

## Life and Death

The Bible has a message of hope for us – we can live forever.

Life comes from God; nothing can live unless God gives it life. God is eternal, and He offers eternal life to men and women who will accept His offer.

The Bible is His word - let's see how it takes us from creation through to life forever for followers of Jesus. And why that commitment to Jesus is vital.

God made the first man, Adam, and gave him life. This was a two-step process. First, God 'made' Adam. Then God gave him life. We read this in Genesis 2:7:

*"The Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."*

God made man from the dust. But Adam was not alive until God breathed into him the breath of life. It is important to understand the origin of man, because we need to understand what man is, what life is and what death is. In Genesis 3:19, God makes it clear what man is:

*"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you will return."*

"For you are dust." Man is dust. That is all he is. He was made from it. At death he will return to it. He only has life because God gives him His breath. The hope of life after death is only possible because God has a way of saving those who die. We are mortal – an unpleasant fact that we all have to face. But God has a plan for us. And God's way of saving can only be for those who have turned to Him while they had life.

¶ This is the message of hope through Jesus which we explain in more detail in the lesson 'Gods Plan for the World'. This is the conclusion of that lesson:

In Mark 16:16, God promised: that *'whoever believes and is immersed will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned'*

In Matthew 16:27 Jesus says *'the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done'*

And finally, the time when the world has been restored to the way it was when God created it, is described for us by Jesus in Revelation 21:3-4:

*'And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.*

*He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and **death shall be no more**, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'*

God does not want you to miss that great day! So think about it and believe it, because these things are going to happen – and sooner than you might think.

And if you do believe it, then you need to be immersed into the saving name of Jesus and to try to be the person who Jesus will be happy to welcome into his kingdom when it comes. ¶

Without that hope, man would be just like the animals. Animals were made from the ground (Genesis 1:12). They had the breath from God giving them life (Genesis 1:30). They also die in the same way.

Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 tell us this: *"Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. .... All go to the same place; all come from the dust, and to dust all return."*

Both man and animals were made from the dust. They both live because of the breath of God. When they die, both go back to the dust. Man lives and dies like the animals.

If God were to take away His breath from either man or animals, then they would die. Psalm 104:29 says that, when God takes away their breath, *“they die and return to the dust”*.

There is another term used to describe the breath of God. That is the ‘spirit of God’. We see this in Job 33:4 where breath and spirit are used for the same thing: *“The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”* The same terms are used in Job 34:14-15: *“If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all humanity would perish together and mankind would return to the dust.”*

It is the breath that keeps man alive. If God takes this away then man dies. Ecclesiastes 12:7 confirms this: *“the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”* The spirit was God’s spirit. At the end of man’s life, God takes His spirit back. Man returns back to dust.

Let us summarise the process of life and death:

- God made man from the dust. But he was not living until God breathed into man the breath of life.
- Man lives because God gives man breath to live with.
- When man dies, the breath leaves him and returns to God. Then the dead body returns to the dust.

Many parts of the Bible describe the life of man as only lasting a short time. He is like a mist that comes and goes. He is like the grass which grows up and then withers. He is like a shadow that goes down and disappears, a cloud that is there one moment and gone the next, a breeze that comes and goes. Man does not have a continuing existence. He is only a temporary actor on the stage of life.

The Bible is clear that, when man is dead, that is the end. No part of man survives death. Death is the end of man’s existence. He does not continue living after death.

Consider Ecclesiastes 9:4-6:

*“Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name 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.”*

The dead “know nothing”! They are not loving. They are not enjoying. They have ceased all life functions. They are dead. Verse 10 of the same chapter has some advice for the living:

*“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”*

You cannot do anything when you are dead. So make the most of your life now.

The dead cannot even praise God. Isaiah 38:18 says: *“For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.”*

Psalm 115:17 says: *“It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to the place of silence.”*

The dead are not praising God on clouds, as some think. They are dead.

Only those who are alive can praise God. The dead are silent.

But the final outcome for the faithful is wonderful!

The destiny of all those currently living is death. It does not matter if one is good or bad. We all go to the same place. Ecclesiastes 9:2-3 tells us: *“All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it*

*is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those are afraid to take them. ... The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead."*

King David understood this common destiny. When he was close to dying, he said "I am about to go the way of all the earth." (1 Kings 2:2)

All this teaching leads to the obvious question: Is death the end? Is there really nothing else? How can God's promises to faithful people like David and Abraham be kept? What about followers of Jesus?

For those who believe God, there is the hope of the resurrection. Acceptance at Christ's judgement leads to eternal life in God's Kingdom and all the associated blessings – remember that promise in Revelation chapter 21? "Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore". The Bible spends far more time painting images of the blessings of that eternity than it does on explaining man's mortality. But we must see things correctly to start our journey of faith.

Another difficult question for some is the teaching about an immortal soul. This is not a Bible teaching; it is a false teaching mixed into Christianity from worldly philosophies by those who did not like the thought of death being the end. So, questions such as "Do you go to heaven when you die?" and "Is hell a place of torment?" spring from the confusion caused by false ideas of consciousness after death.

The Bible teaches us that we certainly can have eternal life; that is, we can have life where we do not die. Romans 6:23 says "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" So, eternal life is a gift from God. It is given through the work of Jesus.

The Gospel of John tells us that God has given Jesus the authority to give eternal life to others: "*For you have granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.*" (John 17:2)

Jesus is able to give eternal life. But not everyone will have it. Romans 2:7-8 tells us "*To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*"

Eternal life is for those who do good. Evil doers will not be given eternal life. He does not want people who do evil to do evil for ever. But seemingly good people *who reject the truth* are also excluded. Again: Eternal life is a gift from God. It is given through the work of Jesus. We must believe that in order to have this wonderful hope.

For those people who will be raised, death is like a sleep. It is a temporary period of unconsciousness, like sleeping. Daniel 12:2 is an example of this: "*Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*"

Only those who live in the way God wants will be given eternal life. This should make us think very carefully about how we live our life.

Many of our quotations have come from Ecclesiastes, which focuses on the destiny of man. Here is another quote, from the end of this book. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: "*Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.*"

This judgement is described (by the apostle Paul) in Acts 17:31 as being carried out, in righteousness, by Jesus when he returns to earth – on a day which has been guaranteed by God by raising Jesus from the dead. Yes, life after death!