

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 1 0 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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WHAT IS DEATH?

The present interest among men in the subject of death is somewhat surprising, since discussion of this subject has been on the taboo list for many centuries, especially among professing Christian people. Reports continue to be heard of college and university students who have requested lectures and discussions of this matter, much to the chagrin of some of their professors, who have had to speak out of their vast ignorance concerning it. The widely circulated magazine *The Reader's Digest* devoted a large section of a recent issue to this theme, and an advertisement on the front loudly proclaimed that the article would present scientific proof of life after death. The entire presentation was made up of reports from people who, due to many causes, had come very near to death and others who had even been pronounced clinically dead but had revived. They told what they imagined they had seen and heard; but a logical person reading these reports which were supposed to be "scientific proof" would be inclined to say to the writer, "You have to be kidding."

I was myself surprised upon going into a large evangelical bookstore and finding one bookcase separated from the rest with a sign over it proclaiming, "Books About Death." These were written by psychiatrists, sociologists, medical doctors, liberal thinkers, and a few by evangelical writers. I welcomed the opportunity to look them over, reading a page here and there; but I bought none of them. I cannot afford to waste money on books written by men who have no facts to support their theories, or evangelicals who are so spoiled by the Platonic philosophy that they think it is taught in the Word of God. I left the store convinced that if there ever was a time when professed Bible-believing expositors should be writing on what has been the one taboo subject for centuries, it is now. However, they are not able to measure up to this challenge when all their efforts are given to trying to

make the Bible say the same as Greek philosophy set forth by Plato.

Plato's view of death, as epitomized from the *Phaedo*, was that our bodies are only an outer garment, ill-fitting as a covering for the soul, which prevents our souls from living and moving freely in harmony with their proper eternal essence as long as we live. The body, he held, imposes upon the soul a restraint which is inappropriate to it since it belongs to the eternal world. As long as man lives, he finds himself in a prison, that is, in a body which is alien to the soul. He considered death to be the great liberator, breaking the chains and leading the soul out of its prison of the body and back to its eternal home.

This is the Platonic theory of death which, through the early church fathers, became incorporated into Christianity. It is a philosophy which must be disregarded and laid aside if we would ever enter into a true understanding and appreciation of the Biblical message of death and the resurrection of the dead.

Simply stated, the Platonic view of death is that death is the separation of the soul from the body. The soul, according to the purveyors of this view, is the real and true man; and death is the great emancipator that brings about the separation of these two antagonistic components. This is now the commonly accepted orthodox view in Christian circles, but it is contrary in all parts and principle to the Biblical record.

Beyond all arguments, it is an undeniable fact that the first mention of death in the Bible shows it to be a punishment which God decreed would fall upon Adam if he disobeyed the explicit directive to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil: "**For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die**" (Gen. 2:17).

Every diligent student of the Word of God will know that in the passage quoted above, we have two forms of the same Hebrew word, and that this actually says "**dying thou shalt die,**" which is one of the most important statements concerning death in the Bible. This declaration tells us emphatically that on the very day that Adam committed the forbidden act of eating of this one specific tree, the processes of death would begin to operate in him and they would continue to work until that moment when death

would gain its victory and Adam would die even as the Word declares.

We do not know how many years passed between the creation of Adam and his transgression; but every day after that, death was working in him. However, he being the finest physical specimen that ever stood upon the earth, he was able to withstand the effects of death working in him until he reached the age of 930 years. Methuselah, who was seven generations removed from his forefather Adam, lived thirty-nine years longer; but from his time forth, each generation died at an earlier age. And had it not been for divine grace, the human race would have perished from the earth, since none would have lived long enough to reproduce. But God in grace injected Himself into the downward *How* of mankind and decreed that the average life span would be threescore and ten years.

The fact that we are dying even while we are living is a truth that many reject. Even most professing Christians are willing to accept only comfortable ideas and pleasant doctrines. They are lovers of that which is pleasant more than they are lovers of God's Truth. Yet, the facts in the case are inexorable; and that we are dying all the time we are now living is the truth declared in God's Word. Death works in everyone of us; and nothing is to be gained by denying this Biblical fact, one which is obvious to all of us.

The positive Biblical testimony is that "**by one man sin entered into the world**" (Rom. 5:12). We know beyond a shadow of doubt who this man was. It was Adam, the head of the human race. And we know that it was through him, his one act of disobedience, that sin entered into the world. Therefore, we accept the fact and we face the fact that a malignant principle called "sin" is in the system, the order, the arrangement into which man is born and in which he must live. David declares this in his sorely misunderstood statement: "**Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me**" (Psa. 51:5). He states that the situation into which he was born, a world where the principle of sin existed, and the circumstances that arose from this fact, the iniquity that was all about him, had pressed his life into a certain shape, which he declares to God.

It is from the sin that is in the world that all sin arises. Iniquity arises from the fact of sin in the world like a miasma, polluting in some manner all that it touches. All who believe should regularly give thanks and praise unto God because Jesus Christ is "**the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29). Note that this is singular "sin," and that this passage

does not deal with your sins and my sins, but with "the sin" of the world, the very sin that entered in by Adam's transgression.

However, in connection with our present study, the most important statement in Romans 5:12 is that the principle of death came in riding piggyback on the principle of sin and death passed upon all men. It was not sin that was passed on to men, but death. Men are not born sinners or sinful, but they are born dying. This can properly be called Adamic death, which works in every one of us and sooner or later all die, since death is universal. It works in all men and never stops until it has accomplished its purpose - as it did in Adam, so also in all of his descendants.

It would be good if every seeker of truth would ask and seek an honest answer to this question: "What did Adam understand by 'death' when God threatened it as a punishment if he sinned?" Could he have possibly thought that the word "die" meant that God would take him out of his body and send him either to heaven or to hell? Of course not !

Logic forces us to believe that Adam understood the exact nature of the penalty that would fall upon him if and when he transgressed. It is a fixed principle of justice that a man must be able to understand the nature of any penalty exacted for the commission of any crime. And, as Eliphaz asked, **"Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker"** (Job 4:17). However, if Adam did not fully understand it at first, it was made unmistakably plain by the words that God spoke after he had sinned: **"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return"** (Gen. 3: 19 RSV).

In view of the directness and simplicity of this declaration, I do not hesitate to say that anyone, who does not believe that Adam is in the dust awaiting resurrection, is one who does not believe the Word of God.

It is from this passage that we learn the true meaning and nature of death. The dictionary defines it as being the cessation of all vital functions; and this being true, we accept it. The Platonist defines it as being the separation of the soul from the body and holds that death affects only the bodily aspect of man. Thus, "separation" is the prominent word in all his declarations concerning death. But the Biblicist declares that death is a return. Man is soil and he returns to it. He was given the breath of life, which becomes his

spirit; and at death that breath which is his life or spirit returns unto God Who gave it.

At Adam's death the work of creation went into reverse. He was made from the soil and then given the breath of life which caused him to become a living soul. This was man's creation; and if the process is reversed, you will have man's death. This is the plain testimony of Ecclesiastes 12:7 where, after four things are mentioned which symbolize death, Solomon says: **"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God Who gave it."**

At death, no part of man or the man as a whole enters into any new, strange, or unknown condition. The man came from the soil, and he returns to it. The spirit (breath of life) came from God, and at death it will return to the One Who gave it. And there is nothing that can bring man back from this condition except the experience of resurrection, worked by the One Who is Himself the Resurrection and the Life.

If there were no resurrection of the dead, then death would be the end of man. It would mean the loss of all that he ever was: **"For if the dead rise not, . . . then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."** (1 Cor. 15:16, 18).

If it were not for resurrection, death would be man's destruction. God would lose nothing, but man would lose everything. Nothing but resurrection can take man out of the state into which death working in him finally brings him. Our hope is in resurrection, not in death.

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