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The Afterlife

Belief in life after death

- There is eternal life after death, received through faith. John 3:16: 'whoever believes in him shall have eternal life'; Matthew 25:46: the righteous [those who respond to Jesus and those in need in the world] go to eternal life.'
- Entry to heaven depends on a person's response to Jesus, their repentance, and to those in need on earth.
- Resurrection is expected, because of the resurrection of Jesus. (John I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me 11:25: ' will live, even though they die.')
- There is a hell - the opposite of heaven - a place of separation from God. (Matthew 25:46: .. then they [who have not responded to Jesus e in need in the world] will go away to eternal punishment.
- Catholics believe there is a purgatory, a place of cleansing that is between earth and heaven; prayers can be said for those in purgatory to shorten their stay there.

Describe Christian beliefs about life after death. **[5]**

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Explain what Christians believe about life after death.

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A new heaven and a new earth will commence, with no tears, sorrow, sin or death.

There is a clear link, in Christian belief, between judgement, responsibility and **free will**. Because of free will, people can make decisions for themselves about their lifestyle and actions. Being able to do this brings the responsibility for the outcomes of the action or lifestyle, and if there is a judgement, as Christians believe, then there will be a reward or punishment in the light of decisions made.

The link between free will and judgement is shown in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. (Mathew 25: 31 – 46)

The 'sheep' – those rewarded by God		The 'goats' – those punished by God
What they did	The kinds of people they encountered	What they didn't do
Gave them food to eat	The hungry	No food given
Gave them a drink	The thirsty	No drink given
Invited them in	The stranger	No welcome given
Gave them clothes	Those needing clothes	No clothes given
Visited them in prison	Those in prison	No visiting while in prison

Christians believe that people are not judged merely by good deeds but also by the faith they have, which motivates their actions.

Why the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats is important

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats teaches that human beings have free will to make decisions about helping those in need, such as giving food or clothing, which is what God requires people to do.

It also teaches that God will judge people by their deeds and actions: if they have shown compassion and invited a stranger in, or have visited someone in prison, then they will receive a reward from God. Failure to do so will bring punishment.

Finally, the parable also teaches that individuals are responsible for their own actions: people choose how to behave and react, so no one can say that they did not have a choice. Everyone encounters people in some kind of need.

Christian beliefs about Judgement day.

It is considered by most Christians to be the end of history

- Most consider it a time for Christ's return (The Parousia/Second Coming)

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MODEL ANSWER

Christians believe there will be a Day of **Judgement**, when people will be judged by God for how they have behaved in their lives. In **the Apostles' Creed** it states that God will come to **'judge the living and the dead'**. Christians believe that, on this day, Jesus will return to earth in a **'second coming'**. This will mark the end of human existence as it is now on earth, and bring in a **new heaven** and a new earth, where there will be no sin or suffering, disease or death, or any of the other hallmarks of the **fallen world**.

The **judgement** will result in reward or punishment – that is, entry to **heaven** or banishment to hell. It is people's choices in life that determine the outcome, as Jesus showed in the **Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew's Gospel**. Those rewarded will be the ones who chose to help the hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick, imprisoned or those needing clothes. Those who did nothing for these people will be punished.

Acting with kindness and compassion to those in need, Christians believe, is actually doing something as if it were to Jesus himself. And Christians also believe that a person chooses to behave in this way because they have decided to follow Jesus' or God's way in their lives, and so make choices according to his teaching. No one is completely good, but people who have faith in Jesus are often motivated to do good deeds; in this way, faith leads to **salvation** – not just to good deeds alone.

In the same way, people who chose to reject God and His ways, and so did not help those in need because of compassion and an intention to live in the way God requires, will suffer the consequences of their decision.

Belief in Resurrection

- The spiritual part of a person (a soul) is able to be with God in heaven after death.
- Some Christians also believe that at the end of the time there will be a physical resurrection – people will have new physical bodies, just as Jesus did after his resurrection.
- The final resurrection will also mark the 'Parousia' or 'second coming' of Jesus, when he will judge the living and the dead.
- St Paul frequently referred to the resurrection of the dead and specifically stated in **1 Corinthians 15: 20-22** that just as sin and death came through Adam, so 'all in Christ will be made alive.'
- Because Christians believe Jesus was not just a human but God at the same time, they believe that all humans can overcome death through their faith in Jesus.

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Belief in heaven and hell

There are many references to heaven and hell in the Bible, but there are different interpretations as to the actual meaning of the language of those passages where there is a description. However, Christians do have beliefs about heaven and hell and the main ones are summarised in the table.

The question of what happens after life has fascinated all human societies. Christians believe in the holiness and justice of God, as well as his compassion and forgiveness. This means there is a time to give account for one's actions. Then there will be **punishments and rewards**. The belief in free will also impacts on beliefs in heaven and hell: the place to which a person goes is determined by their choice in terms of faith and action.

Heaven

What will heaven be like?

Most Christians believe heaven is the place to which believers go when they die: a place where God can be known clearly, and where earthly life and cares are forgotten. However, Christians also have differing views about heaven: some think it is an actual, physical place; others believe it is more of a spiritual dimension or existence. But for most Christians there is also the firm belief that there will be a new heaven and a new earth - a place where there is no more sorrow, sin or death. That is the heaven of eternal life and immortality- where God will be the centre and focus of all who live there, forever.

When will it happen?

Christians believe that those who have faith in Jesus go to heaven when they die. Catholics would say only very good believers go straight to heaven, and the rest go to purgatory first, to be cleansed and made ready for heaven.

Why is it important?

Many Christians would say that only those who have faith in Jesus and his death and resurrection will go to heaven. It is to be in the presence of God. Heaven will be a paradise - Jesus referred to this, as in **Luke 16**. (Rich man and Lazarus)

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Heaven is also seen as a reward for a life of faith and good works. Others would argue that as God is omnibenevolent all will ultimately be forgiven and enter into a new relationship with God in heaven.

Hell

What will hell be like?

Most Christians believe it is a place of suffering, even torment. This is because, whatever else it might be, it is a place of absolute separation from God and all that comes from his presence and love.

Christians also have differing views about hell: some think it is a physical place, where people burn eternally: other believe that if it exists, it is a kind of spiritual dimension, but one that does not include God.

When will it happen?

Christians believe it is the place to which people go when they die if they have rejected Jesus. Many Christians also believe that it is an eternal place; a place where, after judgement day, those without faith will remain - always separated from God and his goodness.

Why is it important?

Most Christians believe hell is to be absent from the presence of God. Jesus' teachings refer to it (as in Luke 16).

Some Christians believe hell is a punishment for life without atonement.

Exam questions

Describe Christian beliefs about heaven. **[5]**

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‘The existence of hell does not fit with a belief in an all loving God’

FOR	Jesus referred to hell in his teachings.	This is important because Christians think that what Jesus taught is the basis for their belief and faith. So if Jesus referred to hell, then there must be such a thing – whatever it is ultimately like.
FOR	Jesus taught that people have a choice through their actions of going to heaven or hell.	This is important as it demonstrates that Jesus clearly taught that going to heaven or to hell is a choice people make through their actions and decisions; it is not something imposed on a person – it results from personal choice in the end.
FOR	Hell is a state of being separated from God.	This is important because Christians believe that being in a relationship with God, or in His presence, is part of why humans were created. Therefore, being separated from an essential part of life is a terrible thing.
AGAINST	Jesus taught about the love of God.	This is important because the central teaching for Christians is about the love of God, which is everlasting and has no limit – therefore God can forgive everyone and anyone.
AGAINST	If God is omnibenevolent, then how can hell exist?	This question raises important issues, because the idea of God’s love and complete benevolence is not compatible with the idea of punishment in hell. Wouldn’t

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an all-loving God pardon everyone, whatever they had done?

AGAINST

People can change their beliefs close to death.

This is important as although a person may have made bad choices in their life, they can have a change of heart and ask for forgiveness even as they approach death. Would God then ignore their plea?

AGAINST

If God’s love is shown through the sending of Jesus to earth, then why would God want to make people suffer in hell?

This question also raises important issues, for if the Christian belief is that God sent Jesus to earth to show His love and offer forgiveness, then it seems pointless to have people being sent to hell and enduring pain and torment.

‘The belief in heaven and hell is the most important Christian belief’ [15]

PLAN

What to include:

Say why the belief in heaven and hell is important.

COUNTER ARGUMENT:

- What else do Christians believe?
- Belief in the resurrection and why that is important
- belief in the afterlife and why that is important.
- Belief in judgement, responsibility for action and free will and why that is important.

...Some people would agree with this statement because

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