment she should have got. Somebody who was perfect volunteered to be punished in her place. He took her sin. She

1. Matthew 25:31–34.

his perfection. They swapped!

‘But that’s outrageous! How can that be fair?’

What I said seemed to remind the angel of something pleasing to him. He laughed and said, ‘You wouldn’t expect it, would you! But that’s the beauty of what God’s done! The fact is that this girl did nothing to make herself acceptable to God, yet as you can see she has been declared righteous by Christ. She walks free from the courtroom into heaven.’

‘But surely she must have been more religious than the other lot who got sent away, the ones who did the driving out of the demons and the prophesying?’ (Which I thought sounded cool – fun even!) ‘This cannot be right,’ I said to the angel, feeling quite indignant.

‘Oh really, and who are you to say what can and cannot be right?’ the angel put me in my place. He continued, ‘Daniel, to understand why this girl is being accepted by God, I must ask you what you know about Jesus Christ.’

‘Well, I know how there was no room at the inn and all that. He was Jewish. The Son of God, crucified for the sins of the world.’

‘Let me stop you there. Where did you get that from?’

‘I don’t know. Maybe school assemblies.’

‘What does “He was crucified for the sins of the world” mean?’

‘I don’t know exactly.’

‘Well, you know that Christ was executed by being nailed to a wooden cross?’

‘Of course ...’

‘Christ is unique. He never sinned. He was perfect. When he died, he took the punishment you should have got for everything you have ever done wrong. And he was punished for the sins of everyone else, including this girl’s.’

‘You mean we’re looking at the same Jesus who was on the cross?’ I was awestruck. ‘But he looks so fantastic!’

‘Well, he’s risen from the dead and ascended to his Father’s side, and his Father has given him authority to judge. But even as he judges this girl, he knows that he took all her sin when he was crucified on the cross.’

‘Let me explain it to you again by telling you a story,’ the angel continued. ‘Imagine you’re in Florida in the year 2000 and you walk into a shopping mall and shoot someone dead.’

‘But I’d never do that!’ I objected.

‘I know,’ the angel replied, ‘but I need to make up a story which will show you that sin leads to the punishment of death, and in Florida, as you probably remember, you were liable to get the electric chair for murder.’

‘OK,’ I said.

The angel continued, ‘So you shoot someone dead and immediately you’re arrested. You wait for your trial to come round. At the trial, a security camera videotape is produced on which you are clearly identifiable as the killer.’

‘Like on *Crimewatch*?’

‘Yes, OK, like on *Crimewatch*. Anyway, the evidence is stacked against you, and the judge is about to sentence you to death when a stranger bursts into the courtroom.’

‘He pushes past the security guards and makes his way

towards you standing in the dock. And to the amazement of the press reporters and your family in the gallery, the judge allows the disturbance to continue. Then the stranger pushes you out of the dock and stands there in your place.

“The judge does nothing to stop the stranger. Instead he looks straight at him and says, “I sentence you to death!” The whole courtroom gasps. The judge bangs his hammer on the desk. The trial is over and you’re left standing on the courtroom floor, free! The police handcuff the stranger and begin to lead him away to death row!

‘As the stranger passes, you ask him, “Why did you do that?” and he replies: “Because I love you.” Somehow that doesn’t seem enough of an explanation. You wander out into the foyer of the courthouse. Then you overhear the press talking. The stranger has been recognized after all. He is the judge’s only son! Now you are in awe of the judge. Then the judge pushes past the reporters. You ask him, “Your honour, please, why have you done this for me?” and he answers, “Because I love you!”’

For once the angel didn’t have to explain any further. I understood instantly why this Christ was so impressive, why he received such worship and praise from the Asian girl. He had loved her so much that he had given up his own life for her, just like the stranger in the courtroom. The penny dropped. Christ had died as a kind of substitute for her. God, the judge, sacrificed his Son.

But this girl must have accepted this news during her life on earth, whereas if I’d ever heard it, so that I understood it,

I knew I wouldn't have been the slightest bit interested. I wasn't the religious type and was perfectly happy as I was.

'So somebody told her about God sending his own Son to death? Or did she read it in the Bible?'

'Both!' replied the angel. 'And she believed it. But she died from meningitis two weeks later. Yet Christ says in the Bible that *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*¹

'Daniel, I think you're now ready for me **to explain my seventh point.**'

'Let me have a crack at it,' I said, hoping that spitting the words out would make me feel better. 'Jesus is that Judge's Son. Jesus is a perfect substitute. He swapped his perfection for this girl's sin. He died in her place, so she escapes punishment and goes to heaven. Is that right?'

The angel said, '**Yes. The punishment for sin is death. But God loves people so much, he sent his Son Jesus Christ to die in their place. Anyone who truly follows Christ therefore avoids the punishment of death and receives forgiveness. In fact they are considered as blameless as Christ himself. These are the people whose names appear in the book of life. They go to heaven.**'

'So why didn't somebody get hold of me and drum it into me so that I could have believed?'

'I don't know, Daniel.'

1. John 3:18.

‘OK then, please tell me, in that Bible passage you were reading, does it say that Christ sends people away just like we’ve been seeing up here?’

‘Oh yes,’ the angel looked at the passage again. ‘Christ says to those on his left, *Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*’¹

This was the first time the devil had been mentioned. I hadn’t been surprised to find out that God exists, though I’d done absolutely nothing about it while on earth. But I was surprised to find out that the devil was real. He was nowhere to be seen here, though.

Now, as you’re reading this, you might wonder how I can carry on when my own fate is looking so bleak. The truth is that I was so taken with the wonder of looking at Christ, that every time I looked at him I thought about him rather than me, but when I looked away, I realized how totally unworthy of him I was. Still the Asian girl who got to heaven fascinated me.

‘So is she the only one?’

‘Oh no,’ the angel said. ‘Look around you.’

All around us were other people; they had somehow blended into the scene, and seeing as I had been staring at Christ most of the time, I wasn’t surprised I hadn’t noticed them more.

‘Here’s the eighth point in my summary: Christians help in the work of judgement.’²

1. Matthew 25:41.

2. 1 Corinthians 6:2–3; Revelation 20:4.

By this stage, my head was spinning. I decided I'd been dead for too long already! What really blew me away was the fact that there were people for whom none of the eight points I'd encountered so far would come as a surprise! They knew about every one of them! Like seeing the exam paper the night before, they knew all the questions and the answers before death. No shocks for them! Who were these people? Why didn't they tell us more about what they knew to be true? I was getting angry just thinking about it.

I was trying to dredge up from my memory a conversation I'd once had with a girl at college called Becky Mason (the only proper Christian I think I'd known), when the angel started to stare at me. 'Daniel, it's time for me to show you what has happened to those who have been sent away to eternal punishment.'

This was what I had been dreading more than anything else. For the first time I was shaking, and the angel had to carry me – which he seemed to do effortlessly. We had been looking head-on at Christ from the rear of the courtroom – now we walked to his left, to the place where everyone except the Asian girl had been dragged.

As we reached this area, the crowd erupted again behind us. Another name had been found in the book of life! I spun round. With all my heart I wanted it to be Becky Mason, because I wanted to give her a piece of my mind. 'Oi, Becky!' I would have said. 'Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you warn me! What was the problem? Wasn't it important enough? Only a matter of life and death, Becky!' Of course it

wasn't her. Instead it was an elderly Japanese- or Chinese-looking man.

He was going to be in heaven for ever. I still shuddered to think that so many hadn't made it. Surely whatever hell was, I was going to experience it, when my turn came to reach the front of the queue and appear before Christ.

What now? The angel began to say something more, 'I have two things left to explain to you in my summary.' I wanted to interrupt and ask if he'd ever heard of Becky Mason, but I hadn't got the guts. He continued, '**Point nine is that hell is a real place and real people go there.** I'll explain the tenth point when we are inside.'

'Stop,' I said, having had more than enough shocks. 'Please, tell me what the Bible says about hell first before I see anything. I don't think I can take any more!'

'Very well,' the angel replied. 'The Bible says that God *will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.*'¹

Now that I had seen Christ with my own eyes, it seemed to me that being shut out from his presence was bad enough. 'Can you tell me what it's like?'

'Being in hell is an experience full of anguish and distress. Christ said repeatedly on earth that hell is a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. But you are not going

1. 2 Thessalonians 1: 8-9.

to see everything in hell, nor will you be told its location.'

Now let me explain something to you here. Usually, no matter how bad things get in life, there's something you can think of, even the tiniest thing, that can cheer you up, even if it's just an inane thought like 'Things can only get better!' But the mind-crunching reality was that for me things would never get better – they would get worse, and then get worse still. I was on an eternal downward spiral. This was a bad trip.

'Come on,' the angel said, sensing that I was approaching a sort of hysterical despair. 'Nothing I tell you, even from the Bible, can properly prepare you for this, so let's get on with it.'

Here I blacked out, so I have no idea how close the entrance to hell is to the scene of the final judgement. This was clearly something that I wasn't going to be told. It was a bit like a documentary I saw once about hostages in Lebanon in the 1980s who got moved around with blindfolds on. The blindfold of my blackout came off as I peered into the entrance to hell. It was a cavernous hole, with masses of people swarming around it.

Another random thought – what good had football, music, clubbing or my mates done for me? Here I was in hell!

'If only I could join that Asian girl we saw.'

The angel replied, 'Christ said, *Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*'¹

1. Matthew 7:13–14.

I was too depressed to take it in. As we looked at the masses surrounding the entrance to hell, I knew what a slave I had been to peer pressure. Where had following the crowd led me? I now knew the in-crowd would end up in hell. I half expected to find my mates from college here already. Then I thought of them having fun on earth – or maybe they were at my funeral. What were they thinking? Was my funeral religious? I bet it was – what a joke that is! Would it sober any of them up? Probably not.

It was weird that I could think so clearly despite my overwrought emotions and the horror of what I saw as the angel led me closer to the entrance to hell. As we neared it, skirting around the edge of the crowds, we could see that immediately beneath those at the front of the crowd was ... a lake of fire! Like water thundering over Niagara Falls, the crowds were crashing down onto the lake. It was awful.

The people in the lake below reminded me of the *Titanic* film, at the end with all those souls shrieking in the water. My sister must have watched that film twenty times, but the consolation for me when I watched it, was that some of the passengers survived. But could some of the real Titanic survivors have ended up in this lake of fire? The sickening irony of it all! Imagine being saved from the world's most famous disaster, then another so many years of useless living without God on earth, and then hell for ever after dying peacefully in your sleep!

And they're called survivors!

The angel again opened his Bible and said, 'Listen to how

Christ finishes the parable of the weeds: *As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*¹

As I looked at these people writhing in agony in the lake, it reminded me of gory moments from videos my friends and I had dared each other to nick from the corner shop when we were 12. I think we'd only succeeded once or twice. But there was a startling difference. Gruesome scenes in those films resulted in death – full stop. ... This was torture, so it seemed, without end.

'What does the Bible say about how long they're punished for?'

'I've already told you,' the angel shouted back, trying to make himself heard above the groanings of those in the lake. 'Do you remember the end of the parable of the sheep and the goats? Christ says that *they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*'²

'I don't get it,' I answered, staring blankly.

'It's the same word.'

'What is?'

1. Matthew 13:40–43.

2. Matthew 25:46.

‘The Bible uses the same word “eternal” to describe the punishment and the life. Daniel, these people will suffer in hell for just as long as the Christians will be in heaven – for ever! Elsewhere in the Bible, Christ says that this fire *never goes out*.’¹

While humans were being shoved down onto the lake, we walked around the perimeter. There was a terrible smell, by the way; in fact there’s so much stinky grizzly stuff I haven’t mentioned. Anyway, the angel began pointing to a particular man who was floundering in the lake and shouting.

‘Look at this one. This guy is mentioned in the Bible,’ he said.

The angel continued, ‘On earth he was rich. He was dressed in fine clothes and he lived in luxury every day. Outside his house lay a beggar called Lazarus. Lazarus was covered with sores. Even dogs would come and lick his sores. Anyway, Lazarus longed to be able to eat even the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table.

‘Well both these men died. The rich man expected to go to heaven, but he’s ended up here, being tormented in hell. Meanwhile Lazarus has gone to heaven.’

I looked at the rich man. Despite the generations between us, I could identify with him. Neither of us thought we’d ever be here. Then the rich man suddenly shouted out, ‘*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.*’²

1. Mark 9:43.

2. Luke 16:24.

‘Did you hear that?’ the angel said. ‘It’s as if it’s being acted out before us just as Jesus described.’

‘Who’s Abraham?’ I asked the angel.

‘It’s a long story, but the bottom line is that Abraham is someone in heaven who this rich man wants a favour from. Anyway, Jesus tells us that Abraham replied at this point, *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. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.*’¹

Then the rich man again cried out to heaven, right on cue, ‘*Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.*’²

I turned to the angel, who read me Abraham’s reply: ‘*They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.*’³

‘Moses!’ I interrupted. ‘Moses, as in *The Prince of Egypt*?’

‘Yes,’ the angel replied.

‘What has Moses got to do with this?’

‘Well, he wrote the bit of the Bible this man could have read.’

At this point, I was shocked by what the rich man said next. ‘*No, father Abraham ... but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.*’⁴

1. Luke 16 : 25–26.

2. Luke 16 : 27–28.

3. Luke 16 : 29.

4. Luke 16 : 30.

This man was still saying no to heaven, even when he was himself in hell! The fact that he had ended up in hell, clearly hadn't sobered him up one bit. Here he was in hell, shouting the odds at heaven, and trying to boss Abraham around, whoever he is!

In that instant, as I watched the rich man saying 'no', it struck me that this too was a sin, and maybe part of the reason why these people were being punished for ever. Were they constantly committing fresh sins that required fresh punishment?

I was appalled by the arrogance of this man. To be honest, I'd never really thought about how our selfishness and arrogance affected God. But the other side of the grave these sins repulsed me.

The angel continued: 'Abraham replied, *If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*'¹

A miracle like someone rising from the dead would certainly have got my attention, but this reply left me reeling. The Bible has more clout than an outstanding miracle! But I never knew that until now, and now it was too late!

At various points, like this one for example, I was haunted by the memory of Bibles lined up on the shelf in the RE room at school. I cannot recall ever having any enthusiasm for opening one of them. Yet if I had, I could have read the story of the rich man and Lazarus at school. Now my mind was racing! If I had read it, would I have believed? If I had read

1. Luke 16:31.

Christ describing this conversation between the rich man and Lazarus, would it have swayed me?

Suddenly, a flashback to my childhood. I remembered sitting on top of the stairs listening in on a shocking conversation between my parents. They were swearing at each other in a way I'd never heard them do before. (A year later they separated and they're now divorced.) Listening to them fight was like suddenly tuning in to the truth! By accident, I'd discovered what my mum and dad really thought about each other.

I could have tuned in to the truth in RE simply by reading about the rich man's fate!

It was all so frustrating. This must be where the gnashing of teeth comes in. So near and yet so far! I thought of Mr Grant, my RE teacher. He was always telling us how the Bible was like – what's it called – Chinese whispers. He was happy to tell us he didn't believe much of it.

Well, Mr Grant, I'm feeling the heat right now in one of the bits you don't believe in! Grant was more enthusiastic, so it seemed, about other religions, but he failed to make any of them sound interesting to any of us. What relevance did all his God talk have to do with our lives? Some kids in our class would bunk off RE. (Mr Grant was very laid back.)

So near to the truth in that room – those Bibles just sitting there – and yet so far! I felt angry with Mr Grant. Why hadn't they appointed a teacher who could have made it interesting to us? The truth about Christ was attractive enough. I decided that God had a serious PR problem on earth, or in Britain anyway.

The angel then said, 'It only remains for me to tell you **the tenth and final point of my summary. God is holy and just and he must punish sin. All sin is punished either on the cross of Christ or in hell. Hell is the punishment every sinner deserves, but because Christ was punished on the cross, his followers escape hell. Those who go to hell suffer different degrees of punishment there.** Christ said it would be more bearable for some people than others¹ and that some would suffer more than others.²

'So how much does it hurt for those who suffer most?'

The angel replied: 'Daniel, how much it hurts physically is not the big deal. You've only seen the outward suffering of those in hell, but it's the inward, emotional suffering you haven't seen that's the worst of it. You've only seen symbols or pictures of what's going on inside these people. The fire is like the burning frustration these people feel. That's why they gnash their teeth. Please don't think that it's because hell's so hot that people writhe in agony – it's the regret and anger they feel that makes it so unbearable for them.'

The angel paused. Something was up. He turned back to me. 'Daniel, I cannot show you any more of hell; we cannot go any further. You yourself have not yet been judged, and that is what must happen now. It's time for us to go back to the queue of those awaiting judgement. But this time, Daniel, you must join the queue yourself.'

1. Matthew 10:15; 11:22-24.

2. Luke 12:47-48.

As we left hell, my first thought was that I wished I had never been born. It was startling to think how pleasurable non-existence seemed at that moment. I now knew that there is a fate worse than death, and its name is hell. If only my parents had never conceived me!

Then I thought of the Asian girl. Her faith seemed so sensible and heroic as she stood before Christ. I could picture his expression, looking into her eyes, saying *Come*. Now I realized my greatest wish was not non-existence; it was to hear Christ say to me, *Come*. But it was too late!

The angel was carrying me again, and I could hardly focus as he walked with me in his arms back down the queue. At that moment, even in my weakness, I realized I had the chance to do something pleasing to God before I was consigned to hell. Summoning what little energy I had, I jumped up out of the angel's hands and stumbled towards people in the queue.

I was in luck, there were people speaking English nearby.

'You need to be a Christian or you'll go to hell!' I screamed with all the strength I could muster.

They completely ignored me, thinking I was some sort of maniac.

Another flashback. This time I remembered being in my bedroom at home, reading the lyrics of a Manic Street Preachers CD.

Now I was a manic street preacher, not outside Boots on a Saturday morning yelling at passing shoppers, but at the queue for the last judgement! The CD was called *This is my truth, tell me yours*. Could God have supernaturally made me think this?

I screamed out, 'It doesn't matter what you think the truth is – there is a whopping great judgement up there and if you're not a Christian, you'll be punished in hell for ever for your sins.'

I realized that I hadn't explained what I meant by a Christian. After all, I suppose I would have described myself as a Christian while I was on earth. I was new to this preaching business, and it struck me that what I had said wouldn't have helped anyone who considered themselves to be a Christian but actually wasn't. I was just about to answer the question 'What is a Christian?' when I realized that no one had asked it. No one was paying attention.

I staggered down the queue another hundred yards. Again I found some English speakers, but this time, rather than shouting at them, I listened to their conversation.

They were talking nonsense.

'I was baptized as a baby,' one said.

'Yeah, you went to church,' said another, 'but you only went three times: for your christening, wedding and funeral, and that means that two out of three times you were carried in!'

There was more laughter. These people were totally unconcerned about their fate.

'Hey, listen!'

Again, no response.

'It's no use,' the angel said. He had been standing behind me all the time! 'They can't hear you.'

I was upset by this. 'But think about what I've got to say. Why doesn't God let them hear me now? I could do something for him by warning these people!'

‘Once you’re dead it’s too late! There’s no second chance here,’ the angel said. ‘The Bible says, *Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*’¹

It dawned on me that none of the people I’d preached at had heard a word I’d said. There was no preaching between death and judgement because at death it was too late!

‘We saw people in hell who’d had chances to believe,’ the angel reminded me. ‘Many of these in the queue had every opportunity to believe, but they would not.’

You’d imagine people queuing up for judgement would be like jelly, quivering in fear, but the truth is that some of the people I heard were talking as if God owed them a favour.

As I spoke to the angel about the presumption these people displayed, he told me something that made sense of so much I had seen on earth. The angel showed me from the Bible (the book of Romans chapter 1 and verse 24) that judgement starts before death for some. It is almost as if God sees the determination of those who want to go against him and gives them over to their own desires. These people end up even more enslaved than when they began to sin in the first place.

Was I enslaved? Yes, to bad habits, to things I knew were wrong. I was horrified, by myself and by the impending judgement and subsequent punishment.

As I joined the queue, I collapsed, sobbing violently.

This wasn’t like the blackout I had before our spin round hell. This was sheer emotional and physical exhaustion. I just

1. Hebrews 9:27.

felt under so much pressure. I don't know how often I collapsed, but I had to keep pulling myself up, until I finally reached the front of the queue.

While some around me were perking up, thinking that their troubles were at an end, I had the horrible knowledge that for those who weren't Christians their troubles were just about to begin. The only consolation was that I knew I would be in Christ's presence. I would hear his voice, even if he was going to send me away.

Finally, I reached the front of the queue. All through my life on earth I had believed that the worst thing that could happen to me was death. At this moment I felt more keenly than ever before that I had been deceived. There was something far worse than death: a punishment of torment and agony that would never end.

I looked up and saw Christ for the last time. Although I couldn't really look at him, being in his presence was terrific. I felt a mixture of admiration and fear. I knew that he would say, *'I never knew you. Away from me.'*¹ and I was thinking how fair it seemed.

Then Christ spoke: 'Daniel.' He said my name! He was departing from the script! Was he going to single me out for special punishment?

'Daniel, your time has not yet come. This is the final judgement at the end of all things and you will be judged here ... but not yet. I have decided that you are to go back to

1. Matthew 7:23.

where you've come from. But from now on, every time you think about the cross where I died, you will understand that I love you, Dan.'



The next conscious moment, I saw my mother's face! I was alive!

Yes! Oh, yes! Thank You!

Elation!

I couldn't move or speak, so I could hardly celebrate. Of course, I was happy to see Mum too, but inside I was doing cartwheels about Jesus! What a let-off! I'd escaped hell and need never go there! I would follow Jesus, whatever happened. Then I began to think about going to heaven. It was all too much for me! Thank you, Jesus!

My body felt numb – or at least my legs did. There were tubes plugged into me, and I had no energy to do anything more than open my eyes.

As I lay there with my family around the bed, I heard my mum screaming with delight, and crying. Obviously, opening my eyes had been the first sign of life I'd shown.



Here I am, six months later. I've typed everything you've just

read from a wheelchair at an Internet café. My mum and sister Kate were more or less unharmed by the crash and I am now recovering fast from my injuries. The most serious were to my head, and it was these that doctors thought would be fatal. In fact they were, in a funny sort of way!

As you can imagine, as soon as I could communicate with anyone, I started to describe what happens beyond death. The biggest impact was upon my family and friends who knew I'd never been religious and they were totally at a loss to know what to make of what I said.

Perhaps you are expecting me to say that they have all become Christians, but the fact is none of them have – so far. They seem to think that I have some sort of trauma-related mental illness. I have been sent to a psychiatrist, who I am due to see for the second time next week.

Of course, I couldn't wait to go to church. I was so excited to think that I could meet people who already knew Christ. They were not likely to send me off to a psychiatrist!

So I persuaded my mother to come with me to our local church. I had cycled past it many times but never been in. There were no more than forty people there. Talk about the world's best-kept secret! We followed the service in a book. I thought the words were great and that everything we sang was spot on. Afterwards we went to the church hall for coffee. There was no one there my age, but, to my mother's embarrassment I got into conversation with a few of them, and started to describe what had happened to me. They seemed a bit shocked. Although they listened with interest, I think they

were just being polite.

So that's where I'm at for the time being. I'm going again next Sunday, when I hope to talk to the minister and tell him about it. Surely, out there somewhere there must be people who will believe me.

As I sit here writing these words, there are two images I cannot get out of my mind: Christ on his white throne, and the agonies of those in hell. Christ's love and their tortured expressions stay with me every night. Can I ask you: are you going to experience Christ's love or the agonies of hell?

And if you're a Christian, here is my question to you, and don't you dodge it. Why do you keep quiet?

what now?

We hope you enjoyed reading the first chapter of the shock of your life.

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