



Lesson 23

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (Part 2)

Reading Ecclesiastes 3

After death - what?

There are many different ideas about what happens when we die. Few people like to think that when they die, that will be the end of them. Here are some of the ideas men have:

- some think they will re-appear as another person, or an animal (this is called reincarnation);
- some think there is something in them which goes on living elsewhere;
- some believe that there is no hope at all of any kind of life after death;
- others believe there will be a day of resurrection of the dead, followed by judgement, and eternal life for the faithful.

What does the Bible say?

As we have already seen, death is a punishment for sin. Death is a lifeless state without any thoughts or any consciousness at all. Death is a complete end to life and no part lives on.

"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 anything that is done under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6)

Does this mean there is no hope for us? Is there no hope beyond the grave?

The promise of resurrection and eternal life

There would be no hope if God had not sent Jesus. Jesus himself said, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).

But because of what Jesus did in his sinless life, and in his death, we can have a hope of life after death.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son Into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16, 17).

We can have our sins forgiven through Jesus. Jesus was described by John the Baptist as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). It is because of sin that we die. If our sins are completely forgiven then, just like Jesus, we cannot stay dead.

Read for yourself John 6:39, 40, 44. Notice that three times in these verses Jesus speaks of raising the dead "at the last day"; that is, when he comes back to earth again. Notice especially verse 40:

"This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 5:28, 29 also speaks of the resurrection of the dead. Jesus said:

"Marvel not at this: for 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."

The prophet Daniel also speaks of this, again showing that only some of those raised will be given everlasting life:

"Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt". (Daniel 12:2).

So there will be a judgement. 2 Timothy 4:1 shows that those alive at the time when Jesus returns will also be involved in this judgement:

"(Jesus) shall judge the quick (living) and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom."

Those people who are judged worthy will be given a place in God's kingdom on earth. To them, Jesus will say:

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

These faithful ones will be given eternal life: a life that is perfect and sinless; they will be like the angels, as we read in Luke 20:35, 36:

"They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."

The hope of the Christian is bodily resurrection from the dead and a place in God's Kingdom on this earth when Jesus returns.

Do sinners go to hell?

Is there really a terrible place called 'hell' where wicked people go to be tormented after they are dead?

We have already seen that when a man dies, his life ceases completely. He can no longer think or feel anything. So where, and what, is 'hell'?

The word 'hell' is an old English word, which means 'a hidden or covered place'. It is the word used in the Bible for the hidden or covered place of the dead - the grave.

HELL means THE GRAVE

In the Old Testament the word for hell is sheol. It is used in these passages:

Psalm 49: 15
The Psalmist says: "God will redeem my soul from the power of the **grave**."

Psalm 55:15
The Psalmist says: "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into **hell**."

These are the same word in the original Hebrew language (sheol)

In the New Testament the word for hell is hades.

1 Corinthians 15:55
The apostle Paul says: "O death, where is thy sting? O **grave**, where is thy victory?"

Revelation 1:18
Jesus says: "... I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of **hell** and of death,"

These are the same word in the Greek (hades). They mean the same thing.

These show that in the Old and New Testaments 'hell' could have been translated 'grave', so

HELL means THE GRAVE

Hell is therefore not a terrible place of torment for sinners after they have died.

Jesus came back from hell

After Jesus had been raised from the dead and had ascended to heaven, Peter preached to the people who were gathered at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. He told them that David the king had prophesied about Jesus being raised from the dead. This prophecy is found in Psalm 16, but Peter talks about it in Acts 2:27:

"Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Peter says that David was prophesying about Jesus Christ (in verse 31):

"He (David) seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."

Christ's soul (that is, Christ himself) was not left in hell (the grave) because God raised him on the third day. God's Holy One did not see corruption.

In Revelation 1 Jesus speaks of his own resurrection, and then of his promise to raise his faithful followers. He says:

"I am he that liveth and was dead: and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:18).

The followers of Jesus who have died are locked up in the grave - or hell. Jesus has the key. He has the power to unlock those gates when he returns and raise the dead from their graves.

Hades

Sometimes 'hades' is thought of as a shadowy place where the spirits of the dead exist. We know this cannot be right, because the Bible tells us "the dead know not any thing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). They have no conscious existence.

'Hades', as we have seen, is simply the Greek word for grave.

What about hell fire?

Jesus speaks three times in Mark 9 of "a fire that never shall be quenched". He says:

"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).

Yet we know that the dead are unconscious and know nothing. What did Jesus mean?

The word 'hell' in this passage is Gehenna. It comes from the Hebrew Ghi-Hinnom. This was the name of the valley outside Jerusalem where long ago, kings of Israel had actually burned their children as a sacrifice to strange gods. (You can read about this in 2 Kings 23:10.)

In the time of Jesus, this valley of Hinnom was where the bodies of dead animals and the town's rubbish were burnt. The fire burned continuously. It was a place for complete destruction. So when Jesus used the word Gehenna, people would think of this place and realise that he was using it as a symbol of complete and utter destruction. He was not saying people would suffer punishment forever.

Summary

1. The Bible teaches that death is the end of all conscious life.
2. It gives no promise of going to heaven.
3. It does promise that Jesus will come back and raise the dead.
4. At that time he will give eternal life to his faithful followers.
5. 'Hell' is the grave; the place where the dead are buried.
6. 'Gehenna' is a valley near Jerusalem where rubbish was burnt: it is used in the Bible to mean utter destruction.

A chapter to read

John 11:1-45

Verses to learn

1 Corinthians 15:22-23

"For 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.