



## 18 LESSON CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

### Lesson 2

#### **BIBLE TEACHING ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH**

Is there life after death? For a true follower of Christ, only the Bible has answers to these questions.

#### **Death**

First of all, what the Bible says about death itself? What happens after our last breath? Do we go on existing in another world?—perhaps in another form? Will we remember our present life? Shall we be able to see those who are still alive?

It is interesting to read what Jesus said concerning the death of his greatly loved friend Lazarus (John 11). He spoke of death as though it were a deep sleep. On hearing that Lazarus was sick, he said to his disciples, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” The disciples were pleased at this, expecting that Lazarus would now recover. But Jesus then told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead”, and he took them with him to the tomb, intending to wake up Lazarus from his “sleep”.

When they came to the tomb the disciples were told that Lazarus had died four days before, and Martha, the sister of Lazarus, came to meet Jesus, in sorrow at the death of her brother. What did Jesus say to comfort her? That the soul of Lazarus was still alive? That he had gone to heaven? No! He said, “Your brother will rise again.”

*Resurrection* – coming back to life - this is the true Christian hope. Martha knew this very well. She replied, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”

To prove that he had the power to raise the dead to life he went to the tomb and cried, “Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus came out, his hands and feet still wrapped in grave clothes (John 11:1-44).

So then, Jesus spoke of death as being like sleep. In death, as in sleep, we are unconscious.

The Bible says:

*“For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know nothing; . . . for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”* (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10)

*“No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from his grave?”* (Psalm 6:5)

The Old Testament therefore teaches that the dead are unconscious. The New Testament speaks of death as though it were a deep sleep, from which a person can be awakened by the power of God.

Not all believers will be asleep in death when Jesus returns. Many will still be living. The apostle Paul wrote,

*“. . . we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, . . . and the dead in Christ will rise first.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:15,16)

#### **The soul**

This simple teaching about death and resurrection has not been clearly understood by many because of the widespread notion that we all possess immortal souls. The expression ‘immortal soul’ is not found anywhere in the Bible! In fact the Bible tells us that only God is immortal. He

*“alone is immortal, and lives in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.”* (1 Timothy 6:16)

The idea that the soul is some part of us that never dies causes confusion. If it was true, the great hope of resurrection has no meaning.

The idea of an immortal soul is based not on the Bible, but on Greek philosophy. But in all ancient civilisations, people did not want to accept that death was really the end. The belief that man has an immortal soul was accepted into the church 200 years after the death of Christ. It was never believed by Jesus and the apostles in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

The truth is that the hope of the Christian gospel is not that we have immortal souls, but that Christ will raise the dead when he comes again.

### **Sin and Death**

God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16). Because he disobeyed the commandment he was condemned to die:

*“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you will return.”*(Genesis 3:19)

There is no hint here of life after death. Death was Adam’s punishment because of the sin of disobedience; as a result, death has been passed on to all his descendants.

*“. . . sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned . . .”* (Romans 5:12)

It would make no sense, if death was not really death. In fact, by death, God ensures that wicked people and bad situations do not continue for ever. The good news of the Gospel is that we can be saved from sin and death.

In a later lesson we shall be able to say more about the great work of Jesus Christ. He died for our sins so that we might have hope of salvation from death, through *resurrection*. Resurrection is an awakening from the sleep of death to a new life. This will take place at the return of Christ to the earth.

How can we be sure of this? Because we read that after his crucifixion Christ himself was brought back to life. He is described as the “firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18).

This means he was the first to be raised to eternal life. Unlike the rest of mankind, he did not sin. Unlike Adam, he was perfectly obedient to the will of the Father.

*“. . . he humbled himself, and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place . . .”* (Philippians 2:8-9)

Although he was unconscious in the tomb for 3 days and nights, God brought him to life again. After 40 days he went up into heaven, to the right hand of God. He will return to the earth to awaken from the dead all the faithful servants of God, and give to them the eternal life which he now enjoys.

At the tomb of Lazarus Martha said of her brother, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” The prophet Daniel spoke of this last day, in these words:

*“There will a time of distress such as not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake.”* (Daniel 12:1,2)

The message of the Bible is clear: there *is* eternal life, salvation from death, for those who believe in Jesus and obey his commandments. In the next lesson we shall say more about the resurrection of Christ.

### **Summary**

- Only in the Bible can we find the truth about life and death.
- When our breath is taken away, we return to dust; we know nothing. It is like being in a deep sleep.
- We do not have an immortal soul which continues to exist after death.
- Our only hope of salvation from death is resurrection at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven.

### **Questions**

To benefit from the study, please read the lesson carefully more than once. Then answer the following questions in your own words. Send the answers to your tutor.

*B1 According to the Bible, what happens after death?*

*B2 Why do you think the Bible describes death as a sleep?*

Please ask for help if you have any difficulty.