

## Lesson 1

# Defining Death

What “pictures” come to your mind when you contemplate the reality of *DEATH*? Do you think of a grave, a casket, or a cross? What about a young boy at play, or an elderly couple, or even a “middle aged” couple? What about a snake, two cute dogs, or even cattle? Give a reason why these images do or do not illustrate death in your mind.

The fact is each of these images could be an indication of death. Paul said, “It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Solomon said, “Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?” (Ecclesiastes 3:21). Additionally Solomon states, “I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. 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 alone breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again” (Ecclesiastes 3:18-20). In this passage, we recognize he spoke only of the *body* of man and beast. In the twelfth chapter of

Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us the body returns to the dust of the earth and the *soul* returns to God who gave it!

This lesson defines death. Let us examine first the definitions offered by the “scholars” and then examine the more vital – the established truth of the scriptures. You will note throughout this lesson one important fact: *no one grows younger ... we are each one ebbing closer to death and judgment with each breath we take*. But do not despair! It need not be a lonesome journey (Psalms 23; Hebrews 13:5-6). Instead, remember that in order to examine the subject of *death* we must first examine the subject of *LIFE!!*

“I am standing on the seashore. A ship spreads her sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. I stand watching her until she fades on the horizon, and someone at my side says, ‘She is gone!’

“Gone where? The loss of sight is in *me*, not in *her*. Just at the moment when someone says, ‘She is gone,’ there are others who are watching her coming. Other voices take up the glad shout, ‘Here she comes!’

“And that is *dying*.”

Let us establish first that *LIFE* is more than this physical, temporal realm. Perhaps to state it better, “Physical life is temporary...spiritual life is ETERNAL!” When God created man (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:7) there is no evidence that Jehovah desired death for Adam and Eve. In fact, we find quite the opposite: His commandment was they should *not* eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. “For in the day that you eat from it you will surely die,” is by some rendered, “dying thou shalt die” (Genesis 3:16-17). What we know is that had they obeyed God, they would not die. Disobedience led to their death – thus our first definition of death – *separation from God’s life!* For this reason (their sin causing a separation from God’s life/commandments) God said, “Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Genesis 3:22-23).

The very first case of “death” noted in sacred writ is that of Abel. Genesis 4:8 – “*And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.*” (NASU – “*Cain rose up against Abel and killed him.*”) The underlined words are equal. We recognize the “taking of life” in the words “slew/killed.” But let the scriptures speak: “And He (God) said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto Me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from

the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand" (vs. 10-11). Careful observation of these verses teaches two things:

1. Life is in the blood (Genesis 9:4-6).
2. Life/blood was placed in *man* not the ground! Yet, *from the ground cried the blood*.  
**Is it reasonable to say, "From the ground cried the life of Abel?"**

The value God placed on *LIFE* is immense. It was not until after the flood that God granted Noah permission to eat flesh – *but not blood!* (Genesis 9:3-6); reminding Noah that "in the image of God made He man." We rightly conclude that this *life*, this *image*, this *blood* share something of great value – and that "something" is God! Yet, it is *sin* that creates this *separation* (Isaiah 59:1-2). By definition, **DEATH IS SEPARATION FROM GOD'S LIFE BECAUSE OF SIN**. The key word is "separation."

The scriptures show four areas of "death/separation." They are:

1. Separation of the soul (life) from the body – Genesis 35:18; James 2:26
2. Separation from spiritual things – Ephesians 2:1, 5
3. A Figurative Separation
  - a. From sin – Romans 6:2, 11

- b. From the Law of Moses – Romans 7:4;  
Galatians 2:19
- 4. Separation eternal from God – Romans 6:23;  
2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

Now we look at the actual subject of *defining death*. Vine says, “Death – used in scripture of (a) the separation of the soul from the body, that latter ceasing to function and turning to dust (b) the separation of man from God ... Death is the opposite of life; it never denotes non-existence. As a spiritual life is ‘conscious existence in communion with God,’ so spiritual death is ‘conscious existence in separation from God.’ Death, in whichever of the above-mentioned senses it is used, is always, in scripture, viewed as the penal consequence of sin.”

Thayer’s definition: “death; 1. prop. The death of the body, i.e. that separation (whether natural or violent) of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended ... 2. metaph. The loss of that life which alone is worthy of the name, i.e. the misery of soul arising from sin, which begins on earth but lasts and increases after the death of the body ... 3. The miserable state of the wicked dead in hell is called – now simply *thanatos*, Romans 1:32 ... 4. In the widest sense, death comprises all the miseries arising from sin, as well physical death as the loss of a life consecrated to God and blessed in Him on earth ... to be followed by wretchedness in the lower world.”

Obviously, *life* is a valued item in God's sight. However, the Psalmist said, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalms 116:15). This obviously (by our study of definition) does *not* refer to the *death of the soul* but rather the death of the body (separation of soul/life from the body, the tabernacle of the soul – 2 Peter 1:13-15) For this reason, that which is the *eternal portion* of man must return to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). This body is not an "eternal" element: it is the *soul within the body* that is eternal. This explains why the apostle Paul was not afraid of death (separation of soul and body). Examine his statement to the church at Philippi (Philippians 1:21-24) and his statement to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:7-8). In a later chapter of this study, we will more closely examine the soul and its preparation for judgment (chapter five). For now, in this beginning portion of the study of *WHERE ARE THE DEAD*, let us fully grasp the concept that...

### **DEATH IS SEPARATION FROM THAT WHICH LIVES.**

In every aspect of this separation, it is *sin* that causes the death. There is no *real life* (i.e. God's Life) in sin, and therefore, sin is death (Romans 6:23). We Christians know that *life* comes from God. Therefore, *true life* requires God – our repentance from sin and our burying that sin in baptism from which we rise to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-6)!

It is fair to say that unless Christ returns first, we will all die (Hebrews 9:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Only two in all of Holy Writ escaped physical death: Enoch (Genesis 5:22-24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11). It is equally fair to say that unless the soul possesses the *life of Christ* (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:1-4) when it departs from this tabernacle called a body, that soul will not live eternally with God! Thus, realizing the certainty of *physical death*, it is imperative we realize the certainty of *spiritual life* (Romans 8:6).

The scriptures are abundant with references to death as well as references to life. Neither time nor space permits our review of each one in detail. That statement does not mean these passages are unimportant to our study and understanding; it means simply what it says – you need to utilize your time wisely and study the scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15). It is our conviction that we have defined death properly, but in so doing, shown the greater importance of being prepared for that physical death by assuring *God's life* as the possessor of the soul (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)! At death (physical) that soul will then return to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7) prepared to live eternally with Him (Romans 6:8; 2 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Timothy 2:11).

## Study Questions

1. Define death.
2. Is death (physical) the result of sin? (Examine and compare 1 Corinthians 15 in your answer. We will more fully discuss this passage in lesson four.)
3. Discuss or illustrate the *joys* of death. As the saying, "There are some things worse than death," contemplate the reality of, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."
4. Liken as best you can the death of the flesh to the death of sin within the flesh. Use Romans 6 as a guide.
5. What "bothers" you about death and/or dying? Why?



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