

It Is Written

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Let Me Die The Death Of The Righteous

By Wayne Jackson

Balaam is one of the great tragedies of the Old Testament. He was a Gentile prophet of God (cf. 2 Peter 2:15, 16) who lived at Pethor in Mesopotamia (Deuteronomy 23:4). Because he was afflicted with the common malady of covetousness, he sold out to Balak, a pagan Moabite king, who urged him to “curse” the Israelites as they made their way toward the land of Canaan.

When Jehovah overruled the effort, causing Balaam to “bless” instead of “curse,” the hireling prophet suggested another plan. If the Israelites could be corrupted internally, God himself would destroy them! And so, the children of Israel were seduced to commit fornication by the women of Moab. As a consequence, some twenty-four thousand of them were slain (Numbers 25). Balaam himself was finally killed in battle with Israel (Numbers 31:8).

In one of his prophecies, Balaam uttered a statement that contains much food for thought. He exclaimed, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” (Numbers 23:10).

When the matter is duly considered, the Bible reveals that there are some similarities and also some significant differences in the deaths of the righteous and the wicked.

Similarities

In a number of ways, death is identical for both the good and the bad.

First, death is the inevitable fate for all (except that final generation which witnesses the return of Christ [cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51]). Scripture declares that as a consequence of Adam’s transgression, death comes to all (Romans 5:12). Indeed, “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Second, the uncertainty as to the time of death is common to all classes of humanity. Death can take us at any stage of life—infancy, adolescence, in the prime of life, or in the advanced years. Death may come with a leap or with a crawl. It comes, though, and comes to all!

Third, for both the prepared and the unprepared, death is the same physical phenomenon. Physical death is that inanimated state of the body that results when the spirit (that part of man that is in the image of God [Genesis 1:26]) has departed from its earthly tabernacle. James gives a clear definition of death when he says, “[T]he body apart from the spirit is dead” (2:26).

Paul speaks of death as a departure when he writes of having the “desire to depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23). Again, the apostle recognizes the possibility of human existence “apart from the body” (2 Corinthians 12:2, 3), which would necessitate the body’s death. And so, physically speaking, the righteous and the wicked die in precisely the same fashion.

Fourth, the Bible teaches that both the godly and the ungodly are conscious after death. In fact, the Scriptures do not suggest that death causes any change in the composition or nature of the human spirit. In the narrative concerning Lazarus and the rich man, both, after death, were quite aware of their condition and environment. The one was comforted and the other was in anguish (cf. Luke 16:25).

Differences

There are, though, some very great differences between the death-state of the Lord’s people and those who are not.

First, God's attitude toward the two groups is in great contrast. Note the testimony of the Psalmist: "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15). On the other hand: "As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). The one is a recipient of the Lord's goodness; the other, his severity (cf. Romans 2:4-11).

Second, for the righteous, death brings fellowship with Christ. Jesus informed the penitent thief, "Today you shall be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Again, Paul knew that his departure would enable him to be "with Christ" (Philippians 1:23), which was "very far better" than this earthly domain.

The apostle affirmed that to be "absent from the body" is to be "at home with [the Greek term *pros* literally means 'face to face with'] the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). The wicked have no such hope. And why should they? They have rejected his fellowship in life; they will not enjoy it in death!

Third, for the faithful, death is a thrilling, blissful experience. "Blessed [literally, 'happy'] are the dead who die in the Lord . . . they do rest from their labors" (Revelation 14:13). But the wicked know nothing except "trouble and sorrow" (Psalm 116:3), "affliction" (Jonah 2:2), "anguish" (Luke 16:25), and "punishment" (2 Peter 2:9, ASV).

Each of us—as rational, responsible human beings—has the option now of determining whether our death will be like the righteous or the wicked. There is one thing for certain: after death has taken us, there will be no changes in our destiny (cf. Matthew 25:1-13).

WE WERE ALL BAPTIZED

By Doy Moyer

One of the most significant arguments for baptism that I believe is under-utilized is the fact that the epistles, written to those who are already Christians, assume that the believers were all baptized. Look at passages like Romans 6:3-6; I Corinthians 1:13; 12:13; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:10-13; etc. These are not written to unbelievers to try to persuade them to be baptized. These were written to those who already were baptized, reminding them of what they did and what it meant when they were baptized. If baptism were not expected, necessary, or the norm for all Christians then, why is there a pervasive indication that all the believers in these churches were baptized? There is no distinction being made in the epistles between baptized saints and unbaptized saints. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..." (I Corinthians 12:13). In other words, the epistles were not written to the unbaptized.

But let's not lose sight of this: again, these were written to remind believers of the significance of their baptism and how that should affect their living for the Lord.

How is your baptism affecting your walk with the Lord?