

GCSE Religious Studies Christianity Knowledge Organiser

Christian beliefs – The afterlife

Key concepts

Bible	reason
baptism	free will
vows	judgement
Eucharist	marriage symbols
revelation	pilgrimage
confirmation	heaven/hell

Past exam questions

- Describe Christian beliefs about the afterlife. [5] 2019
- Explain Christian beliefs about Judgement Day. [8] SAMs

Links

Unit 1 Christianity – God; Jesus as God Incarnate; Morality.

Unit 1 Issues of Life and Death – Beliefs about Death and the Afterlife.

Belief in life after death

Christians believe that the soul survives in a spiritual life after death. This is called the afterlife. They believe that this life is a preparation for the afterlife. They believe that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and that “those who believe in me will live, even though they die” (John 11:25). The resurrection of Jesus is recounted in all four Gospels: on Sunday morning women went to the tomb and found that the stone covering the entrance had been removed. They believed angels told them that Jesus had risen from the dead and gone to another part of the country [Galilee]; when told, the disciples could not believe what they had heard so visited the tomb. During the next few weeks the disciples and the women met Jesus before he was taken to heaven [the ascension]. Christians believe that Jesus’ death and resurrection was part of God’s plan – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Judgement

Christians believe people will be judged by God on the Day of Judgement on how they have lived. As a result, they will either be rewarded with going to heaven (to be with God) or punished by being sent to hell (being apart from God). The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25) shows that God separates people for heaven or hell like a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. The people selected for heaven (sheep in the parable) have helped others, while those sent to hell (the goats) have not done anything to help others.

Responsibility for actions and free will

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats shows Christians that they must take responsibility for their own actions as they will be judged by God, who knows everything (omniscient). Some Christians believe that they need faith and good works to go to heaven, saying that people who believe in Jesus will follow his teachings and will be encouraged to do good. Christians also believe in free will, so it is up to individuals to decide whether they want to accept or reject God, and to do good works or not.

Resurrection

Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of Christianity. For Christians, Jesus’ resurrection (as a man) convinces them that all humans can beat death. Christians believe that they will also be resurrected after death, “since death came through a man [Adam], the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man [Jesus]” (I Corinthians 15:21). Some Christians believe in a spiritual resurrection when the soul lives with God in heaven. Some might also believe in a physical resurrection that will happen at the end of time. Physical resurrection is when people will be brought back to life with physical bodies (like Jesus’ resurrection).

Heaven and hell

Heaven is believed to be the reward for believing in God and Jesus and doing good works. For some, heaven is an actual place of love and harmony, while other Christians would describe it as being where God is. In the Bible there are very few descriptions of heaven, but Jesus says, “There are many rooms in my Father’s house” (John 14:2) and that he will take his followers there “so that you will be where I am” (John 14: 3). Hell is believed to be the punishment for not doing what God wants. Some Christians believe it is a place of everlasting torment; others would describe it as being separated from God. There are no clear descriptions of hell, but Jesus did tell the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) where the rich man complains that hell is a place of great pain and fire, and where the gap between heaven and hell is so great that no-one can cross between the two. Catholic Christians also believe in purgatory, a temporary place where the dead go through a cleansing process before they can enter heaven.