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Heaven, Hell, and Life After Death

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Kay Arthur, Bob & Diane Vereen

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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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HEAVEN, HELL, AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

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Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-60142-560-7

eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-561-4

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Cover design by Kristopher K. Orr

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, New York, a Penguin Random House Company.

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Printed in the United States of America

2014—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This small-group study is for people who are interested in learning for themselves more about what the Bible says on various subjects, but who have only limited time to meet together. It's ideal, for example, for a lunch group at work, an early morning men's group, a young mothers' group meeting in a home, a Sunday-school class, or even family devotions. (It's also ideal for small groups that typically have longer meeting times—such as evening groups or Saturday morning groups—but want to devote only a portion of their time together to actual study, while reserving the rest for prayer, fellowship, or other activities.)

This book is designed so that all the group's participants will complete each lesson's study activities *at the same time*. Discussing your insights drawn from what God says about the subject reveals exciting, life-impacting truths.

Although it's a group study, you'll need a facilitator to lead the study and keep the discussion moving. (This person's function is *not* that of a lecturer or teacher. However, when this book is used in a Sunday-school class or similar setting, the teacher should feel free to lead more directly and to bring in other insights in addition to those provided in each week's lesson.)

If *you* are your group's facilitator, the leader, here are some helpful points for making your job easier:

- Go through the lesson and mark the text before you lead the group. This will give you increased familiarity with the material and will enable you to facilitate the discussion with greater ease. It may be easier for you to lead the group through the instructions for marking the text, if you, as a leader, choose a specific color for each symbol you mark.

- As you lead the group, start at the beginning of the text and simply read it aloud in the order it appears in the lesson, including the “insight boxes,” which appear throughout. Work through the lesson together, observing and discussing what you learn. As you read the Scripture verses, have the group say aloud the word they are marking in the text.
- The discussion questions are there simply to help you cover the material. As the class moves into the discussion, many times you will find that they will cover the questions on their own. Remember, the discussion questions are there to guide the group through the topic, not to squelch discussion.
- Remember how important it is for people to verbalize their answers and discoveries. This greatly strengthens their personal understanding of each week’s lesson. Try to ensure that everyone has plenty of opportunity to contribute to each week’s discussions.
- Keep the discussion moving. This may mean spending more time on some parts of the study than on others. If necessary, you should feel free to spread out a lesson over more than one session. However, remember that you don’t want to slow the pace too much. It’s much better to leave everyone wanting more than to have people dropping out because of declining interest.
- If the validity or accuracy of some of the answers seems questionable, you can gently and cheerfully remind the group to stay focused on the truth of the Scriptures. Your object is to learn what the Bible says, not to engage in human philosophy. Simply stick with the Scriptures and give God the opportunity to speak. His Word *is* truth (John 17:17)!

HEAVEN, HELL, AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

We all know death is certain. Yet that certainty prompts many questions, such as, *Where is my loved one now? What is happening to him, to her? What about those who inflicted hell on my life—will they get what they deserve? And what awaits me on the other side of death?*

We want hope. Comfort. Assurance. We want answers.

Theories abound. Different religions offer varied scenarios from reincarnation to a paradise where sensual pleasures are fulfilled by virgins at our disposal. Some say there is a place called hell; others say a loving God would not condemn anyone to hell. Some say when you are dead, you are dead; that's the end. Others say it's just the beginning!

An abundance of books detail the experiences of

those who say they have died or had an out-of-body experience. Most describe a glorious scene that appeals to our imaginations. Others tell of torment. Which leaves us with even more questions:

- Can we trust the experiences of other human beings? What if they were deceived?
- Do we know heaven is for real only because someone went there and came back to tell us about it?
- Those surreal pictures of the afterlife bring either peace or consternation, but what if they are just imagination? *What if death is the end and nothing follows?*

With all these options, we can choose to believe what suits us. But wouldn't it be better to know the truth? To know what we can expect beyond death's door? What is right? What is true? What is certain? Surely if death comes to all, shouldn't we find out what happens after death?

Heaven, Hell, and Life After Death is a study designed to help you see for yourself what the Bible, the Word of God, has to say on the subject. Whatever you believe about the Bible, it will be well worth your time to discover what God Himself has to say on the subject. It might take the sting out of death!

WEEK ONE

Death is a reality. Sooner or later we will die. The Bible puts it this way in Psalm 89:48: “What man can live and not see death?”

Since death will touch us all, shouldn't we want to know the answers to questions like these:

- What is death?
- How does it come?
- Why do we all die?
- If God is love, why doesn't He stop it?

OBSERVE

Let's begin by looking at what the Bible says about the why of death and what comes after.

Leader: *Read aloud Ecclesiastes 3:1–2 and Hebrews 9:27. Have the group say aloud and mark each key word as directed.*

- Circle each occurrence of **appointed** and **time**.
- Mark each occurrence of the word **die** with a tombstone symbol, like this: 

ECCLESIASTES 3:1–2

¹ There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—

² A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

HEBREWS 9:27

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking *time* and *appointed* in these verses?

- According to Hebrews 9:27, what follows death, and what does this tell you about the person who dies? Is death the end of everything?

OBSERVE

In order to understand why man is appointed to die, we need to first have some understanding about life. Where did life come from?

Leader: Read aloud Genesis 2:7–9. Have the group say aloud and...

- mark every reference to **the Lord God**, including pronouns, with a triangle, like this: 
- underline each reference to **man**, including the pronoun **his**.
- draw a squiggly line under the **two specific trees** mentioned, like this: 

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about the Lord God in these verses?
- Although it may seem redundant, discuss what you learned from marking the references to man? When and how did man become a living being?
- What do these verses tell you about the relationship between the Lord God and man? What is one to the other?
- What two specific trees are mentioned in these verses?

GENESIS 2:7–9

⁷ Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

⁸ The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.

⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

INSIGHT

According to Genesis 2:7, man was more than a physical being. God made the outer physical body out of “dust from the ground,” and then He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” Simultaneously, at this breathing, “man became a living being,” or as the King James Version says, “a living soul.”

GENESIS 2:15–17

¹⁵ Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

¹⁶ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;

OBSERVE

Leader: Read aloud Genesis 2:15–17. Have the group...

- underline each reference to ***the man***, including the pronouns ***him*** and ***you***.
- mark the word ***die*** with a tombstone:

**DISCUSS**

- What did you learn from marking references to the man?

- Who's in control in this relationship, and how do you know?
- Is the man a mere puppet on a string, or does God give him a choice of whether or not to believe and obey? Explain your answer.
- What would be the consequence if the man disobeyed God?

¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

- Of the two trees listed in Genesis 2:9, which specific one was Adam told not to eat from? Was he given any instruction regarding the other tree?

INSIGHT

Genesis 2:17 is the first time the word *die* is used in the Bible. In Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament was written, *to die* means “to expire, to breathe out.” It describes that point in time when man becomes absent from his physical body.

Physical death brings a separation of the body and soul. When the body expires and man breathes out the last breath of life, the body then returns to the ground, to dust (Genesis 3:19). Man dies physically, but his soul—the God-breathed part of his being—lives forever.

OBSERVE

According to the account of Genesis 2:18–25, God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone, so He fashioned a woman out of one of his ribs to be a suitable helper for him.

Leader: Read Genesis 3:1–10 aloud. Have the group...

- *mark every reference to the serpent, including pronouns, with a pitchfork, like this: *
- *mark every reference to **God** with a triangle.*
- *underline every reference to **the woman**, **the husband**, including appropriate pronouns such as **you**, **we**, **they**, etc.*
- *put a tombstone over **die**.*

DISCUSS

- Discuss the dialogue that took place between the serpent and the woman. What were the serpent's first words, and how did the woman answer?

GENESIS 3:1–10

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;

3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"

4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!

5 “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

- What was the serpent’s perspective regarding the consequence for disobeying God? How did he reply when the woman told him why she couldn’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

- Was the serpent telling the truth or a lie? Explain your answer.

- What did the woman do then? Circle the verbs that show each action that led up to eating the forbidden fruit. The first verb has been circled for you.

- Who else was involved in the woman's disobedience? How did that come about?
 - What did they do immediately after their disobedience? What had changed to prompt this action on the part of Adam and Eve?
 - Who went looking for whom?
 - What insights can you gain into the results of disobedience from these verses? Discuss these.
- ⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
- ⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"
- ¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

REVELATION 12:9

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

JOHN 8:44

[Jesus is addressing men who claimed to be Abraham's descendants, but who were trying to kill Him.]

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no

OBSERVE

Let's look at two references that give us further insight into the serpent.

Leader: Read Revelation 12:9 and John 8:44.

- *Have the group mark every reference to **the serpent, the devil**, including pronouns and synonyms, with a pitchfork.*

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about the serpent from these verses? Don't miss a thing! This is your enemy, and you need to know all God tells you about him.

- What truths do you see in these verses that relate to what you learned in Genesis? What is the nature of this enemy of man, the serpent, the devil?

OBSERVE

Now let's see what God said to Adam after he joined Eve in eating fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Leader: Read Genesis 3:17–19. Have the group...

- *put a triangle over the pronouns **He** and **I** that refer to **God**.*
- *underline the references to **Adam**, including the pronoun **you**.*

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about Adam?
- Look at verse 17 again. What were Adam's options? Whose were the two voices Adam had to choose between? Think back to what you've observed in Genesis up to this point.

truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

GENESIS 3:17–19

¹⁷ Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

¹⁸ "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field;

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

GENESIS 3:20–24

²⁰ Now the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

- Have you ever found yourself torn between obeying the commandments of God, as revealed in His Word, and listening to the word of another human being? Discuss briefly what made your decision difficult.
- What was Adam’s punishment for his act of disobedience?
- Did Adam’s punishment include physical death? How do you know from the text?

OBSERVE

The verdict for disobedience is that man is now destined to die, to return to dust. But is that all there is to the story? Thank heaven, it is not!

Leader: Read Genesis 3:20–24. Have the group...

- put a triangle over every reference to **the Lord God**, including **Us**.
- underline each reference to **Adam** and **Eve**, including pronouns and synonyms.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about Eve from Genesis 3:20?
- So according to the Bible, the Word of God, who are the parents of all mankind? Or to put it another way, if you could trace the genealogy of all human beings, who would be the first parents?
- After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they attempted to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. What did God do?
- What did God have to do to the animal in order to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness?

²² Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—

²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

²⁴ So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

INSIGHT

If you stop to think about it, the first incident of physical death in the Word of God is that of an animal—the animal whose skin covered Adam and Eve’s nakedness (Genesis 3:21). This is a beautiful picture, foreshadowing the later substitution of a blood sacrifice to cover the sin of mankind. In Leviticus 17:11 and Hebrews 9:22, God would explain that without the shedding of blood there is no atonement—no covering, no forgiveness—for sins. All of this points to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, which alone can pay for our sins in full.

GENESIS 5:5

So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Genesis 5:5 aloud. Have the group...

- underline the word **Adam** and the pronoun **he**.
- put a tombstone over the word **died**.

INSIGHT

From the beginning Adam had permission to eat from any tree of the garden, including the tree of life, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16–17). Adam had choices to make, and God was careful to tell him the consequences of his choices. If Adam had chosen to eat from the tree of life instead of the forbidden tree, he would have lived forever in fellowship with God. However, since Adam willfully chose to disobey, God in His mercy cast Adam and Eve from the garden to keep them from eating the fruit of the tree of life and living forever in a state of sin, separated from their Creator. As you will see, God in His omniscience had a Savior in the wings, the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world, who would come in “the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4). Don’t ever let the liar, the murderer, convince you that God doesn’t love you or that He does not want the very best for you!

OBSERVE

Why didn't the consequence of death end with Adam and Eve?

Leader: Read Romans 5:12 aloud. Have the group...

- mark *sin* and *sinned* with a big **S**.
- put a tombstone over each occurrence of the word *death*.

DISCUSS

- How did sin and death enter into the world?
- Who was the "one man"? What was his wife's name, and what did it mean? If you don't remember, look at Genesis 3:20 again.
- What was the result of sin entering the world? For whom is this true? Does that include you?

ROMANS 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

WRAP IT UP

The decision that Adam and Eve made to disobey not only changed their lives but also reverberated down through history to affect every human being who has ever lived.

God has made it clear from the beginning: disobedience brings death. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, we all will one day experience a physical death. Dust shall return to dust.

As we saw in Ecclesiastes 3:1–2, each of us has an appointment with death, and we will keep the appointment no matter how busy we are, how inconvenient that moment is, how much is left undone. When God decides to repossess His breath of life, no last-minute buyout offer will be considered. We don't have the option to negotiate a longer time frame. God sets the date and time according to His schedule.

We also saw in Hebrews 9:27 that after death comes the judgment (see also 2 Timothy 4:1). What sort of judgment must we face? And is there a way of escape? Did this merciful, gracious, loving God who provided a covering for Adam and Eve's nakedness also provide a way forward for us?

Do we have any hope to live again after death? Next week, we'll see what God says.