

Study Guide for the Week of January 8, 2006

The Bible and The After Life—What Happens When We Die?

This study guide is designed to help you to become more familiar with the Bible. Study these passages on your own, with a friend, or with a group. If you or someone you know needs a Bible, please take one from under a chair in the Worship Center. They are there for you to take home and use! Sermon manuscripts are available at www.saintpauls-umc.com.

Monday – During this series of sermons on the afterlife we'll use the Study Guides to do our own daily Bible study on the weekly topic of the sermon. This week we'll begin by reading some of the scriptures related to the question, "What happens when we die?"

Scholars believe that the Jewish understanding of the afterlife developed over a long period of time, and that the earliest biblical literature had only vague references to an afterlife. This is why, when we read the gospels, we find that the Sadducees, among the Jewish religious groups, did not believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees held that the only authoritative scriptures were the Laws of Moses and they found no reference to the resurrection in these books. Like the Sadducees of Jesus' day, today some Jews do not believe in an afterlife. Let's begin our study in the Torah, the books of Moses. **Read Genesis 2:7.** Here we find a distinction between the body and the "breath of life" – this breath of life later came to be understood to be the "soul" or "spirit" which is distinct from our physical body. **Read Genesis 5:21-24.** What happened to Enoch? It was something different than ordinary death – he was taken to be with God apart from undergoing death. The same happened of Elijah – **Read 2 Kings 2:1-13.** In Genesis 27:35 Jacob, grieving what he believed was the death of Joseph, notes that he will go down to his son in Sheol. In the first five books of the Old Testament Sheol seems only to signify the grave. Later in the Old Testament Sheol becomes seen as a place where the dead souls live on. 1 Samuel 2:6 may be an early reference to resurrection. **Read Psalm 23:4-6** – what hints do we have of David's view of the afterlife here? Ecclesiastes 12:7 is often quoted at funerals – related to our return to dust, but our "breath" or "spirit" returning to God. Finally, let's look at a couple of the more explicit references to the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament: **Read Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:1-3.**

Tuesday – By the late Old Testament period a clearly defined belief in the resurrection was held by many of the Jewish people. Let's read a few of the things Jesus had to say about the Resurrection. **Read Luke 20:27-39.** We'll address the topic of marriage in heaven in a sermon in a few weeks. **Read John 5:24-29 and John 11:1-44.** Note Jesus' promises to us in this passage.

Wednesday – **Read John 14:1-4.** In a few weeks we'll study what that "place" that he has prepared for us is like. Jesus' resurrection was meant, by God, to offer clear and compelling proof of the resurrection and our hope. Let's turn now to the writings of Paul on the subject. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.** Look over your notes from Sunday's sermon. At our death do we immediately enter the presence of God in heaven, do we go to purgatory, do we sleep until the Second Coming of Christ when the dead in Christ are said to rise? When Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise", what did he mean? How do we reconcile this with Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 about the dead being raised?

Thursday – **Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-58.** Paul here answers questions about the resurrection and our resurrection bodies. What insights do you gain from this passage about the afterlife? What questions does it raise for you? What hope or promise does this passage offer you? **Read v. 58 again.** It teaches the implications of our hope for our daily lives.

Friday - Paul faced hardship and difficulty and the threat of death many times as a result of his faith. Let's see how the hope of the resurrection sustained him: **Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10.** Look over your notes from last Sunday's sermon as you consider the implications of this passage for your life. This Sunday's sermon will be on "The Inferno: A Biblical Study of Hell" – you won't want to miss this.