

DEATH: A CASE STUDY IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Introduction

The death rate around the world today is 100%. Statistically speaking, one out of one person dies. Death is real, it is constantly reaching out and touching us or those around us, and understanding death is critical to understanding life. This lesson will have two main emphases: (1) understanding death as Ecclesiastes describes it and (2) learning the steps of a good Scripture topic study. Biblical theology has been defined as “that branch of theological inquiry concerned with tracing themes through the diverse sections of the Bible ... and then seeking the unifying themes that draw the Bible together” (Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*). Biblical theology is the bridge between correctly interpreting individual passages (exegesis) and understanding Bible doctrines (systematic theology). As we study today’s theme, we will look behind the curtain and see the process that brings us to the final conclusions.

Step One: Choose your _____ and your specific _____.

Our theme today is _____. Ideally, you should pick a topic that’s broad enough to give you sufficient material to study, but narrow enough that you don’t get bogged down in an avalanche of information. With practice, you can do this with any theme that interests you or addresses a ministry need. Once you have a topic, you’ll need to limit the range. For instance, you can study sin, but you’ll get a clearer picture if you study the Old and New Testament terms separately. If you take the New Testament and narrow it down to Paul’s epistles, you’ll get an even more focused picture. With broader topics, you can occasionally narrow your range to a single book.

- Ways to limit your range
 - by _____
 - by type of literature (poetry, prophecy, gospels, etc)
 - by historical time period
 - by _____
 - by book

Our study of death is limited to references in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Step Two: Find all the _____ to your theme within your range.

This step goes beyond simply using a concordance. The best way to find all your references is to carefully _____ all the books in the range - several times. Let’s go through Ecclesiastes now to find every place that Solomon writes about death.

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Step Three: _____ *the references by what they teach about the topic.*

Once you've listed all the references to your theme, study the verses individually to see what each reference teaches about your theme. We'll go through the verse list and ask, "What does this verse/passage tell me about death?" Write down a single phrase or sentence for each verse that summarizes its truth about your topic: be as _____ with your words as you can.

By the time you finish studying the meanings of each verse in your list, you will be seeing some repetition, overlap or _____ between passages. This is your starting point for organizing the facts. You may want to write each reference and its teaching summary on a single index card and then move the cards around as you test different patterns of organization. You are looking for _____ to _____ general categories by which to sort the verses. This is one of the hardest parts of topic study: be prepared to test several different ways to sort the verses before finding one that deals with all the references consistently.

After you've grouped the individual verses into broad categories, look at each category one-by-one and organize the verses into more specific sub-categories. Once you've organized your categories and sub-categories, it will be easy to write what you've learned in an _____ format.

- Everyone must die.
 - No matter who you are, you will die.
2.14-16; 3.19-22; 8.8, 10; 9.2-3
 - You can't escape death.
3.2; 6.3-4; 8.8; 9.10-12
- Nothing goes with you after death.
2.18-21; 5.15-16; 6.3-6
- Death has advantages.
 - Death is better than oppression.
4.1-3
 - Death is better than being enslaved to sin.
7.26
 - Death gives us a better appreciation for life.
7.1-2, 4
- Death has disadvantages.
 - Death is not something to rush.
7.17
 - All opportunities to seize and enjoy life are over.
9.4-6
 - Dying is a painful process.
12.1-7

Step Four: Find the _____ between the main categories.

The question to ask is "How do the parts relate to each other?"

- Are there definitions or descriptions?
- Do you see a series of _____ or comparisons?
- Do the categories explain causes and effects?
- Is there a chronological (_____) relationship?
- Does the information reveal motives or methods?

There are two relationships we see among Ecclesiastes' information about death. First, there are two parallel _____: death is inevitable and death is final. The last two points show a contrast in human _____: death has advantages and disadvantages. So what we have when we boil all these verses down is a description of death and how it affects us.

Step Five: _____ *out what you've learned in order to crystallize your understanding.*

Take the time to write a _____ (or several) summarizing what you've learned during your study. Devote a paragraph to each main point with a sentence describing each subpoint. Finish this "paper" with a concluding paragraph that puts all the main points into one or two sentences. Remember to choose your words carefully - use precise words that _____ express what you've uncovered in your study.

As we've looked at each of Solomon's comments about death, we've discovered that it is inevitable. Wise men and fools, men and beasts, strong men and weak, reverent men and profane - all go to one end: _____. No matter how swift, strong, wise, perceptive or skillful you may be, the time of your death will certainly come. All the wealth in the world won't follow you to the grave - it'll all be left behind to someone else. Yet for all its somber finality, death has some advantages. In the grave, oppression is gone and sin cannot _____ any more. Sober consideration of death motivates you to live rightly. Death is not, however, an easy escape or a cheerful milestone to rush toward. Death means the end of all the opportunities to enjoy the life on earth that God has given you. And don't forget, death is usually preceded by the debilitating process of _____.

Step Six: _____ *what you've learned to how you live.*

One of my professors in college often said, "Belief always affects behavior; behavior always reflects belief." His point is this: what's in your head shows up in your action. There's no reason, though, to fill your mind with good facts and then _____ wait for that to trickle down to your attitudes and words and choices of daily life. When you study God's Word, make a deliberate effort to apply it personally. Look for application for your own _____ first, then for your children and others under your spiritual responsibility, then for others around you to whom God lets you encourage as peers. Never push back your chair and call your Bible study a success without asking yourself, "What does this mean for me today?"

But how do you appropriately apply facts gleaned in Bible study? Find legitimate _____ between your situation and the original context - the more exact parallels you find, the more appropriate that passage is to meet your need. By the same token, finding differences between the Scriptural situation and your own should alert you that application won't be as practical and well-fitting as another passage would be. Start by looking for applications in the _____ itself. Does the author of Scripture tell you what to do with the facts he gives you?

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon starts us off in the right applicational direction. Ecclesiastes 9.2-6 is the most thorough passage that deals with the certainty of death's _____ blow, and 9.7-10 tells us how to respond. We should enjoy life: the food and drink that God provides, the clothes that He gives, and the relationships that He puts you into. Further, we should be _____ and resourceful in the work that He gives us to

do. The longest description of the downward progress toward death (12.1-8) is part of Solomon's motivation for the command of 11.9-10. We are to rejoice in _____ under the accountability of God's watchful eye. Should you take Solomon's instruction as application for your life? See how parallel your situation is with the one described in Ecclesiastes. Will you die? Will death end all your earthly opportunities to enjoy your portion from God? Are you aware of the slow painful approach that death often makes toward those it takes? If so, then _____ life while you can (it is God's gift to you) and do only what _____ God (He will judge all actions).

Conclusion

"Theology" is not a lofty pursuit best left to ivory tower academicians and seminary professors - it is something that you do every day. What do you know about God? That's part of your theology! We all have theology whether we like it or not; let's make sure we do it _____. In conjunction with the theme, we've looked at the method for studying a topic in a particular book of Scripture.

1. Choose your theme and your specific range.
2. Find all the references to your theme within your range.
3. Organize the references by what they teach about the topic.
4. Find the connections between the main categories.
5. Write out what you've learned in order to crystallize your understanding.
6. Apply what you've learned to how you live.

This takes a little more time and effort than simply reading a chapter or two and jotting down some devotional notes, but it is more than worth that cost! The most _____ lessons gained from God's Word are the hidden gems that we dig out with our own hands. Death is certain and final, so make the most of life's opportunities: including your opportunity to diligently _____ the precious Scriptures that you hold in your hands.