

Sabbath School Lesson #6A – Did Christ die second death? – 3 November 2022

Christ died for us, but what death did He die? On Thursday 3 November 2022 on the section entitled “The meaning of the cross”, the Lesson writer says: “Christ did not die just the natural death that every human being has to face. He died the second death, so that all those who accept Him will never have to experience it for themselves.” This is not the Lesson writer’s view, but the official Seventh-day Adventist Church position. This position was first given by the Biblical Research Institute (BRI), a body that expounds or enhances the doctrinal and theological understanding, and fosters doctrinal and theological unity in the Seventh-day Adventist world-wide Church. What the BRI says on what death Jesus died is the official position of our Church. According to the BRI, in an online article written by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, we are told: “As a church we hold that sinners who die “the second death” will stay dead forever. Should not Christ, who experienced this death as our substitute, also stay dead forever? . . . Jesus experienced the second death because it was the right penalty for the sins of the world. He bore the sins of the human race as its substitute (Mark 10:45). Here we reach the limits of this mystery. Christ experienced the second death by assuming responsibility for our sin and receiving its penalty (2 Cor. 5:21)” – available at: <https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/surviving-the-second-death/>

QUESTION – is the official position of our Church, as given in the Lesson and by BRI, truth or error? Christ died the death typified by the lamb offered as a sacrifice in the earthly sanctuary service. The sins of the repenting soul were in that type placed on the innocent lamb. The high priest transferred the sins to the earthly sanctuary typifying Christ who now transfers our sins to the heavenly sanctuary. The final penalty for sins was suffered by the scapegoat. In that type, we may say the scapegoat suffered the second death, but can we accurately say the same applied to the lamb? We find in the Spirit of Prophecy (SOP) that Christ died “the most cruel, the most shameful!” death {RH November 20, 1883, par. 10}, but His death is never described as second death. Should we be content to follow the Church position to describe Christ’s death as second death? If so, how do we describe the death that Satan will finally die? Ah, BRI says, “Here we reach the limits of this mystery.” Is that just “mystery” or suppositions, which cannot accurately be supported from the Bible/SOP?

IMPORTANCE – Of critically examining the position we take on this subject: “Every position of truth taken by our people will bear the criticism of the greatest minds; the highest of the world’s great men will be brought in contact with truth, and therefore every position we take should be critically examined and tested by the Scriptures” {4LtMs, Lt 6, 1886, par. 10}.

WHY IT MATTERS – If there be an opportunity to avoid error, it matters that we come to the truth of this, because: “Error is never harmless. It never sanctifies, but always brings confusion and dissension. It is always dangerous. The enemy has great power over minds that are not thoroughly fortified by prayer and established in Bible truth” {T32 48.2}.

OCCURRENCES – In the Bible, the exact phrase “second death” occurs four times: Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; and 21:8. Two of these occurrences (Revelation 20:14 and 21:8) provide the definition; the other two (2:11 and 20:6) provide the usage of the phrase.

DEFINITION – Second death is defined as follows: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14); “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” (Revelation 21:8). Second death = “the lake of fire” or “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.” SOP says: “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}.

APPLICATION – To overcomers: “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) — Christ says, “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). It follows then that Christ could have died the second death if He had not overcome, but He says “I have overcome the world.” To them that take part in first resurrection: “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” (Revelation 20:6) — Paul says

this of Christ , “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming” (1 Corinthians 15:21-23). It follows then that “Christ the firstfruits” of the “blessed and holy” “that hath part in the first resurrection,” “the second death hath no power.” That the second death had “no power” unto “Christ the firstfruits” is attested by the fact “God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24).

SINNERS AND SATAN – It is the unrepentant sinners and Satan that die the second death: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die an everlasting death — a death from which there will be no hope of resurrection; and then the wrath of God will be appeased” {EW 218.1}. “Said the angel, “Satan is the root, his children are the branches. They are now consumed root and branch. They have died an everlasting death. They are never to have a resurrection, and God will have a clean universe” {EW 295.1}. “Millions in bondage to sin, slaves of Satan, doomed to suffer the second death, would refuse to listen to the words of truth in their day of visitation. Terrible blindness! strange infatuation!” {GC 22.2}. “The word of God plainly tells us that few will be saved, and that the greater number of those, even, who are called will prove themselves unworthy of everlasting life. They will have no part in heaven, but will have their portion with Satan, and experience the second death” {2T 293.3}.

FULL PENALTY – Satan, not Christ, die the second death. In a chapter entitled ‘Second Death’ in Early Writings, we read: “Satan bore not only the weight and punishment of his own sins, but also of the sins of the redeemed host, which had been placed upon him; and he must also suffer for the ruin of souls which he had caused” {EW 294.2}. “It was seen, also, that while the sin offering pointed to Christ as a sacrifice, and the high priest represented Christ as a mediator, the scapegoat typified Satan, the author of sin, upon whom the sins of the truly penitent will finally be placed. When the high priest, by virtue of the blood of the sin offering, removed the sins from the sanctuary, he placed them upon the scapegoat. When Christ, by virtue of His own blood, removes the sins of His people from the heavenly sanctuary at the close of His ministration, He will place them upon Satan, who, in the execution of the judgment, must bear the final penalty. The scapegoat was sent away into a land not inhabited, never to come again into the congregation of Israel. So will Satan be forever banished from the presence of God and His people, and he will be blotted from existence in the final destruction of sin and sinners” {GC 422.2}. “In the typical service the high priest, having made the atonement for Israel, came forth and blessed the congregation. So Christ, at the close of His work as mediator, will appear, “without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28), to bless His waiting people with eternal life. As the priest, in removing the sins from the sanctuary, confessed them upon the head of the scapegoat, so Christ will place all these sins upon Satan, the originator and instigator of sin. The scapegoat, bearing the sins of Israel, was sent away “unto a land not inhabited” (Leviticus 16:22); so Satan, bearing the guilt of all the sins which he has caused God's people to commit, will be for a thousand years confined to the earth, which will then be desolate, without inhabitant, and he will at last suffer the full penalty of sin in the fires that shall destroy all the wicked. Thus the great plan of redemption will reach its accomplishment in the final eradication of sin and the deliverance of all who have been willing to renounce evil” – Ellen G White {GC 485.3}.

CONCLUSION – In saying that Christ died the second death, the Lesson and BRI places Christ with the lost sinner and Satan in the lake of fire. We find no support in the Bible or SOP to describe the death of Christ as second death; but we find much to describe the death of the lost sinner, Satan and his angels as doomed to suffer the second death. Let us be content to leave this where the SOP left it: “Had it been a common death even, it would still have been the greatest of humiliations. But oh, what a death the Son of God suffered, — the most cruel, the most shameful!” {RH November 20, 1883, par. 10}; “becoming obedient unto death, and that the most ignominious and revolting, the most shameful, the most agonizing, — the death of the cross” {T29 103.1}; “in clear, trumpet-like tones, that seemed to resound throughout creation, Jesus cried, “It is finished.” “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” A light encircled the cross, and the face of the Saviour shone with a glory like the sun. He then bowed His head upon His breast, and died” {DA 756.2}.