



Bible teaching about Life and Death - Part 2

READING FOR THIS LESSON – Ecclesiastes 3.

Our love of life

In Matthew 16:24-26, Jesus told his disciples of the need to love him more than their own lives. Notice particularly verse 25,



“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

We all love our own selves as Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:29,

“After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.”

We would soon die if we did not look after ourselves, and made sure that we had food, drink and shelter.

The serpent's lie

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

In the Garden of Eden the serpent said to Eve,

“You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4).

This was a lie, yet Eve chose to believe it rather than to believe what God had said in Genesis 2:17.

“...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

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

“...for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19).



Like the beasts that perish

Yet the teaching of the Bible is quite clear. Turn to Ecclesiastes 3:19,

“Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal.”

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 and women. When they die, all that is left is a lifeless body.



Also read carefully Psalm 49 verse 12, which says,

"But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish."

Are we really like the beasts when we die? Yes, the writer leaves us in no doubt about it, for he continues in verse 14,

"Like sheep they are destined for the grave ..."

A wrong idea

Many people believe that, when we die, there is some part of us that goes on living. They think men have an "immortal soul" which will live forever in heaven. But souls are not "immortal".

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God says,

"For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son – both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die." (Ezekiel 18:4).

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

A gleam of hope

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

The same Bible that teaches that death is real, tells us also that there is a hope beyond the grave - the hope of a resurrection from the dead. Three days after his crucifixion, the Lord Jesus was restored to life by a bodily resurrection. The day will come when those who belong to Christ will be raised from the grave as he was.

Hell - where is it?

The Bible tells us,

"The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to man" (Psalm 115:16).

We know that heaven is the dwelling place of God. And we know that God created the earth as a home for men and women (Isaiah 45:18). But what about 'hell'? Where is it, and what is 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, as we read in Ecclesiastes 9:4-6).

"...For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun..."

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 for "hell" is "*sheol*" and means "a covered place." This is the Hebrew 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, also. Therefore "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 the Hebrew word "*sheol*" in the Hebrew. Thus we read of Jesus Christ,

"...he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact" (Acts 2:31).

Jesus went to hell ("*hades*") – in other words, the grave – but he was not left there. God raised him from the dead.

But what about hell fire?

In Mark 9:43, we read,

"It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out."

Here is another Greek word for "hell" which is "*Gehenna*".

Gehenna was 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 always being burned. In times of starvation and war, the bodies of the dead were also thrown into Gehenna to be burned. It was a place of destruction; and so to be "cast into Gehenna," meant to be destroyed completely.

Jesus was warning men to cut from their lives those things that could lead them away from God, and so avoid the complete destruction of everlasting death.

Summary

1. The Bible teaches that men rot away just like animals when they die.
2. The Bible does not promise we go to heaven when we die.
3. When Jesus comes back to this earth, he will bring back to life (raise from the dead) those who believe on him.
4. The Old Testament (Hebrew) word for "hell" (*sheol*) means "the grave".
5. The New Testament (Greek) words for "hell" are "*hades*" meaning "the grave" and "*Gehenna*" which was the place where rubbish was burned.