

The Sign Revisited: The Two Deaths of Christ: the Plural Noun “Maweth” in Isa 53:9; in New Testament: “Thanatos” Refers to the Lord’s Spiritual Death while “Nekrós” refers to His Physical Death; the doubling of “Muth” in Gen 2:17 Refers to Adam’s Two Deaths; Sparganóō (Burial Cloths) Refers to the Lord’s Deaths while “Phátnē” (Feeding Trough) Depicts the Cross; Gabriel’s Annunciation to the Shepherds, Luke 2:10–12; the Angelic Pass in Review, Luke 2:13–14; Poem: “The Sign”

16. Here are two sources that comment on מָוֶת (*maweth*) the Hebrew word for death which is found in:

**Isaiah 53:9** - His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His deaths [מָוֶת (*maweth*)], because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

53:9 death. In the Hebrew the word rendered “death” is an intensive plural. It has been suggested that it speaks of the violence of Christ’s death, the very pain of which made it like a repeated death.<sup>1</sup>

מָוֶת [*mothe*] is a plural exaggerativus here; it is applied to a violent death, the very pain of which makes it like dying again and again.<sup>2</sup>

17. What is missed by Scofield and Delitzsch is that Jesus died twice on the cross, therefore, the plural should be translated literally instead of as an intensive. The New Testament distinguishes these two deaths by the use of two Greek words for death:

In order to purchase our salvation, Christ had to pay the price of spiritual death. The great difference between the spiritual death of Christ and His physical death cannot be emphasized too strongly. The fact that Christ died twice on the cross is borne out by the use of the Greek and Hebrew words in several passages.

For example, in Colossians 1:22 [He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death...] the word “death” is in the singular—one death. The Greek noun *thanatos* refers to His spiritual death. When it comes to His physical death, the Greek word is *nekros*. When the resurrection of Christ is mentioned, it is often from *nekros*, not from *thanatos*. The only time that *nekros* is used for spiritual death is when it is found in the plural, as the object of the preposition *ek*, as in Colossians 2:12, “... God having raised Him out from the deaths.” Another example is the plural of *meweth*, “deaths,” in the Old Testament.

His grave was assigned [literally, the Father assigned Christ’s grave] to be with wicked men [the two thieves], Yet with a rich man in His death [deaths]. (Isaiah 54:9a, NASB)

The plural use of “deaths” is not generally understood, and therefore, the meaning of the blood of Christ is obscured. (p. 13)

When His spiritual death was complete, Jesus Christ shouted, “*Tetelestai!*”—the perfect tense meaning, “It is finished in the past with results that go on forever!” (John 19:30). Note that our Lord was still speaking *after* salvation was *completed*. Obviously He could not have spoken if He were physically dead! And certainly if He was still physically alive on the cross after salvation was complete, His physical death could have nothing whatever to do with the payment of sin!<sup>3</sup> (p. 14)

<sup>1</sup> C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Study Bible: NASB* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 991n.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 3d ed., trans., James Martin (1877; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 2:329.

<sup>3</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Blood of Christ*, 5th ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1989), 13–14.

18. This is a critical doctrine because if it is assumed the payment of our sins was the execution of Jesus, then the penalty for sin would be physical death. If that were true and since Jesus Christ died physically for our sins, then we should no longer die physically.
19. The penalty for sin is established by the Lord in His lone prohibition issued to Adam and Ishah in Eden:

**Genesis 2:17** - "But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

20. The phrase "surely die" is actually the doubling of the Hebrew verb מוֹת *muth*. Here is the way it looks in the Hebrew text: מוֹת תָּמוּת (*moth*: the Qal infinitive absolute and *tamuth*: the Qal imperfect).
- The infinitive absolute used before the verb to strengthen the verbal idea, i.e. to emphasize in this way either the certainty or the forcibleness and completeness of an occurrence. In English, such an infinitive is mostly expressed by a corresponding adverb, but sometimes merely by putting greater stress on the verb; e.g. Genesis 2:17 מוֹת תָּמוּת [*moth tamuth*] *thou shall surely die*.<sup>4</sup>
21. Literally translated the phrase would read "dying you will die," but it is an idiom that indicates the intensity of the death or as Heinrich Gesenius puts it "the certainty or the forcibleness and completeness of an occurrence."
22. Violation of the mandate would therefore result in the immediate death of the man and/or the woman. But when each bit into the forbidden fruit neither died physically. Consequently, the penalty was not physical death but spiritual death. We know that Adam lived for 930 years after he first sinned according to Genesis 5:5.
23. Adam and Ishah immediately lost their personal relationship with God which could only be restored by the redemption solution: faith alone in Christ alone. They would eventually die physical death. Physical death is an eventual result of spiritual death, but physical death is never the same as spiritual death. If it were, members of the human race would all die physically at birth since we are all born spiritually dead.
- Romans 5:12** - Therefore, just as through one man [ Adam ] sin [ the sin nature ] entered into the world, and death [ θάνατος, *thánatos*: spiritual ] through the sin [ nature ]; consequently death [ spiritual ] spread to all men, because all sinned (when Adam sinned).
24. In order to pay the price for our salvation, Christ had to endure spiritual death on the cross. The Christ Child wrapped in *sparganōō* implies His destiny is physical death. But Scripture attests to the fact that it is His spiritual death that results in our redemption.
25. Those who execute the redemption solution are reconciled to God, receive eternal life, and have the promise of a resurrection body. The resurrection body is the aftermath of physical death; salvation is made possible by His spiritual death.
26. The sign in the manger is the prophetic message of the Lord's destiny to become a "substitute for us" by dying spiritual death.
27. Gabriel's second indicator to the shepherds regarding the Christ Child is that He would be found "lying in a manger." The word for manger is φάτνη, *phátñē*: a feeding trough.
28. The ultimate Christmas gift ever given was wrapped in burial cloths and placed in an animal's feeding trough:

**2 Corinthians 9:15** - Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!

<sup>4</sup> E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2d Eng. ed. rev. (1910; repr., New York: Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1963), 342n(a).

**John 3:16** - "For God loved the world so much that He gave His uniquely-born Son for the purpose that whosoever believes in Him should not perish and with the result that he would have eternal life.

29. No pretty wrapping paper with glossy bows and sparkling stickers; no stately trees lush with limbs studded with glimmering lights. Instead, a unique Child on a mission of death swathed in burial cloths and lying inside a stark, wooden feeding trough.
30. The shepherds were believers; their bosses, the spiritual leaders of Judea, the master theologians of the day, the scribes and the Pharisees, were unbelievers.
31. Up in Jerusalem, the priesthood was carrying out its duties of conducting rituals, sacrificing designated animals, and preparing for feast days – all of which had now been reduced to ritual without reality.
32. The shepherds, whose duty was to guard the spotless and unblemished lambs for the Levitical sacrifices, knew the true identity of their true Messiah. Gabriel had given them all the doctrines they would need to find the Christ Child: He was born that day in Bethlehem, wrapped in burial cloths, and lying in a feeding trough.
33. These shepherds knew their Master's manger was in Bethlehem, but before they could leave the field and hasten into town, they were privileged to see the entire angelic army perform a pass in review before the Lord's feeding trough.
34. In His undiminished deity, Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Angelic Armies. The Commander-in-chief is on a special mission which, if successful, will change human history and resolve the angelic conflict.
35. As Operation Reconciliation gets underway, His angelic armies pay tribute to their eternal leader by performing a pass in review. They assemble over the sheep fields outside Bethlehem and then march past the manger where their Commander is bivouacked with His human family.

**Luke 2:13** - And suddenly a multitude of the army of heaven appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

**v. 14** - "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased."

36. Those who have peace are those with whom God is well-pleased. God is well-pleased with those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, who entered this life wrapped in burial cloths, lying in a trough of wood. This sign speaks of His mission's victorious culmination when He dies spiritually as our substitute on Calvary's cross of wood.

**Colossians 1:19** - God was pleased to have all His fullness [ the prototype spiritual life ] dwell in the Son

**v. 20** - and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross—whether things on the earth or things in heaven.

**v. 21** - And you were at one time strangers and enemies in your minds as expressed through your evil deeds,

**v. 22** - but now He has reconciled you by His physical body through death to present you holy, without blemish, and blameless before Him—

**v. 23** - if indeed you remain firm in the faith, without shifting from the source of confidence of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has also been preached in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become its servant.

**Luke 2:10** - And the angel said to them, "Stop being afraid, for behold I bring you good news of great happiness which shall be for all people.

**v. 11** - "Today in the city of David there was born for your benefit a Savior who is Christ, the Lord.

**v. 12** - "This sign is for your benefit: He is wrapped in burial cloths and lying in a feeding trough."

This is the true meaning of Christmas. The religious leaders were involved in animal sacrifices without realizing that the reality was six miles down the road in Bethlehem.

While the angelic army gathered for a pass in review before its Supreme Commander, Archangel Gabriel informed the shepherds of the arrival of the Lamb of God that was to take away the sins of the world.

Because they understood the sign described by this angel means they had the doctrine to know the Messiah's mission. As a result, they were motivated to go to Bethlehem and find their Master's manger.

**Luke 2:15** - When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."

**v. 16** - So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the feeding trough.

On the overhead, you see Scott Carson's artistic adaptation of Luke 2:7-14 entitled, *The Sign*. We conclude with the poem that inspired a benefactor to commission Scott's painting:

### The Sign

The Lord entered this world prepared  
On a cross of wood to die,  
While He, wrapped in burial cloths,

In a feeding trough did lie.  
From David's line He entered time—  
The Lion of Judah's roar—  
As Heir apparent to the crown  
That Herod in arrogance wore.

Where shepherds watched, attending flocks,  
An angel appeared o'erhead;  
His message did assuage their fear  
With good news that quickly spread.

He spoke to them of Bethlehem,  
Which Micah did prophesy,  
"The Savior, Christ the Lord, is born  
In David's city nearby."

And then he gave to them a sign  
By which to identify  
The One who would be sacrificed  
For man's sins and then to die.

Then on high, in rank and file,  
Heavenly armies did appear,  
Flying through to pass in review  
Before the symbolic bier.

Filing by, the angelic throng  
Saluted Him with this creed:  
"Glory to God in the highest;  
His peace to whom He's well-pleased."

The prototype system in place,  
God's perfect plan went in motion;  
Each person's volition must choose  
His redemption solution.

Oh, what must one do to avail  
This eternal salvation?  
Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ:  
Sin's only absolution.

**(End CR12: The Sign Revisited.)**