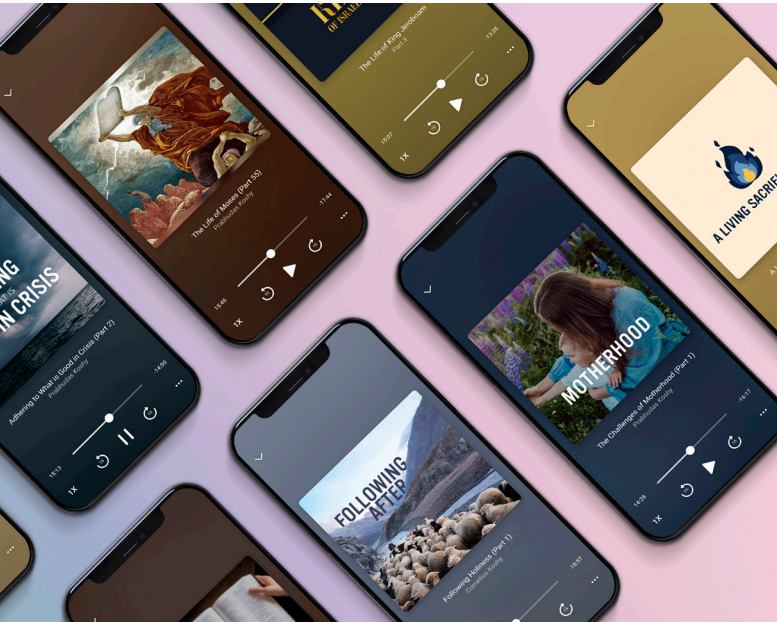


Bible Witness

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THE REALITY OF DEATH





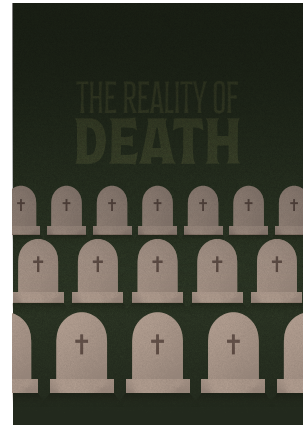
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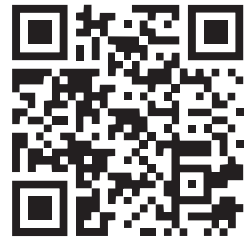
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On the Cover ▲

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die...”

—Hebrews 9:27



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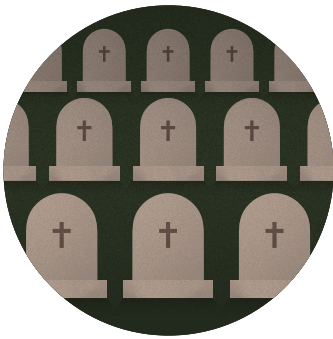
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WHY IS THERE DEATH?

CORNELIUS KOSHY

Would not the idea of a world without death be wonderful? It is quite hard to conceive such an elusive scenario because we live in a world plagued with death. Advancement in medical technology has only prolonged life by a little, but it has not overcome death.

Be that as it may, Scripture reveals that there was a time when death did not exist in the garden of Eden, which God declared as “very good” (Genesis 1:31), and that there will come a time when “there shall be no more death,



neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelation 21:4). Yet, it is undeniable that so far as man’s life on earth is concerned, death is a reality! It is an appointment which no one can miss (cf. Hebrews 9:27)! The apostle Peter talks about the certainty of death most eloquently: “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away” (1 Peter 1:24).

DEATH IS PENAL CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

Scripture tells us that death is, firstly, the consequence of sin. Paul explains, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:22a). When we consider the circumstances of Adam’s sin, we realise that death is not just a logical consequence, but the punishment for sin. That is to say, death is the penal consequence of sin, for God had expressly commanded Adam and Eve that “in the day that thou eatest [of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17)! Man’s disobedience of God’s command—which is sin—brought death upon himself. However, Adam and Eve did not fall dead there and then. They continued to live on physically for a while before eventually dying. Still, death’s appointment finally came to pass—“all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died” (Genesis 5:5). This verse (in the light of Genesis 2:17) tells us that death, as the penal consequence of sin, involves two aspects: spiritual death and physical death.

Spiritual death is the separation or alienation of the soul from God, such that man is controlled by “the prince of the power of the air”, seeking to fulfil his own carnal desires (Ephesians 2:2–3). Thus, Scripture declares such a man to be “**dead** in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). This state of spiritual death renders man incapable of doing any good, and he is unresponsive to God’s offer of redemption in Christ through faith, just as a physically dead man is unresponsive to external impulses.

Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. At the point of physical death, the material part of man returns to the earth from whence it was taken (cf. Genesis 3:19), while his immaterial part, i.e. the soul, is either ushered into God’s presence eternally (cf. Luke 23:43), or tormented in hell forever (cf. Luke 16:22b–23)! Undoubtedly, both spiritual death and physical death constitute the penal consequence of Adam’s sin.

DEATH PASSED UPON ALL MEN

Secondly, death has “passed upon all men”, because Adam, as the divinely appointed head of the human race, stood representative of the entire race. Thus, Paul says, “in Adam all die” (1 Corinthians 15:22a). That’s why mankind continues to suffer death (both spiritual and physical death). Every man “inherits” sin and death from his federal head: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Romans 5:19a). In his being and practice, no man can claim he is free of sin, “for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12b; cf. 3:23)—and the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23)! In accordance

with this, we find that even infants can suffer death, for all who have inherited this human nature from Adam, also inherit sin and death (cf. Romans 8:22).

DEATH IS GOD'S JUDGMENT AGAINST THE WICKED

Thirdly, death is God's expression of His anger against the wicked. The wicked commit and have pleasure in evil things despite knowing the judgment of God. Thus, they are worthy of death (cf. Romans 1:32). Scripture is replete with examples of God immediately taking away the lives of the wicked: from Nadab and Abihu who were devoured by fire when they offered "strange fire" (cf. Leviticus 10:1–2; Numbers 3:4), to Ananias and Sapphira who dropped dead when they were confronted for lying at the start of Peter's ministry in the early church (cf. Acts 5:1–11). Paul also highlighted the divine judgment on some who partook of the bread and the cup without examining their hearts to repent of their sins: they ate and drank God's damnation and died (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27–31).

DEATH SERVES AS A WARNING TO THOSE ALIVE

Finally, physical death serves as a warning to all those who are still alive, that the time of their death is also approaching. Thus, Solomon ranks the attendance at vigil services as better than at celebratory feasts, for we would then pause to consider the brevity of life, as well as the reality of death and of the afterlife—"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart" (Ecclesiastes 7:2). Even sickness


and physical sufferings, which are premonitions of death, serve as God's active means of sanctification. These have the effect of humbling the proud (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7), causing us to be guided by God's Word (cf. Psalm 119:71), and stirring us to be more prayerful and dependent on God (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9; James 4:6), that we may be heavenly-minded. Thus, sickness and death are part of God's will, so that man may be warned of the brevity of life and contemplate on what would happen after death. As such, this has often been an important question to ask in many evangelism efforts: "Where would you go after you die?"

While the idea of a world without death may seem hard to conceive, the reality of death should not terrorise believers. Believers' faith in Jesus—who paid the price and punishment of sin (which is death), died on our behalf, and conquered death with His resurrection—gives them the confidence and courage to face death (cf. John 11:25–26). Indeed, believers ought to be able to say, in the face of death, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ... But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57). ■

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CHRISTIANS' PREPARATION FOR THEIR DEATH

PRABHUDAS KOSHY



Many people find it uncomfortable to engage in discussions on “death” and “dying”, as they are particularly aware of their own mortality. However, it’s a universal experience that everyone will face and should be prepared for. The Bible continually reminds us that death is both inevitable and unpredictable. Ecclesiastes 3:2 reminds us that there is “a time to be born, and a time to die”. Scripture uses various metaphors like “handbreadth”, “flower”, “grass”, “shadow”, “vapour”, etc. to convey the idea of life’s fleeting nature.

Job 14:1–2 proclaims, “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.”

The Book of Psalms echoes the brevity of life, a theme which it repeats. “Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Psalm 39:5). “For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again” (Psalm 78:39). “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10). “As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more” (Psalm 103:15–16).

Thus, James 4:14 cautions, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” Truly, life can give way to death anytime, without notice. Death is an

Death is an
unavoidable
appointment
that God has fixed
for every man.

unavoidable appointment that God has fixed for every man. Hebrews 9:27 confirms this reality—“it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”. Shouldn’t we be prepared for this eventuality?

EXAMPLES OF SAINTS PREPARED FOR THEIR DEATH

Several Biblical saints demonstrated preparedness for their death as they neared the end of their earthly lives. Here are some notable examples, though more can be found in the Scriptures.

The Patriarchs

Hebrews 11:13–16 gives a commentary of how, with steadfast faith and vibrant hope, the patriarchs completed their journey on earth—“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

Abraham

Even while living in the Promised Land, Abraham (one of the patriarchs) longed for his heavenly home. Hebrews 11:9–10 testifies to Abraham’s yearning for the celestial city—“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of

the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Jacob

As Jacob (another of the patriarchs) approached death, he gathered his twelve sons to bless them and prophesy over their futures (Genesis 49). After blessing his sons, he gave instructions to be buried in the cave of Machpelah with his forefathers; thereafter he peacefully “gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people” (Genesis 49:30–33).

Job

Job endured immense suffering, losing his children, wealth, and health. His hope for recovery from his debilitating ailments had dwindled to almost nothing. Yet, he maintained his faith and integrity before God, hoping to meet God soon. He was prepared to die when he said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him” (Job 13:15). He yearned for the day of resurrection when he would reunite with his Creator and Redeemer—“Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:23–27).

Moses

Knowing that God would soon end his life and had chosen Joshua in his stead

to lead Israel into the Promised Land, Moses demonstrated his preparedness by accepting his approaching death. According to Deuteronomy 34:1–6, Moses ascended Mount Nebo at God’s command, where God fulfilled His promise to show him the Promised Land before his life ended. Having been given a panoramic view of the inheritance God had prepared for Israel, “Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day” (Deuteronomy 34:5–6). Undeniably, Moses approached his death with a deep sense of fulfilment in completing his God-given mission, along with profound peace in God’s presence and confident hope in eternity.

David

Concerning David, upon knowing his time of death was near, he called his son Solomon to his side. His words to Solomon reflected his preparedness for death. “Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; and keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself” (1 Kings 2:1–3). By passing on this spiritual and practical wisdom, David showed not only his readiness for death, but also his concern for Israel and her throne to

be faithful to their covenant God. His words portrayed his sense that he had accomplished his God-given mission, and he was prepared to entrust the next generation with God's ongoing work.

Daniel

Daniel is yet another Biblical saint who exhibited readiness to face death, as strikingly portrayed in Daniel 6. Despite the royal edict forbidding prayer to anyone but the king, Daniel steadfastly continued in his daily prayers to God, fully aware that this devotion could seal his fate. He faced the threat of death with unshakeable calmness and resolve, trusting in God's power to deliver him and yet ready to accept whatever outcome God willed. His peaceful demeanour in the face of death reflected his deep assurance in God's eternal plan and care for him—even in the face of death!

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Daniel's three friends and contemporaries, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, demonstrated preparedness for their death by refusing to bow to the idol that King Nebuchadnezzar had raised, though they were threatened with a horrific death in the fiery furnace. They boldly told the king, "our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:17–18). Their fearless response to the king and their calm demeanour as they were bound and cast into the fiery furnace, portrayed how their firm belief in God and His presence with

them prepared them to face death if God would permit it.

Simeon

Simeon, a just and devout man, had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. When he saw the baby Jesus in the temple, "then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:28–32). Simeon's joy in Jesus' birth as the Saviour whom God had promised gave him perfect peace and readiness to depart from this earth. He looked forward to the glory which Christ offers to all His people.

Stephen

Stephen was a deacon in the early church who fearlessly faced death for his bold preaching against the unbelief and opposition of the Jewish leaders (Acts 7:2–60). They raged with fury at Stephen's preaching and stoned him to death. Stephen was filled with the Holy Ghost as he faced their murderous rage (v. 55a). He "looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God" (v. 55b). Stephen found no sympathy below, but he found divine sympathy above. "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v. 59). He was full of divine grace and glory, and willingly committed his spirit to God as he faced death. Even in his dying moments, he prayed for God's forgiveness for his persecutors. "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their

charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (v. 60).

LIVING WITH PREPAREDNESS FOR DEATH

We live each day under the shadow of death. Reminders of our mortality are constant: illness, ageing, natural decay, tragic accidents, global catastrophic events, etc. Every day, we move closer to our end.

Yet, those who have Jesus Christ as their Redeemer and Lord can face this inevitable event calmly and confidently. As David expressed, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). We need not cower as we face the reality of our death. We can meet it with the quiet assurance: “I will fear no evil”. This is because we have the assurance of the presence of the Lord Jesus by our side—“for thou art with me”.

Those who actively follow Jesus Christ, trusting in His goodness, obeying His commands and serving His purposes, intimately know His abiding presence in their lives. They live in communion with Him for help, guidance and strength to overcome temptations and endure trials they face. They heed His voice every moment. They experience His rebuke, correction and instruction, and yield to them constantly. They delight in His gracious promises of His presence, provision and empowerment, and take bold steps of faith in fulfilling His will concerning their lives. They have learned and are assured of His presence all through their life, and

hence, they will not doubt His enabling presence even in death!

Like David, everyone who trusted the Lord and lived under the Lord’s shepherding can be well prepared to go through the “valley of the shadow of death” without fear. The believers’ experience of the divine Shepherd’s presence and works in their daily life (“thy rod and thy staff”) affirms their blessed assurance that even in death, He will lead them through to inherit the eternal kingdom that He has prepared for them. They will then be strengthened to say, as they look forward to the eternal glorious home that the Lord has promised, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalm 23:6).

Live each day with the Lord in faith and obedience, and you’ll find the courage to face even death fearlessly, with Him by your side. “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we **die**, we **die** unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or **die**, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8). ■

CHRISTIANS AND BEREAVEMENT

PRABHUDAS KOSHY

Bereavement is the process of grieving the loss of a loved one. Grief is a natural response to loss. For Christians, it does not indicate a lack of faith or trust in God's workings. Instead, it acknowledges the reality of the pain of separation, loneliness and afflictions.

Numerous figures in Scripture wrestled with the pain of loss, including Job, King David, and Jesus Himself! Losing a loved one is one of the most challenging experiences in life. It can be incredibly complex, stirring deep emotional, spiritual and existential questions.

JESUS SAYS, "WEEP NOT!"

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus encountered individuals mourning the loss of loved ones. Here are some of His responses to bereaving individuals:

To the Bereaved Widow of Her Only Son

While Jesus was entering the city of Nain, He saw a funeral procession of a young man who was the only son of a widow. The broken-hearted, bereaving mother and many others followed those carrying the body to the burial place. She had already lost her husband, and



now her youthful son too! The woman's deep sorrow and distress, evident in her weeping and tears, moved Christ's heart to compassion. "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not" (Luke 7:13).

Jesus understood every detail of her travail and sorrow. Nothing was hidden from His infinite knowledge. Jesus not only witnessed her grief, but fully entered into it, sharing her sorrow. He was one with her at that moment, empathising deeply with her pain. The Lord, understanding her sorrow, offered comfort, saying, "Weep not." Drawing her from the depths of despair, He stood with her, gently offering consolation and assurance. Later, He raised the young man from the dead and returned him to his mother, demonstrating His power to raise all those whom He calls to eternal life, from the grave on the day of resurrection.

To the Bereaved Father of His Only Daughter

In another instance recorded in the Gospel of Luke (8:40–42, 49–56), Jesus went with a father, Jairus, whose only 12-year-old daughter was very ill. On their way, the news arrived that she had died. "And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth" (vv. 51–52).

The house was filled with a lamenting crowd (cf. Matthew 9:23; Mark 5:38). Jesus urged all to "Weep not". Jesus' declaration that the young girl was "not dead but asleep" is the proper perspective that all of

us should have concerning death. By comparing death to sleep, He redefined it as a temporary state. This metaphor, commonly used throughout Scripture (cf. John 11:11–14; Acts 13:36; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:14–15; 5:10; 2 Peter 3:4), suggests that while the body rests in death, the soul continues to exist (cf. Luke 16:19–31; 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; Revelation 6:9–11).

To the Bereaved Sisters of Lazarus

In the house of the just deceased Lazarus, though Jesus knew He would raise Lazarus, He fully entered into the sorrow of the bereaved family, sharing their sadness and pain. "When Jesus therefore saw her (Mary) weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" (John 11:33). The Greek word translated as "groaned" (*embrimáomai*), contains the connotation of anger, resentment or outrage. The word "troubled" further emphasises His emotional indignation. Jesus seemed to feel a deep, righteous anger—not just over the painful realities of sin and death (which had claimed His dear friend Lazarus), but possibly also towards the mourners who were grieving without hope, as if they had no assurance of life beyond death.

John 11:35 tells us that Jesus, too, wept. But a unique Greek verb (*dakruo*) is used for "weep", instead of the Greek word (*klaio*) in verse 33 which denotes loud wailing common among mourners. The word *dakruo* conveys a more restrained sorrow, a quiet breaking into tears. Unlike the loud mourning of others, Jesus' tears were deeply personal, expressing His profound love for Lazarus and His

sorrow over the relentless impact of sin and death in a broken world. The Jews correctly observed: “Behold how he (Jesus) loved him (Lazarus)!” (John 11:36). However, it was not a hopeless expression of sorrow at the death of His friend.

JESUS EMPATHISES WITH THE BEREAVED

Jesus’ grief over the suffering caused by death, a result of humanity’s fall, expresses His compassion towards all His people affected by it. He is indeed “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). The Lord, who is moved by our suffering, shall be with us. We are never alone in our grief; His presence will comfort us.

His response also calls believers to mourn with hope, trusting in His promise of resurrection and eternal life. Far from shying away from the harsh reality of death and loss, Jesus embraced the grief of others, offering comfort, sharing their sorrow, and assuring them that death is not the final chapter. His interactions with the grieving souls revealed not only a profound empathy for human pain and anguish associated with the death of dear ones, but also an unwavering promise of hope in resurrection and eternal life.

JESUS PROMISES HOPE OF RESURRECTION AND ETERNAL LIFE

To comfort and strengthen the bereaving Martha, Jesus said, “Thy brother shall rise again” (John 11:23). She concurred unhesitatingly and testified, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day”

(John 11:24). She believed in the Old Testament revelation concerning the resurrection (cf. Job 19:25–27; Psalm 16:10; Daniel 12:2).

Nonetheless, a general belief in the doctrine of resurrection does not guarantee the hope of eternal life. Even the Pharisees, who rejected Christ, believed in resurrection (cf. Acts 23:6–8). However, by rejecting Christ, they forfeited the promise of resurrection to eternal life.

Jesus wanted Martha to be wholly assured that He alone can guarantee resurrection and eternal life. Without Him, there is no resurrection unto everlasting life. So, He said unto her, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). He wanted her to understand that He is God—the great “I AM”—who holds the authority and power to give life not only on the last day, as Martha believed, but even in that very moment as they spoke. Jesus was about to raise her brother from the grave. He called her to place personal trust in Him, the One who holds absolute authority over life and death.

Jesus further said to Martha, “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:26). These words of Jesus to Martha, the sister of the dead Lazarus, are deeply significant. Martha, though expressing faith in the resurrection, was still grieving deeply. He wanted her to know that there was no need to grieve over the physical death of Lazarus as she did, because everyone who dies as a believer “shall never die”, for their souls live on eternally with the

Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Jesus, who deeply understands and sympathises with us in our grief over the loss of a fellow believer, urges us to hold fast to His promise of resurrection and eternal life. Our loved ones who have died in Christ are not lost forever; they are secure in His promise of life beyond death.

CONCLUSION

Christians are encouraged to temper their grief over the loss of loved ones, recognising that while mourning is natural, they have the hope of eternal life through Christ. This hope reminds believers that death is not the end, and that they will one day be reunited

with those who have died in the Lord. No matter how difficult or painful the circumstances surrounding a loved one’s death, steadfast faith in Christ’s promises will provide comfort and peace, enabling Christians to grieve with hope rather than despair.

Bereavement is a time to draw close to our blessed Saviour, who will dispel our sorrow, fear and anxiety that may arise. With renewed faith in Him, His compassion and His promises, we can live in His comfort, looking forward to the eternal union of all the believers with the Lord. (*Read also John 14:1–3; 2 Corinthians 5:1–8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 7:14–17; 22:1–7*).

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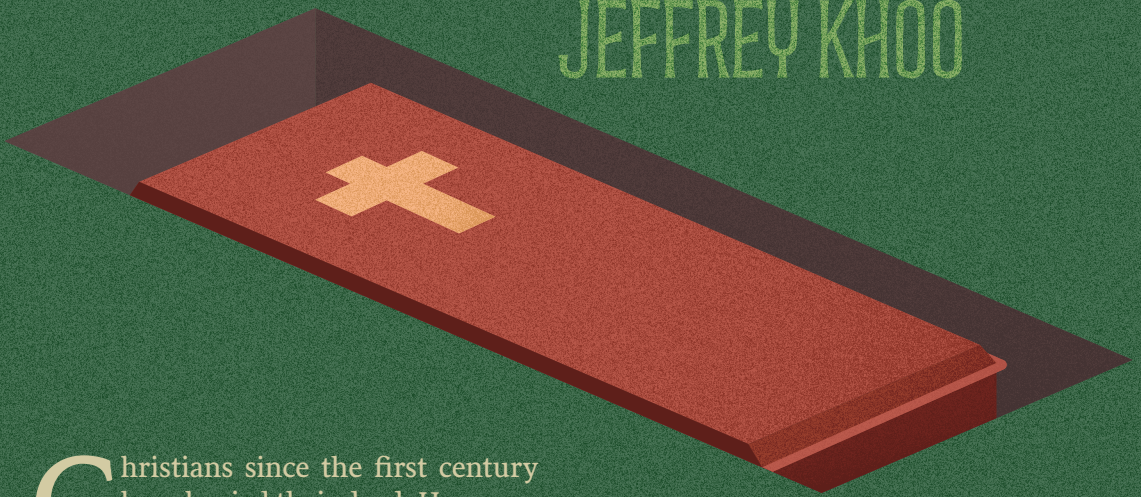
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WHY? BURIAL!

JEFFREY KHOO



Christians since the first century have buried their dead. However, it has become increasingly popular in modern times for Christians to cremate their dead. Cremation, they say, is more convenient and cheaper. The question arises: Should we bury or should we burn believers who have died? We have to go to the Scriptures for our answers, and we find in God’s Word a strong basis for burial, not cremation.

CREMATION

Cremation is the method of disposing of the dead by burning. This method is not new. It has ancient origins, and was practised by the Canaanites in the time of the Old Testament. In the light of the Old Testament, we learn that cremation is not only a heathen practice, but also a sign of divine judgment.

Heathen Practice

Dr John Davis in his book—*What About Cremation?*—said that cremation “was both early in origin and widespread in geographic scope. For the most part, it was associated with pagan ideas about the essence of life or mythical beliefs regarding the afterlife.” Cremation is tied to the heathen practice of offering human sacrifices. God commanded the Israelites not to follow this cruel practice in Deuteronomy 12:31, “Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters **they have burnt in the fire to their gods.**” For the heathen, cremation was the way to send off both the living and the dead to the netherworld!

The Jews regarded the act of cremation as a form of idolatry. Israel, in keeping herself distinct from the heathen nations and in obedience to the command of separation, practised burial instead of cremation. To prove that the divinely sanctioned method is burial and not cremation, the Jews cited Deuteronomy 21:23, “His body shall not remain all night upon a tree, but thou shalt in any wise **bury** him that day” (see also Genesis 23:19; 35:8; Deuteronomy 34:6; 1 Kings 11:15; 22:37; Ezekiel 39:15).

Divine Judgment

Cremation is also a sign of judgment. In the Old Testament, cremation was done to dishonour or punish those who had sinned against God. Achan, for his sin of covetousness, was punished by fire. God said, “And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel. ... And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones” (Joshua 7:15, 25).

Fire is a symbol of God’s judgment. When the wicked priests—Nadab and Abihu—offered strange fire before God which He commanded them not, “there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD” (Leviticus 10:1–2). God destroyed the homosexual cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone and fire (Genesis 19:24). The nation of Moab too faced God’s fiery judgment, “For three transgressions of Moab,

and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime: but I will send a fire upon Moab” (Amos 2:1–2b).

In the New Testament, we also find that fire and burning point to God’s judgment and disapproval. In Acts 19:18–19, the newly converted believers renounced their heathen past by burning all their books on witchcraft and sorcery. The apostle Peter prophesied that God would destroy the whole universe one day by fire—“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). At the judgment of the great white throne, all the fallen angels and all the finally impenitent will be cast into the lake of fire for eternal punishment (Revelation 20:14–15).

In both Testaments, believers have always been buried. The Old Testament patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—were all buried (Genesis 25:8–10; 35:29, 49:31, 50:1–13). The same is true in the New Testament: John the baptizer was buried (Matthew 14:10–12), Lazarus was buried (John 11:17), Stephen was buried (Acts 8:2), and our Lord Himself was buried (John 19:40–42).

Dr Davis has rightly concluded, “The biblical record of burial is clear that inhumation was the only acceptable practice among both Jews and Christians. Although the practice of burning the human being is not absent from the Old Testament, when it appears, it is cast in a negative light.”

BURIAL

Why is burial the biblical way for Christians? There are two doctrinal reasons why we should bury and not cremate. We bury because of (1) the doctrine of the resurrection, and (2) the doctrine of the body.

Doctrine of the Resurrection

As Christians, we believe in the bodily resurrection. Burial is meaningful to the Christian because it points to the future resurrection. This was certainly what the apostle Paul had in mind when he said, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Romans 6:4–5). When we bury the human body, it is like sowing a seed into the ground; at the appointed time, it will sprout out of the ground as a plant. God will one day raise up our body, just as He raised Christ’s (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42–44).

Cremation, on the other hand, with all that fire and burning, would only evoke thoughts of punishment and judgment. Would not the message on the Christian’s blessed hope of a future resurrection be contradicted by rolling a casket into the furnace? The fire gives a picture of hell, not heaven. Clearly, cremation illustrates the eternal destiny of unbelievers, and not of believers. The hideous sight of a body stoking up the furnace will only bring more sorrow and grief to the bereaved, not hope and comfort. The message of the resurrection is lost when we cremate our dead.

Doctrine of the Body

The Bible teaches that a human being consists of two parts: the spirit and the body. These two parts are not only distinguishable but also separable (Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 23:43, 46). Both the spirit and the body are important. The spirit is that part of man which relates to God (John 4:24; Romans 8:16) while the body is that part which allows man to subsist on earth. For Christians, the body is also the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Although at death, the spirit will be separated from the body, both will be re-joined at the time of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:44). Know that the body is not only useful for this life, but also for the afterlife.

When a believer dies, he is said to be “sleeping” (1 Corinthians 15:51). This refers to the body. The body lies in the grave and is “sleeping”. When a person sleeps, he expects to wake up. This awakening will happen when Christ returns. The Jews understood the doctrine of the resurrection and of the body (cf. John 11:24). That was why they treated the body of their departed loved ones with great care. Consider the following Jewish burial procedure:

1. Eyes of deceased closed by eldest son or next-of-kin [if necessary] (Genesis 46:4).
2. Body washed (Acts 9:37).
3. Body anointed with aromatic spices (John 12:7; 19:39; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1).
4. Body wrapped in cloth (Matthew 27:59; John 11:44; 19:40).
5. Body not to be mutilated (Leviticus 19:27–28; Deuteronomy 14:1).
6. Body carried to a tomb on a wooden bier (2 Samuel 3:31).

7. Body finally placed in a simple grave, cave, or rock-cut tomb (Luke 23:53).

The Jews and the church, believing in the resurrection, buried their dead. Dr Davis noted that “the early church practised inhumation and rigorously opposed cremation. Prompt burials followed death and a special memorial service was conducted the third day following the believer’s death. The choice of the third day was a means of reaffirming belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the ultimate resurrection of all believers. ... The overwhelming consensus of early church writers and leaders was that cremation was associated with rites that were incompatible with many basic tenets of their faith.”

Christians should not bow to social or cultural pressures to cremate, but seek to obey the Scriptures and bury their fellow believers who have died in the Lord. Christians should inform their next-of-kin, who might be unbelievers, that their wish is to be buried and not cremated. When the funeral is by burial, the Gospel can be preached most clearly and powerfully—Jesus died, was buried, and (on the third day) rose from the dead—and so will we if we believe in the One who is “the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Scriptures plainly teach that:

1. Christians are to love their own bodies (cf. Ephesians 5:28); even at death, the corpse is not to be lightly disposed of, having been associated

with the soul of a departed loved one. God’s judgment upon Adam was that at death, Adam should return to the ground: “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19b).

2. The patriarchs and their spouses were buried, viz. Abraham (Genesis 25:9), Sarah (Genesis 23:19), Isaac (Genesis 35:29), Rebekah (Genesis 49:31), Jacob (Genesis 50:5–7, 13), Leah (Genesis 49:31), Rachel (Genesis 35:19–20) and Joseph (Joshua 24:32).
3. Our Lord Jesus was laid in a tomb and buried (Matthew 27:60). On the third day, He rose from the dead (Matthew 28:1–6; 1 Corinthians 15:4). We should follow the Lord’s example, according to the Gospel (Colossians 2:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:50–57).
4. Burial of the believer at death is compared to being “sown in corruption” (1 Corinthians 15:42b). This exemplifies faith and hope of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:42–44). ■

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LIFE AFTER DEATH

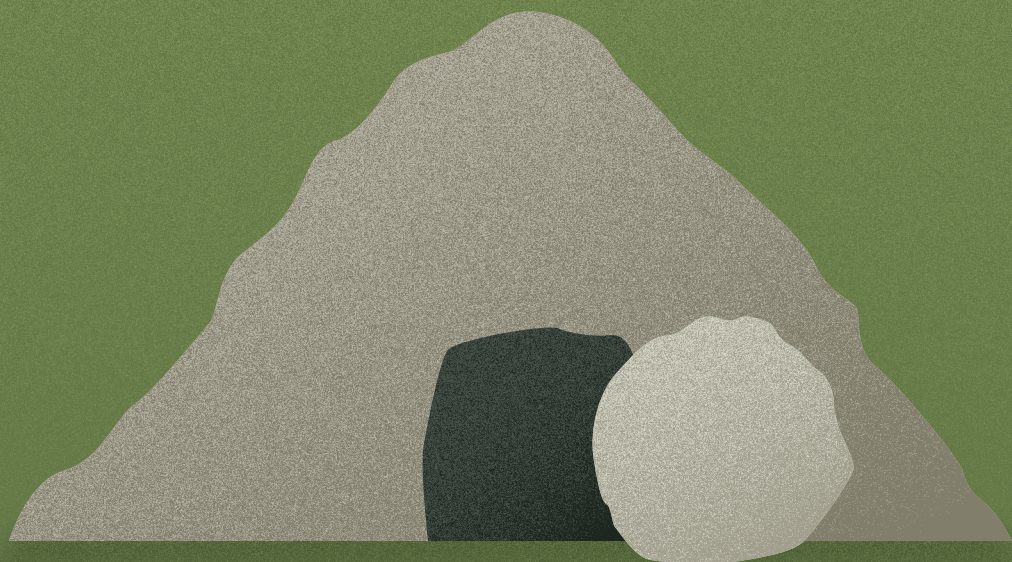
CORNELIUS KOSHY

CERTAINTY OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

Scripture's teaching of an afterlife is unmistakable. Death is not an annihilating end of man. Death is the unavoidable appointment which brings everyone before God (Hebrews 9:27; cf. Amos 4:12). The great assumption of the Old Testament is that life continues beyond the grave. One of the oldest patriarchs, Job, famously declared his certainty of seeing God

after his life of suffering—"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (Job 19:25–27).

Such certainty also lies behind the description of Abraham's death, who



“died in a good old age ... and was gathered to his people” (Genesis 25:8). This expression, “and was gathered to his people”, has been often understood as Abraham’s continued existence with saints who had gone before him, and as evidence of the soul’s immortality. Solomon poetically speaks of death as a “homegoing”—“man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets ... Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:5, 7).

Jesus also authoritatively 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” (John 5:28–29). Those in the graves anticipate a great awakening out of their physical death, and will be resurrected to stand in the divine court where Jesus presides as Judge (cf. Daniel 12:2). Scripture is unequivocal in asserting the fact of an afterlife.

CONFIDENCE OF BELIEVERS’ LIFE AFTER DEATH

So far as believers are concerned, the certainty of life after death leads to a greater anticipation for it. While others cower in fear at the thought of death, believers are bold to face death (1 John 4:17; cf. Psalm 23:4; Philippians 1:20; 1 John 2:28). This is the confidence of many a Christian, like Paul who testified, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8; cf. Romans 6:8–10).

It may be said that no other account has aroused believers’ assurance of life after death more than Jesus’ words to the dying thief: “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

In fact, whenever Scripture teaches about the fact of an afterlife, it also speaks about the faith of a believer in Jesus to face the afterlife, such as in John 5:24—“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (cf. John 11:25; 14:1–3). Just as the psalmist sings of how “[p]recious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15), believers confidently look forward with eyes of faith to eternal life with God after death, knowing that God receives believers into His presence after physical death.

Furthermore, when believers consider the resurrection of the saints, and the rewards and crowns which await them, they are fond of life after death (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:13–14; 2 Timothy 4:8). Paul confidently looks forward to the “crown of righteousness” which awaits him and all believers, and thus believers are described (in 2 Timothy 4:8) as “them also that love his appearing”. Those who love Jesus with a believing faith would long for Him. This is an abiding characteristic of every true believer on earth!

CHARACTERISTICS OF BELIEVERS’ LIFE AFTER DEATH

For believers, life after death is a conscious, continuous and fixed

existence in heaven. The account of the rich man and Lazarus brings out the condition of believers in the afterlife. Jesus contrasts the comfort of Lazarus resting in Abraham's bosom with the rich man's torment in hell. The state of suffering is plainly described by Jesus. The rich man is identified to be in hell "being in torments" (Luke 16:23). So unbearable was the heat of the flames and so excruciating was the tormenting pain, that the rich man pleaded with Abraham that Lazarus might give him a drop of water to cool his tongue (Luke 16:24). In this narrative, the aorist tense suddenly changes to the present tense in verse 23, before returning to the aorist tense. The sudden change in tense brings to the reader's attention the rich man's conscious sense of his torturous experience and his clear sight of the distant yet discernible comforts of Abraham and Lazarus in heaven.

When the rich man desired Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue, Abraham replied that "...between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Luke 16:26). They were separated by an uncrossable distance. Ironically, the rich man and Lazarus were once neighbours (Lazarus at the rich man's gate), but now never crossing paths ever again! Thus, the principal point of the "great gulf fixed" is that once a person goes into one or the other afterlife condition, there is no bridge from hell to heaven or vice versa. Neither is there any repentance beyond the grave. These conditions (rich man in torment and Lazarus in comfort) are fixed and unchangeable conditions. In other words, life after death ushers

in two changeless conditions: either the conscious and continuous state of suffering in hell for unbelievers or the conscious and continuous state of solace and succour for believers.

Jesus' words to the dying thief makes a strong case for the *location* of the believers in the afterlife: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Some have thought that believers go to a holding place after death (called "paradise"), waiting for their admission into heaven. If the dying thief had to go into a special holding place for believers, and then later be ushered into heaven, Jesus would not have said "To day". The immediacy of "today" rules out any intermediary place. Jesus went straight to the presence of God in heaven when He died, and this is confirmed by His final statement: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46; cf. Philippians 3:20).

Therefore, we conclude by affirming that believers, on account of their faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, have certainty and confidence that they would enjoy a conscious and continuous state of communion with the Triune God in heaven forever! ■

Wang Ming Dao

(1900-1991) - Part IV

Retold by Jenny Lok

Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

To help Yong-Shung understand what the Bible says about death, the senior boy went on,

You see, some people have the idea that when death happens, man will cease to exist and there is nothing beyond that.

However, the Bible tells us that there is the Judgment Day after death.


Romans 2:16 says that on that day, 'God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ'. So do not think that nobody knows about your sins.

God will judge every word, thought and deed of every single man.

But there is no one to bear witness against me! So how can God punish me?

Your own conscience will testify against you (cf. Romans 2:15) and you cannot but acknowledge your sins. Furthermore, God says in Psalm 9:17 that 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.'

Are you not among the wicked and bound for hell?

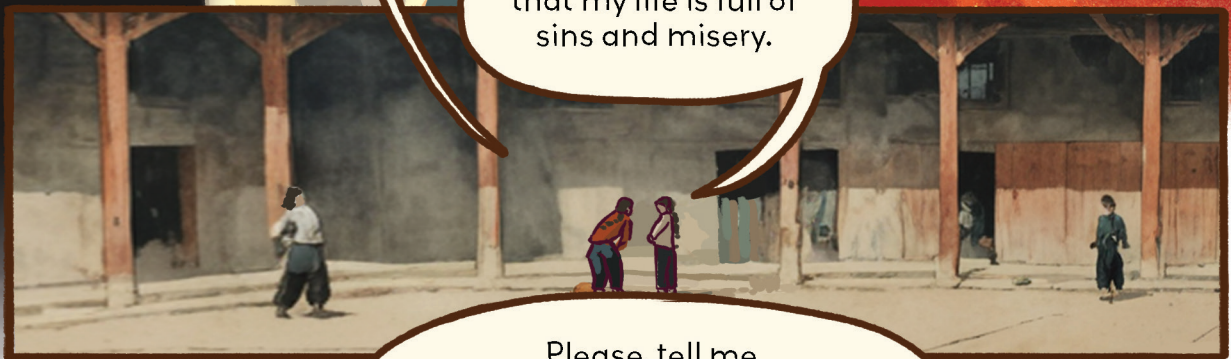


Yong-Shung was feeling more and more troubled in his heart.

Surely hell is waiting for me!

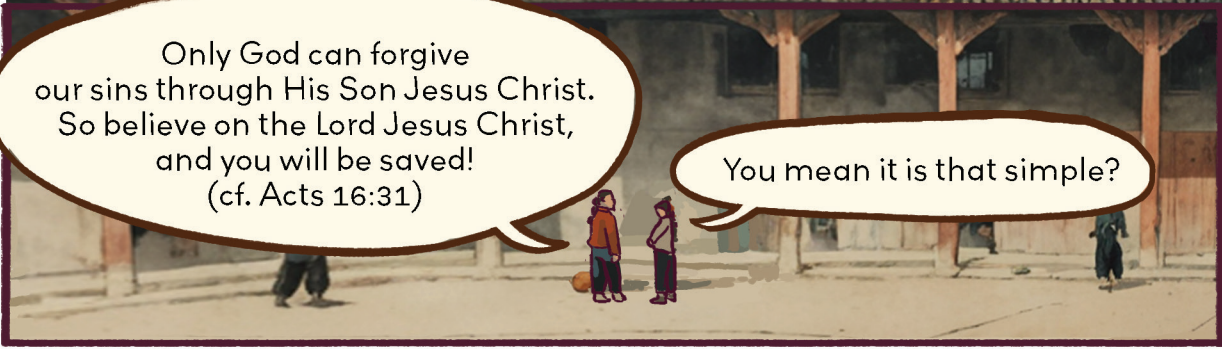
Hell, according to the Bible, is a 'lake of fire' (Revelation 20:15), where those who are in it will suffer eternal torment and agony.

I must confess that my life is full of sins and misery.




Please, tell me how I can escape from God's wrath and eternal punishment?

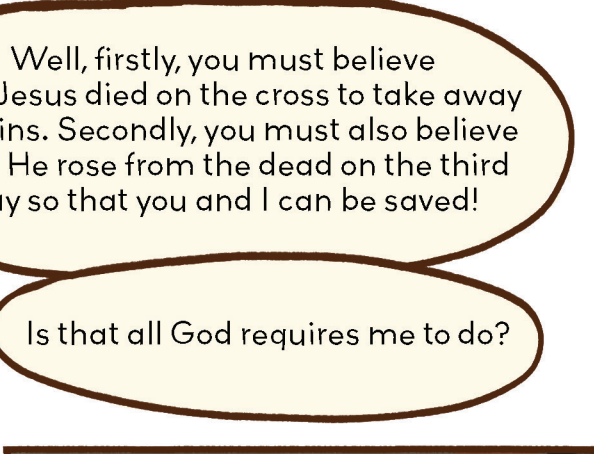





Only God can forgive
our sins through His Son Jesus Christ.
So believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and you will be saved!
(cf. Acts 16:31)




You mean it is that simple?



Well, firstly, you must believe
that Jesus died on the cross to take away
our sins. Secondly, you must also believe
that He rose from the dead on the third
day so that you and I can be saved!




Is that all God requires me to do?




If you truly believe in Christ,
you must also repent from your sins
and live a new life in Christ!

The Bible says in 1 Peter 1:16,
'Be ye holy; for I am holy.'

So put your trust in the
Lord Jesus, and forsake your
sinful habits so that you may live a
holy and God-honouring life!



Yes, I believe in Jesus!
I want a new life in Christ!



I thank God for the working of the Holy Spirit in your heart!

So when can I receive Christ as my Lord and Saviour?

Yong-Shung was eager to know, being deeply moved by the Holy Spirit.

Today! This is indeed the day of salvation! Remember, God has promised everlasting life to those who believe in His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. John 3:16). Death is not the end for Christians because our soul lives forever in Christ!

That very day, at the age of fourteen, Yong-Shung was led to the saving knowledge of Christ. From that day onwards, the senior fellow student taught Yong-Shung how to read the Bible and pray unto the Lord. Yong-Shung was also reminded to frequently check on his spiritual walk with God. To help Yong-Shung grow in his faith, the senior boy gave him a book entitled, "A Help to Personal Development", which was edited by a man named Mr Zia of the Young Men's Christian Association.

Yong-Shung was a changed boy after receiving Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. He desired a life of holiness, and so avoided sin and all forms of unrighteousness. He also began to enjoy reading the Bible and to commune with God daily. Yong-Shung stopped using ungodly language and made great effort to behave well towards others. It was no longer a chore for him to attend chapel meetings, and on Easter day that year, Yong-Shung was happy to be baptised in the chapel!

Yong-Shung's senior friend continued to guide him in his spiritual life and never hesitated to rebuke him severely whenever it was necessary. Soon Yong-Shung finished his Higher Primary School education and started his first year in the Middle School. The older fellow student had progressed to the fourth year of the Middle School by then. In that remaining one year when they were together in the shared premises of the school, Yong-Shung had benefited so much from the godly instruction and counsel of his older fellow student.

The day came when Yong-Shung's senior friend in school graduated.

All of a sudden, Yong-Shung felt so alone and desperately in need of further guidance in his new-found faith.



He began reading the book, "A Help to Personal Development" (edited by Mr Zia), previously given to him by his senior friend. To a young, growing new believer, Yong-Shung was grateful for Mr Zia's words of wisdom and helpful advice. When Mr Zia later died in 1925, Yong-Shung felt sad and missed him, as he would a close relative (even though they had never met in person).

The first year at Middle School went by quietly without any disturbance. The second year, however, was far from being peaceful; it was a year of trial and persecution for Yong-Shung.



That year, a group of new students proved to be a pain in the neck because of their wicked and pleasure-seeking ways. As their parents were wealthy and prominent people in society, these students had plenty of money and were free to spend it as they wished, and often on luxurious items. Besides this, they were uncouth in their behaviour, and foul speech was commonly heard among them.

Yong-Shung could not tolerate it anymore and finally plucked up the courage to speak with his teacher (who was responsible for the general affairs of the school),

Sir, please can you do something to stop those wealthy but ill-behaved students from being such an evil influence on others in the school?

We need income to maintain the school. So we can't afford to be too particular about the behaviour of these students.


But they deserve to be expelled for their rebellious and irresponsible behaviour!

If we do that, we will not have sufficient funds, and the school has to stop operating!

Rather than putting up with such evil practices of these wealthy students, it is better to close the school to prevent them from corrupting the other students who may be easily taken in.

Yong-Shung was at his wits' end.

We can't do that!



But it is against our Christian principles to allow such wickedness to continue in a mission school such as this!

Unfortunately, one of the corrupt students overheard Yong-Shung's conversation with their teacher and informed his gang of bullies. They started calling Yong-Shung names like "Dr Morality" or "Pharisee". At every opportunity, these evil doers would criticise Yong-Shung or attack him over any mistake he might have unknowingly made.

However, Yong-Shung could still rejoice in God because in Luke 6:22, it is written, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake."

Indeed, God had used this trial to strengthen Yong-Shung and kept him on the straight and narrow way.

To be continued...

BIBLE TRIVIA—JOSHUA 5

SARAH YONG

A. Read the verses indicated in each section, and then fill in the blanks to complete the statements.

Section I

After the LORD had dried up the waters of River Jordan and led the children of Israel to pass over to the western side, the surrounding nations came to hear of the Almighty God of Israel.

Joshua 5:1

- 1) The LORD had dried up the waters of the _____ river from before the children of Israel, to allow them to pass through over to the land of Canaan.
- 2) When all the kings of the Canaanites heard about it, their hearts _____.
- 3) Neither was there _____ left in them any more.

Section II

The LORD commanded Joshua to circumcise the children of Israel who had been born in the wilderness before allowing the people to claim the covenant land that God had promised to them.

Joshua 5:5, 9

- 4) Now, all the people that came out (of Egypt) were circumcised, but all the people that were born in the _____ by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised.
- 5) The LORD declared unto Joshua, "This day have I _____ away the reproach of Egypt from off you."
- 6) Thus, the name of the place is called _____ unto this day.

Section III

While the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal till they were whole, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening, in the plains of Jericho.

Joshua 5:11–12

- 7) And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the Passover, _____ cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day.
- 8) After that day, the children of Israel had no more _____ to eat.
- 9) But they did eat of the _____ of the land of Canaan from that year on.

Section IV

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, the captain of the host of the LORD appeared unto him.

Joshua 5:14–15

- 10) Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did _____, and said unto him, "What saith my lord unto his servant?"
- 11) And the captain of the host of the LORD said unto Joshua, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is _____."

B. Answer the following related questions by referring to the verses indicated.

1. Name the sea that God had also previously parted the waters thereof, to allow His people to walk on dry ground. [Joshua 2:10]

2. With whom did God first establish the covenant of circumcision? [Genesis 17:9–10]

3. Which other Bible character encountered a similar situation, whereby he had to loose his shoes from off his feet? [Exodus 3:4–5]

Answers to Bible Trivia—Joshua 2 **(Vol. 24, Iss. 3, p. 27)**

Part A: 1) land; 2) Rahab; 3) children; 4) forth;
5) time; 6) stalks; 7) fainted; 8) dried; 9) house;
10) wall; 11) scarlet

Part B: "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

Answers to Bible Trivia—Joshua 3–4 **(Vol. 24, Iss. 4, p. 35)**

Part A: A, D, E, G, H, I, L, M, N, O, R, T, Y

Part B: All these things were done in the midst of the children of Israel so they would know that the hand of the LORD is mighty.

Image by Gustave Doré



26th Bible Witness Retreat

Theme: Heaven

Speaker: Pastor Prabhudas Koshy

Dates: 19th–21st March 2025 (Wednesday to Friday)

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