

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSE



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Date: _____

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Ref No.: _____

LESSON 12 • Bible teaching about Life and Death -2

WEEKLY READINGS
READING FOR STUDY PAPER

Genesis 39-41, Jonah 1-4
Ecclesiastes 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" (1 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!

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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 live there?

We have already seen that when a man is dead he return 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" mean "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 be quenched" (verse 43).

There is another Greek word for "hell" in verse 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.