

Did Christ Die the Second Death?

The death of Christ is central to the Gospel. Without it, there is no Sacrifice upon whom we can transfer our sins, no price paid for our redemption, no justification, no cleansing from sin by the shed blood of the Lamb, no resurrection of life for our salvation. Could a misunderstanding about the death of Christ, then, change the gospel into another gospel? Yes, it could. The death of Christ is so crucial, so integral, to the Gospel, that a wrong view of Christ's death will result in a different gospel.

More Than 2 Options

The question is, Did Christ die the second death? And the answer is, No, Christ did not die the second death. But this does *not* mean that He died the first death. We have to get our heads out of this false dichotomy, because these two options (the first or second death) aren't the only options. There is another option, and that is "the death of the cross."

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even *the death of the cross.*" Philippians 2:8.



(1) First Death or
(2) Second Death?



(1) First death or
(2) Second Death or
(3) the Death of the Cross?

What the Second Death Is

There are only four texts in the Bible that mention the second death:—

1. Revelation 2:11

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

2. Revelation 20:6

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

3. Revelation 20:14

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

4. Revelation 21:8

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Although there are only four verses specifically talking about the second death, these four verses give us a lot of information. They tell us (1) *what* the second death is, (2) *when* the second death takes place, (3) *how* the second death will be executed, (4) *who* will experience it, and (5) *who* will *not* experience it.

(1) *What*: The second death is the death of the wicked in the lake of fire. Revelation 20:14, 21:8.

(2) *When*: The second death takes place when death and the grave are finally and forever destroyed in the

lake of fire. Revelation 20:14. This means that it occurs at the very end of all things:— “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” 1Corinthians 15:26.

(3) *How*: The second death is death by burning in the lake of fire. Revelation 20:14, 21:8.

(4) *Who*: The “fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars” will experience the second death. Also death itself, and hell (the grave) will be forever destroyed in the second death. Revelation 20:14, 21:8.

(5) *Who not*: Those that overcome sin, who are righteous by Christ’s righteousness, and holy by His holiness, will not experience the second death. Revelation 2:11, 20:6.

The second death is a concrete, specific event at a specific time involving specific people. It is reserved for the wicked (Revelation 2:11; 21:6; 21:8), and there will be no resurrection from it, for all have been resurrected once to receive their reward, and the Bible mentions no other resurrection. The second death is death in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14; 21:8), which will take place after the thousand years (Revelation 20:7-10).

Ellen White penned the following:—

“And beyond this life stands the tribunal of the judgment, with its award of eternal penalties. ‘They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God,’ but with Satan and evil angels shall have their part in that *‘lake of fire’* which *‘is the second death.’* Galatians 5:21; Revelation 20:14.”
PP 461.1

Dying in that lake of fire IS the second death.

Christ’s Death of the Cross and His Resurrection

The death of the cross is the death that Christ alone died. There is no one, no, not even one, who will die the death that Christ died on the cross. The first death, all mankind will experience, except, of course, those who will remain alive until His appearing. And the second death, all the multitudes who have not been cleansed from sin in the blood of the Lamb will experience. But the death of the cross is Christ’s alone. Christ died for the sins of the whole world on the cross, and there is absolutely no one else who will die that death.

Though He alone died the death of the cross, yet, as His followers, we follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, through the consecrated way, and are baptized into *this* death, the death of the cross, which the Bible calls *His* death, and we are raised to a new life by the power of the resurrection:—

³“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into *his* death?
⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:3, 4.

Christ’s death is consistently, repeatedly, and without exception, tied to the resurrection. So it is for us who follow Christ. In baptism, we have been buried in the likeness of *Christ’s* death, and raised in the likeness of *His* resurrection. Continuing in Romans Chapter 6, we see that Christ’s death is clearly connected to *His* resurrection, and both are made essential to the Christian experience:—

⁵“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of *his* death, we shall be also in the likeness of *his* resurrection...” Romans 6:5.

Of Christ’s followers, God’s word says, “take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21); “he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38); “if any man will come after me, let

him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24); “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). We follow our Saviour wherever He goes, and this means we follow Him into the death of the cross, the Bible calls it *His* death, and then, by the power and grace of God, we follow Him into life, in what the Bible calls *His* resurrection (Romans 6:5).

But there is no resurrection from the second death. So if Christ did **died** the second death on the cross, then we must find biblical evidence that there is a resurrection from the second death, for this is the death that He was resurrected from. But this evidence cannot be supplied, for it does not exist. In all of the scripture passages that mention the second death, none give hope of a resurrection from it. Quite the contrary, the second death is a final and hopeless death. And of all the passages that mention the death of the cross, absolutely none connect it with the second death.

Christ’s Followers Have Naught to Do With the Second Death

There is much said in the Bible about Christ’s death being the death of the cross—but absolutely nothing said in the Bible about the death of Christ being the second death. There is much said in the Bible about the need for His followers to follow Him by taking up the cross—but absolutely nothing said about the need of Christ’s followers to follow Him by dying the second death. The Bible just does not give the second death the place and value that it gives to the death of the cross; neither does the Bible relate it to Christ, nor to His followers.

In fact, of the four verses in which the Bible mentions the second death, two of them positively *sever* the Christian from the second death:—

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” Revelation 2:11

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power...” Revelation 20:6

Scripture promises that the overcoming Christian will not be hurt by the second death, nor ever come under its power. The true follower of Christ will not experience the second death in any form or fashion—and, hear this, it is not because Christ died the second death for them, as some assert. Rather it’s because they have followed Christ through baptism into the death of the cross, and have been raised by the power of the resurrection to a new life in Christ. It’s because they have known Jesus, just as Paul knew Jesus and gave account of his experience in Philippians:—

“⁷But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ¹⁰*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death...*” Philippians 3:7-7.

Selah. What beautiful words! What a beautiful experience we may have! We “may know Him, and the power of *His* resurrection, and the fellowship of *His* sufferings, being made conformable unto *His* death.”

If this experience had anything to do with the second death, the scriptures would have said so, but they do not. This experience is about “being made conformable to *His* death,” which is the death of the cross, and knowing the power of *His* resurrection, which is positively connected to His death.

In order to maintain the belief that Christ died the second death on the cross, one must support the idea that Christians are baptized into the second death, because we are “made conformable to His death,” and by this know Him and the power of His resurrection. But the Bible makes no such case. On the contrary, the Bible makes the exact opposite case—it completely *severs* the Christian from having anything to do with the second death.

Now, if Christ died the second death on the cross, as some people say, but the overcoming Christian has nothing to do with the second death, as the Scriptures teach, then the Christian is disconnected from Christ’s death, and we have nothing. What a horrifying thought! But if one wants to insist that Christ died the second death, then he must insist that Christ was resurrected from the second death, and if Christ was resurrected from the second death, then Christ’s example would give the hope of a resurrection for the wicked who are condemned to its flames, while His faithful and the true followers, having naught to do with the second death, have lost the hope and power of the resurrection!

Do you see the confusion? The gospel would be changed, giving hope to the wicked and stealing it from the just.

Did Christ Die the First Death?

As to whether or not Christ died the first death on the cross for the sins of the world, not much needs to be said. It is an impossibility because the first death, as all should know, does not satisfy the claims of the law for the sins of you and I. It is the result of Adam’s own personal sin in Eden, and although we suffer from its ramifications as his posterity, it will not suffice as the judgment for our own sins. “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son” (Ezekiel 18:20). There remains a penalty for our own personal sins.

The Wages of Sin in The Great Controversy, page 544, par. 1

There is a passage in the Great Controversy regarding the wages of sin and the second death, which is often misunderstood to mean that Christ died the second death:—

“The wages of sin is *death*; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23. While life is the inheritance of the righteous, *death* is the portion of the wicked. Moses declared to Israel: “I have set before thee this day life and good, and *death* and evil.” Deuteronomy 30:15. The *death* referred to in these scriptures is not that pronounced upon Adam, for all mankind suffer the penalty of his transgression. It is “the second death” that is placed in contrast with everlasting life.” GC 544.1

The wages of sin is *death*. But in this passage, Ellen White says that the wages of sin is the *second* death. So it’s reasoned that if the wages of sin is the second death, then Christ must have died the second death. But this line of reasoning produces the necessity of two different wages for sin, and thus can’t be the correct way to understand the passage. Let the reasoning unfold:—

- (1) Ellen White compares the second death with the wages of sin, so
- (2) the conclusion is made that Christ, then, died the second death, because it is the wages of sin.
- (3) However, the passage also states that the second death was *not* the penalty pronounced upon Adam:—
“The death referred to in these scriptures is *not* that pronounced upon Adam,” yet
- (4) Adam did indeed incur a penalty for sin, for the passage states:— “for all mankind suffer the *penalty* of his [Adam’s] transgression.”

(5) If the second death is the penalty for sin, but not the penalty that was pronounced upon Adam, then there must be two penalties for sin—one that Christ suffered in the second death on the cross, and another that was pronounced upon Adam in Eden.

Do you see the problem?

Are there two penalties for sin? Of course not! The wages of sin is always everlasting destruction. So was everlasting destruction the penalty that was given to Adam in Eden? Yes, of course it was! Then how come Ellen White connects eternal destruction with the second death, and says that this was not the penalty pronounced upon Adam?

The first part of the passage can be read without any trouble:—

“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23. While life is the inheritance of the righteous, death is the portion of the wicked. Moses declared to Israel: “I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.” Deuteronomy 30:15.”

In this portion of the passage, the wages of sin is contrasted with eternal life, meaning the wages of sin is eternal death. That’s correct and straightforward.

It’s the next portion that’s misunderstood:—

“The death referred to in these scriptures is not that pronounced upon Adam, for all mankind suffer the penalty of his transgression. It is the “second death” that is placed in contrast with everlasting life.”

It’s important to notice, and to consider why, Ellen White equates the second death with the wages of sin, but also states that this death was *not* pronounced upon Adam. She certainly acknowledges that the penalty for sin, which is always everlasting destruction, was, in fact, pronounced upon Adam, for she wrote, “all mankind suffer the *penalty* of [Adam’s] transgression.” How is it, then, that she can say that the second death is the wages of sin, *and yet it isn’t called the second death when pronounced upon Adam?*

The reason why “the death referred to in these scriptures (i.e. the second death) is *not* that pronounced upon Adam” is because of the death of the cross, and its place in the plan of salvation.

The Wages of Sin in Eden

God said to Adam, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). God simply said that Adam would die. There was no mention of the second death in Eden, nor of the first death. God just said that Adam would die. And *this* is where Christ interposed and made Himself an offering for sin—for Adam’s sin, as well as for the sins of the whole world, which was to be ratified by *His* death *on the cross*. Christ interposed before there ever was a first or second death.

The death of Christ connects with Adam’s need. It goes to the beginning—not to the end. By connecting to Adam’s need in Eden, it also connects to the great need of Adam’s posterity, and lifts the human race out of the doom, death and hopelessness we would otherwise be destined to suffer. It is solely His interposition back in Eden that created the first and second deaths. The promise of the resurrection from the eternal death penalty pronounced upon Adam meant that, although all would die this death, all would also be raised from this death. This turned the penalty pronounced upon Adam (eternal destruction) into the first death (not eternal). The promise of the resurrection to release mankind from the prison-house of death made this

death temporary. It is solely because Christ intervened after the very first sin, before there ever was a first or second death, that the dead now wait in the grave, both the just and the unjust, for the resurrection. And since “it is appointed unto men *once* to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27), the resulting judgment upon the wicked (eternal destruction) will be their *second* death— called “second” only because it will be the *second* time they will die.

In the foregoing passage from the Great Controversy, Ellen White is simply saying that when we die the first death it is not counted as the wages of sin, but it is, nevertheless, the result of the *penalty* for Adam’s transgression. All mankind will suffer it, regardless of their standing with God. And all will be resurrected from it, also regardless of their standing with God, because Christ intervened back in Eden when transgression was first committed by the head of the human family. This death is not God’s means to administer the penalty for sins which have been committed since Adam’s fall and Christ’s interposition. Since that time, the penalty for sin will be administered by the lake of fire, which is called the *second* death because it will be the *second* time that the wicked will die.

The death of Christ was established in Eden, He was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), before the first and second deaths ever were. He died the death of the cross to save us from Adam’s fall, and if we “take up the cross and follow” Him, we will be overcomers and avoid the anguish and power of the second death, which is reserved for those who have rejected His grace and clung to their sins. It will be administered at the close of this world’s present existence, after the sins of the faithful are transferred to the scapegoat, and Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and the unrepentant wicked meet their just desert in the infernal flames that will burn them out of existence.

A Comparison

When the second death is moved to the cross, man-made additions must be accepted as augmentations to the biblically defined characteristics of the second death, even though these additions are in conflict with the scriptures. When held up in a side-by-side comparison, it becomes even clearer that the idea of Christ dying the second death is incompatible with truth:—

BIBLE	CHRIST DIED THE SECOND DEATH
Those who overcome sin will NOT experience the second death. (Revelation 2:11).	Those who overcome sin WILL experience the second death because they have been baptized into the second death, and will thus experience it in their practical Christian lives as death to sin. (No biblical support).
Those who take part in the first resurrection will NOT experience the second death. (Revelation 20:6).	Those who take part in the first resurrection DO experience the second death because they were baptized into it, and will rise in Christ from it. (No biblical support).
The second death is executed by FIRE. (Revelation 20:14; 21:8).	The second death is not only executed by FIRE, after the thousand years, but was also executed by THE CRUCIFIXION of Christ. It is also executed in the Christian’s BAPTISM and DAILY life as they take up the cross and daily die to self. (No biblical support).

Only ONE class will die the second death: the unrepentant wicked. (Revelation 21:8).

THREE classes of people die the second death: Christ, His followers, and the wicked. Christ died it on the cross. Christ's followers die it in baptism, and in their daily life of dying to self. The wicked die it in the lake of fire. (No biblical support).

The Bible's Answer

The Bible's answer to the question, What death did Christ die? is Philippians 2:8:—

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:8

So when asked, What death did Christ die? let us respond with a “Thus saith the Lord,” with the language of the Bible, and say, Christ died “the death of the cross.”