

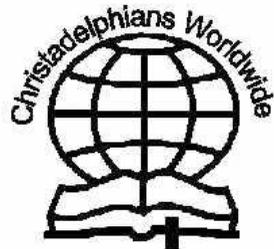
Bible teaching about Life and Death -1

WEEKLY READINGS:

Genesis, chapters 36-38
James, chapters 4-5.

READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Psalm 49
Genesis, chapter 2.



“I can’t do the things I used to when I was younger” - how often we hear those words. And how true they are! We don’t have to wait until we reach our 70s to find our powers failing, either. Even in middle age we cannot move as fast or think as quickly as we did when we were young.

We spend our life growing old, and we know for a certainty - if we stop to think about it - that one day we shall die. The words of the Psalmist are true when he says,

“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away”

(Psalm 90, verse 10).

All men die. It has been truly said that the only certain thing about living is that one day we shall die.

The first man on the earth

Why is it that we all grow old and die? To find the answer we must turn to the first book of the Bible, and read about the very first man and woman. God made the world as a very lovely place for men and women to live in. He created the plants and animals first, and then, when all was ready, He made a man.

It tells us in Genesis, chapter 2, verse 7 that,
“The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.”

With wonderful skill a human body was formed. We can picture that lifeless body lying on the ground. What happened next? God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis, chapter 2, verse 7).

The man began to breathe. He was alive! He could see, and hear, and think and feel - surely he was the most wonderful of the things which God had made.

Adam is lonely

Genesis, chapter 2, verse 8,
“The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed.”

Adam - for that was the name which God gave to this man - looked after the garden. He was told by God that he could eat any of the fruit he liked - except for one tree, which is called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” . God warned him,
“In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”
(Genesis, chapter 2, verse 17).

Adam had only the animals for company; and they couldn't think in the same way as he could. He became lonely, and God said,
“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis, chapter 2, verse 18).

You will read in verses 21-23 how God put Adam to sleep, took one of his ribs, and shaped it into a woman - someone to be with Adam and share his life.

Adam and Eve break God's law

Now read Genesis, chapter 3, verses 1-13 and you will see how the first woman, Eve, broke God's law by listening to the serpent, and how Adam also disobeyed God.

By breaking God's law they had sinned; and as we have already seen, the wages of sin is death. Adam and Eve knew that, too, for God had said to them,
“In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”
(Genesis, chapter 2, verse 17).

The punishment

The serpent was punished for his part in causing the trouble. Adam and Eve were condemned to death, and driven out of the garden.

Although they lived a long time after this, Adam and his wife became dying creatures - and, just like us, they would get tired and sick, and at last grow old and die. The words of God were certain - "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis, chapter 3, verse 19).

You will remember how, when God made Adam, He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis, chapter 2, verse 7). All human beings are 'living souls', but when they stop breathing, their life has gone - they become 'dead souls'.

As the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes says, "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." (Ecclesiastes, chapter 9, verses 5-6).

Or, as we read in Psalm 146, verses 3-4, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."

Sin and death in the world

The apostle Paul helps us to understand how this affects us. In Romans, chapter 5, verse 12, he says, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned".

Adam and Eve became sinners. We are their children, and so we are sinners too.

Our very nature is a sinful nature; or as Paul puts it, we are by nature "children of disobedience". Like our father, Adam, we sin, and, like him, we die.

It is not our fault that we have a sinful nature, and it certainly is not God's fault. It was Adam's fault, and our misfortune.

We are being very foolish if we blame God. Instead we should thank Him. We should thank Him because He has given us a chance to live at all, which we have no right to, really; and we should especially thank Him for giving us a way of escape from our hopeless plight. We are not blamed for being born with a sinful nature, but we deserve great blame if we neglect God's offer of a way of escape.

Summary

1. God made Adam from the dust of the ground.
2. He caused him to live, by breathing into his nostrils the breath of life.
3. God gave Adam a commandment. He told him that if he broke this commandment, the punishment would be death.
4. Adam and Eve broke God's commandment. They became dying creatures.
5. All men are descended from Adam; all are sinners, and all die.
6. As we shall see in the next three lessons, Christ brought men a hope of life.

Bible teaching about Life and Death - 2

WEEKLY READINGS:

Genesis, chapter 39-41

Jonah, chapters 1-4.

READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Ecclesiastes, chapter 3.



Loving ourselves

Speaking of the great love which Jonathan had for his friend David, the Bible says,

“The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (I Samuel, chapter 18, verse 1).

We all love our own soul, or self. Paul says in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 29,

“No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church.”

If we did not look after ourselves, and see that we had food and drink, we should soon die.

The serpent’s lie

But most of us love ourselves too much. Yes, we think much too much of ourselves. Perhaps this is why men have always found it hard to believe that they die and corrupt in the same way as the animals do. They have preferred to think that they will go on living somewhere after death.

The serpent said to Adam and Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis, chapter 3, verse 4). This was a lie, yet Eve chose to believe it rather than to believe what God had said.

And men have always chosen to believe the serpent's lie, and to make up all sorts of stories of what happens at death, rather than to believe God's words:

"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis, chapter 3, verse 19).

Like the beasts that perish

Yet the teaching of the Bible is quite plain. Turn to Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, and read the 19th verse,

"For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast."

When you see the body of a dead animal, you do not imagine that the most important part of that animal has gone to live in the heavens. You know that all that is left of the creature that lived and breathed and moved - however beautiful it may have been - is a dead body.

And it is exactly the same with men. When they die, all that is left is a lifeless body

Did you notice verse 12 of Psalm 49, which says,

"Man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish."

Like the beasts? Yes, the writer leaves us in no doubt about it, for he continues in verse 14,

"Like sheep they are laid in the grave."

A wrong idea

Many people believe that, when we die, there is some spark of life in us that goes on living. They think men have an "immortal soul" which will live for ever in heaven. But souls are not "immortal". Through the prophet Ezekiel, God says,

"Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son in Mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die"

(Ezekiel, chapter 18, verse 4).

We have seen what the Bible means when it speaks of death. It means a complete end of life, so that body and mind decay, and return to dust.

A gleam of hope

Perhaps you feel like shutting the Bible, and throwing this paper away. But wait a little while. The Bible is the Word of God, and what it says is true. We should be very foolish if we refused to believe the truth, just because it isn't very pleasant.

The same Bible that teaches that death is real, tells us also that there is a hope beyond the grave - the hope of resurrection. The Lord Jesus was restored to life by a bodily resurrection; and the day will come when those who belong to Christ will be brought forth from the grave as He was. But this is the subject of another lesson!

Summary

1. The Bible teaches that men, when they die, perish and corrupt like animals.
2. The Bible gives us no hope of going to heaven.
3. When Jesus comes back to this earth, He will bring to life those who believe on Him.

Hell - where is it?

The Bible tells us,
"The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath He given to the children of men" (Psalm 115, verse 16).

We know that heaven is the dwelling place of God. And we know that God created the earth as a home for men. But what about hell? Where is it, and who lives there?

We have already seen that when a man is dead he returns to the dust of the ground. He can no longer think or feel - he has no more life than an insect that you have crushed between your fingers.

Some people have thought that the wicked are sent to a place of punishment when they die, and that this place is called "hell". But let us see what the Bible says about it.

The Old Testament was first written in the Hebrew language, and afterwards translated into English. The Hebrew word "sheol" means "a covered place" - and that is the word which has been translated "hell" 31

times. The covered place referred to is the grave; and it is interesting to note that the translators have actually put “grave” for “sheol” 31 times, too. Hell and the grave are one and the same place.

Hades

Just as the Old Testament was first written in Hebrew, so the New Testament was first written in the Greek language. One Greek word for “hell” is “hades”, and it means exactly the same as “sheol” in the Hebrew.

Thus we read of Jesus that,
“Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell...” (Acts, chapter 2, verse 27).
Jesus went to hell (hades) - in other words, the grave - but He was not left there. He was raised from the dead.

But what about hell fire?

In Mark, chapter 9, we read,
“It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched” (verse 43).
There is another Greek word for “hell” in verses like this: “Gehenna”.

Gehenna is the name of a valley just outside Jerusalem - a place which would be well known to the Jews who listened to Jesus. It was the place where the rubbish from the city was burned. In times of siege and war, the bodies of the dead were also flung into Gehenna to be burned. It was a place of destruction; and so to “cast into Gehenna” meant to destroy utterly. Jesus was warning men to cut from their lives those things that tended to lead them away from God, and so avoid the complete destruction of everlasting death.

Resurrection

WEEKLY READINGS:

Genesis, chapters 42-44
Philippians, chapters 1-2.

READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

I Corinthians, chapter 15.



The word “resurrection” means coming back to life again. It must have been the most wonderful event in the history of the world, when Jesus Christ came out of the grave after being dead for three days.

When His disciples saw Him, they just couldn’t believe their eyes. They thought it was a spirit, but Jesus said to them.

“Behold My hand and My feet, that it is I myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have”. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, “Have ye here any meat?” And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them” (Luke, chapter 24, verses 39-43).

At last, they were convinced that He was really alive again. God had given Him eternal life. We read of Jesus saying - in Revelation, chapter 1, verse 18,

“Behold, I am alive for evermore.”

Jesus will raise His followers

Jesus taught His disciples that they, too, would be raised from the dead. Look again at the verse which we have just quoted. Jesus said “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell (or, the grave) and of death’.” (Revelation, chapter 1, verse 18).

Now, if you have the key to a door, it means you are able to open it. Jesus has the keys of the grave. This is a way of saying that He has power to open the graves, and set free those who are buried there.

This power has been given to Him by God. Read in John's gospel, chapter 5, verse 20-29. Notice particularly verse 21, which says "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will."

To quicken is to bring to life; and God has given Jesus the power to bring men and women back to life again.

A hope shared by all faithful men

Men of God throughout the ages have died looking forward to the day when they would be raised again. Paul tells us of some of these, that they "...died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 13).

Further on he speaks again of these men, "...received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews, chapter 11, verses 39-40).

We see from this verse that the gift of eternal life is going to be given to all true worshippers of God at the same time.

The early Christians also looked forward to this time. When one of their number died, they spoke of him as having "fallen asleep" because, just as men wake up after sleeping, so the disciple would be "awakened" from the dead. In the 15th chapter of I Corinthians, which you have read, Paul says of the 500 disciples who saw Jesus after His resurrection, "some are fallen asleep" (verse 6).

When will the Resurrection take place?

Nearly 2,000 years have passed since Jesus was raised from the dead. When is He going to raise those who have "died in faith"? The apostle Paul answers this question for us. He says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" (verse 22-23).

We have seen already that Jesus Christ is coming back to set up the Kingdom of God and reign over the whole earth. When He comes to do this, He will raise the dead. Then those who have been faithful will be given eternal life, and will enjoy the great privilege of helping Jesus to rule the earth, as we read in Revelation, chapter 5, verses 9-10. Here we read the words of a song they will sing in that day.

“...Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Some will be alive when Jesus comes

What of those who are still alive when Jesus comes back? Jesus said that, when He comes, He will “...send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew, chapter 24, verse 31).

In I Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 14-17, Paul tells us a little more about this. He says “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the cloud, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

The dead will be raised, and the living will be gathered together, and all will appear before the Lord Jesus. Before He gives them eternal life, there must be a judgement - but you will hear more about that in your lesson next week.

Read again I Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 51-58. Here the apostle speaks of the time when the faithful Christians will be given that great gift of eternal life, or - as he calls it here - immortality.

As we look forward to that time, the apostle Paul tells us to be “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

Some points to remember

1. God has given Jesus power to raise the dead.
2. He will do this when He comes back to the earth again.
3. He will at the same time gather together those “in Christ” who are still living when He comes.
4. To those who have been faithful, He will give eternal life, and they will live and reign with Him.

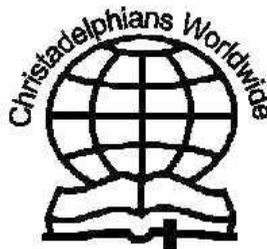
The Judgement Seat

WEEKLY READINGS:

Genesis, chapters 45-47
Philippians, chapters 3-4.

READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Matthew, chapter 25.



On the night that Judas betrayed Him, the Lord Jesus gave him one last warning: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born" (Mark, chapter 14, verse 21).

By betraying his master, Judas had deliberately turned against the Lord Jesus, and chosen the way of wickedness. There have been men in every generation who have wilfully turned away from the Lord and chosen the way of wickedness. They have to bear the responsibility of living darkness rather than light. They deserve a severe judgement. That is why Jesus said of Judas, "Good were it for that man if he had never been born."

There must be a judgement

If we think about this, we shall see the need for a judgement after the resurrection. God is loving; but He is also just and upright. He could not give eternal life to men and women who had despised His love, and who - knowing that Jesus had died for them - made no effort to serve and obey Him.

So Paul tells us, in Romans, chapter 14, verse 10, "We shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ." and again in II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 10: "We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

A righteous judge

When Jesus comes again, He will raise the dead, and gather together those of His followers who are living at that time. There will be a time of judgement. After the judgement, those who have been accepted will be given eternal life, and Jesus will say to them, as we read in Matthew, chapter 25, verse 34, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Jesus Himself will be the judge. In John, chapter 5, verses 28-30, where Jesus is speaking of the resurrection, we read, “...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, “And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgement is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me.”

He will judge with the wisdom that God has given Him. We read in Isaiah, chapter 11, verse 3-4.

“He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears. “But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.”

Men can only judge by what they see and hear; but the Lord Jesus will know the hearts of men, and He will make no mistakes in His judgement.

Who will be at the Judgement seat?

Those who have accepted God’s gracious offer of life, and who have been baptised into Christ, will be gathered to the judgement seat of Christ. But they will not be the only ones. There will be faithful men of Old Testament times as well. And, of course, there will be some who have not been faithful. We read in Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 26-27, “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, “But a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

Those who have never known about the true God, and His Son Jesus Christ, will not be raised to judgement. You may remember the verses in Psalm 49, verse 19-20, which say of such a man, “He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. “Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.”

(If you read Isaiah, chapter 26, verses 13-14, you will see that the same thing is taught there, too.)

What will happen to those who are rejected?

We have seen that those who come before the Judgement Seat of Christ will be divided into two classes. Christ will accept some, and reject others. He will give eternal life to those He accepts. But what will happen to those who are rejected? What will their punishment be?

We do not know all the details of their punishment. But some things are quite certain. First, they will be made to see how foolish they have been; they will realise what they have lost; and this will cause them agony of mind. Jesus said of such people: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God - and you yourselves thrust out!" (Luke, chapter 13, verse 28).

Finally, they will be completely destroyed. Jesus likened the judgement to a harvest, where the good corn is separated from useless weeds. The corn is carefully preserved. But the weeds are destroyed in the farmer's bonfire. (Matthew, chapter 13, verse 36-43).

Paul taught the same thing very plainly:

"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (II Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 7-9).

Love or fear

There are some passages which seem to warn us not to be too confident about our position at the judgement; whereas other scriptures seem to encourage us to be brimful of confidence. There is no contradiction. We must have no confidence - in ourselves; we must have unbounded confidence - in the saving power of God.

Though we may begin by being afraid of God, we shall gradually learn to love Him and trust Him completely. And so John says:

"Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement" (I John, chapter 4, verse 17).

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear" (I John, chapter 4, verse 18).

Summary

1. There will be a judgement day.
2. It will be after the resurrection.
3. All who have known the truth of God will be brought to judgement.
4. Those who are accepted at the Judgement Seat of Christ will then be given eternal life.
5. Those who are rejected at the Judgement Seat will suffer agonies of mind, and then will be destroyed.