



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 15.2 – The Doctrine of the Last Things (Eschatology)

What the Bible Teaches Us about Death

In the Bible the word “death” has several different meanings. Death is referred to already in Paradise before sin entered the world when God warned Adam: **“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”** (Genesis 2:17). Adam passed on this warning to his wife, Eve. The two of them then knew that death was something bad, something that God did not want them to experience, something that did not fit at all with the wonderful life they were enjoying with God and each other and with all creation in the Garden of Eden. For in this home of theirs they were privileged to eat of the tree of life, not death (Genesis 2:9).

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command, their life and their world changed. They did indeed die. They died in a spiritual sense the moment they sinned. Their attitude toward God and toward each other changed immediately, as we can learn from their reaction to their sin and to God’s visit to them, as described in Genesis 3:7-21. Their spiritual death was accompanied by a change in their bodies that eventually led to their temporal death. The very first human temporal death was most likely the death of their son Abel at the hands of his brother Cain. We read in Genesis 4:8: **“Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”** There was no longer any life in Abel’s body; he was dead. The same destiny awaited Adam and Eve and all their descendants. **“All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died”** (Genesis 5:5). Adam and Eve had a son named Seth. **“All the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died”** (Genesis 5:8). The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: **“Death reigned from Adam to Moses”** (Romans 5:14), and it has reigned ever since as well. The letter to the Hebrews describes human beings as **“those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”** (Hebrews 2:15).

This spiritual death and temporal death would have inevitably led to eternal death if God had not intervened at once by cursing Satan (the serpent), who had enticed Adam and Eve into disobedience by his lies. The cursing of Satan was at the same time the first promise of Gospel (Good News) to Adam and Eve. For God said to Satan: **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”** (Genesis 3:15). Since the woman’s Seed (Jesus, the Christ) would crush Satan’s head, He would also take the power of death away from Satan. The letter to the Hebrews explains: **“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He (Jesus) Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”** (Hebrews 2:14-15).

If Jesus had not come and released us, spiritual death and temporal death would have been followed by eternal death for us and all mankind. Now eternal death is the fate of the devil and his angels, together with all of Adam’s descendants who reject the one Savior God has sent, Jesus Christ, who has won eternal life rather than eternal death for all mankind by His death and resurrection.

Even in the early world before the great flood, God prevented temporal death from assaulting one man named Enoch. This was a sign to give hope to all believers that a victory over death was on its way through the woman’s Seed. The letter to the Hebrews explains: **“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death”** (Hebrews 11:5). **“Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him”** (Genesis 5:24).

Questions

1. What warning did God give to Adam in the Garden of Eden?
2. How did Adam and Eve respond to God's command and His warning?
3. What changes came to Adam and Eve after they sinned?
4. What kind of death did they die immediately after they sinned?
5. What is meant by temporal death?
6. Who is the one exception to the statement that death reigned from Adam to Moses?
7. In what way was God's cursing of Satan a wonderful promise to Adam?
8. Who is the woman's Seed, and how did He crush Satan's head?
9. Why do we no longer have to be afraid of temporal or eternal death?
10. Explain the differences between spiritual death, temporal death, and eternal death.