

PSA Examined**Article Series:****Article #8****Is Death a
Punishment or
a Consequence?**

PSA Series — Is Death a Punishment from God or a Consequence of Sin? (Or both?)

Description**PSA Examined****Article Series:****Article #8****Is Death a
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Whether death is a punishment from God for sin or a natural

consequence of sin (*or both*) might seem unimportant, or even like a distinction without much real difference. However, it's actually vitally important for understanding Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA) and the gospel at large. Obviously that's important for [this series on PSA](#).

Here's an example to illustrate the difference between consequence and punishment, mostly for clarity's sake:

- If a father tells his son not to touch the hot stove and the son touches it anyway, he'll be burned. He'll be burned regardless of whether the father knows of him touching it or not because it's the nature of hot things to burn skin. Thus, the son being burned is a natural consequence of touching a hot stove, not a punishment from the father for touching the hot stove.
- Conversely, if the father tells the son not to go outside to play until all the chores are done, there are no naturally bad consequences if the son disobeys, like there are with the hot stove example. However, if the father sees the son playing outside when the chores aren't done, he might ground the son for the rest of the day as a punishment for disobedience.

That's the difference.

The hot stove burns because it's in the nature of hot stoves to burn, whereas the son being grounded

is a punishment inflicted and can't be a result of natural consequences.

The question of this article is which category death itself fits into according to the Bible: Punishment (like grounding) or a natural consequence (like being burned by a hot stove).

Also, is it **both** a punishment **and** a natural consequence?

That's entirely possible as well, but we'll ignore that possibility for the entire article because the answer will become obvious as we go.

But before we answer that question, we need to ask an even more foundational question, which we'll ask now.

Is biblical death physical, spiritual, or both?

This might seem like an obvious question with an obvious answer — I thought it was when I started writing this article — but I discovered that it was much more complicated than I thought as I did the research. For starters, we'll look at the PSA position and the verses used to support it, then afterward we'll look at the counter-arguments and judge both on their merit.

The PSA position

Now, the normal/typical PSA position is usually stated similarly to the "Got Questions?" article quoted below, from the article entitled: "How is physical death related to spiritual death?"

The Bible has a great deal to say about death and, more importantly, what happens after death. Physical death and spiritual death are both a separation of one thing from another. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, and spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God. When understood that way, the two concepts are closely related. Both physical death and spiritual death are included in the very first references to death.

[Source](#).

One passage that's regularly used to support this understanding is Romans 6:23.

Romans 6:23

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Many have commented on this, and I pulled a few quotes from various places to represent the prevailing view in the Western Protestant church today. Commenting on Romans 6:23, Got Questions

says this:

First, sin does not necessarily result in physical death right away. **Romans 6 is not telling us that when we sin we will physically die. Rather, it is referring to spiritual death.**

[Source.](#)

John Piper has a very similar statement on the verse that adds another element — that of punishment — which we'll examine later in the article.

To begin with, this statement is telling us that sin has serious consequences. **Paul says, "For the wages of sin is death..."** He figuratively uses the word "wages" to imply that this is something you are getting because you deserve it — you have, as it were, worked for it (6:20–21). Paul opens the salary bag of a sinner, and all he finds in there is death. Our first parents were warned about this in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16–17). They did not listen and the payment they got, which has become ours also by inheritance, was death (Romans 5:12). **Yet, we do not only inherit this, but we also get paid when we "work" as we yield to temptation (James 1:15). This death, we must emphasise, is not just physical death but also eternal death — the second death (Revelation 21:8). That is what you ask for when you live a life of sin!**

God Is Holy and Righteous

We need to pause and ask the question, **"Why should death and hell be the inevitable result or payment for sin and evil?"** It is because of the nature of God. He is holy and righteous. **He must punish sin.**

[Source.](#)

Commenting on Genesis 2:17 (*where God commands not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*), one Bible commentary says this:

17. thou shalt not eat of it ... thou shalt surely die—no reason assigned for the prohibition, but **death was to be the punishment of disobedience.** A positive command like this was not only the simplest and easiest, but the only trial to which their fidelity could be exposed.

[Source.](#)

Fundamentally, mainstream PSA thinking these days says that death in the bible is:

1. Primarily spiritual (*though obviously physical sometimes as well, and often both*)
2. A punishment from God because of our sin.

As you might've noticed above, three different "types" of death were mentioned by those various sources. Before we go further, we need to define them or this article will get too confusing.

The three “types” of death in the Bible

Normally we’d go through scripture and collect the clues along the way to build the case before reaching the conclusions, but I tried writing this article that way it got too confusing.

Thus, as a summary with evidence to follow, **there are arguably three separate-but-interconnected “types” of death in the Bible, and we will artificially separate them from each other for the sake of clarity.**

Again, I want to stress that this is something of an artificial distinction because in reality, they are deeply interconnected and entwined with each other. However, it’s just too hard to have this discussion unless we take a step back and define terms. **Some verses use the word “death” and unless we take a moment to define which type of death the verse is talking about, we can misapply the passage.** (Again, the first draft didn’t do this and it got super confusing, super fast.)

Thus, here are the three artificially divided categories of death we’ll use for this article.

1. **Physical death**, referring to the fact that our bodies decay over time, eventually stop working, and die. (*I would include sickness/disease in this category because they lead to death.*)
2. **Spiritual/metaphorical death**, referring to the state of being separated from God, and/or separated from relationship with Him.
3. **Second death**, referring to the result of the “Great White Throne Judgement” in Revelation 20. (*which we’ll look at in a moment.*)

Now, everyone who has lived more than a few years will be familiar with the first type, and most Western Christians are intimately familiar with the second type because it’s taught regularly. However, the third type might be a bit less known so we’ll spend a moment defining it.

Throughout this article, we’ll be asking two questions whenever we see the word “death” in the Bible.

1. Which type of death is in view (*physical, spiritual/metaphorical, or second*)
2. Is that death **(1)** a punishment from God, or **(2)** a natural consequence of sin?

Please keep those two questions in mind throughout this entire article.

Okay, with that out of the way, we’ll discuss the “second death” first.

What is the “second death”?

This is mentioned in only one place in scripture, but it’s quite significant anyway. Verse 10 will become important later.

Revelation 20:4-15

4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and **they came to life** and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

5 The rest of **the dead** did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. **This is the first resurrection.**

6 **Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power**, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,

8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

10 **And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

11 Then I saw a **great white throne** and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

12 And I saw **the dead**, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and **the dead** were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

13 And the sea gave up **the dead** which were in it, and death and Hades gave up **the dead** which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.

14 **Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.**

15 **And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

Verses 11-15 are commonly referred to as the “Great White Throne” judgement. Thankfully, virtually every understanding of Revelation considers this event to be the “final judgement” (*including mine*), so proceeding with that assumption shouldn’t cause a speed bump.

Now, notice that death and “Hades” were thrown into the lake of fire.

The Greek word that’s transliterated “Hades” is “????” ([Hadés](#)), and it means:

86 hád?s (from 1 /A “not” and idein/eid?, “see”) – properly, the “unseen place,” referring to **the (invisible) realm in which all the dead reside, i.e. the present dwelling place of all the departed (deceased); Hades.**

And again at that same link:

Usage: In the New Testament, “hadés” refers to the abode of the dead, a temporary place where the souls of the deceased reside. It is often understood as the equivalent of the Old Testament “Sheol,” a place of waiting for the final judgment. Hades is depicted as a place of both comfort and torment, depending on one’s relationship with God.

Effectively, “Hades” is the underworld; it’s the place of the dead.

It’s rather like saying “*he’s in the grave*” or “*he’s six feet under*”, etc. When you see Hades mentioned, you know that physical death is in view because Hades is the place where the physically dead go.

Notice that death and Hades (*the place of the dead*) were thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is the “second death”.

This makes it clear that the “second death” — the result of the Great White Throne Judgement — is different than “death” in the rest of the Bible.

This is partially why we’re talking about different kinds of death. Too often, Christians lump all types of death together and that can cause confusion. Now, one other thing that’s important, **“death and Hades” are thrown into the second death, indicating that they will end at some point.** This shouldn’t be surprising since immediately following the previously quoted section, we get this:

Revelation 21:1-4

1 Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be

among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and **there will no longer be any death**; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

We'll look at the implications of death and Hades being thrown into the lake of fire later. For now, we'll return to discussing the “second death”, specifically passages that appear to be parallel to it and talking about the same thing.

Parallel passages about the “second death”

Now, a large number of Christians — myself included — also think that a certain part of Matthew 7 refers to this Great White Throne judgement.

Matthew 7:21-23

21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.”

22 “Many will say to Me **on that day**, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’

23 “And then **I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’**

The phrase “that day” is often used in the New Testament as a reference to the final judgement, for example, in Romans 2.

Romans 2:5-6

5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are **storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**,

6 who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

Notice that the wrath that’s being stored up is a result of their wickedness. And in this next verse, notice that the phrase “throw out” is an active imperative command. Verse 30 is the end of the parable about the “worthless slave”, so keep that in mind as you read:

Matthew 25:30-33 & 41

30 “**Throw out** the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

31 “But when **the Son of Man comes in His glory**, and all the angels with Him, **then He will sit on His glorious throne**

. **32** “All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; **33** and He will put the sheep on His right, and **the goats on the left.**

...

41 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘**Depart from Me**, accursed ones, into the **eternal fire** which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

Remember from Revelation that “eternal fire” is synonymous with the “second death”. Matthew 7:23 has “depart from Me” and Matthew 25:30 has the wicked being thrown out, both of which are clearly active acts being performed as judgement. I simply don’t see another way to take it. Further, in addition to the above, there are a mountain of other passages that support this idea as well that we won’t look at for space’s sake.

Thus, the “second death” seems like it’s clearly a punishment from God for sin, not merely a natural consequence of sin.

(Though of course, the “second death” happens because of sin. However, it’s not like how touching a hot stove burns you as a natural consequence. Rather, it’s like a punishment in addition to the consequence of being burned.)

That’s one of the three types of death, but it’s easily the simplest because it’s clearly stated and defined for us. The two other types will be less so. **Because of that, we’ll look at the relevant passages that argue for or against death being a punishment from God, then we’ll decide which type of death is in view in each passage.**

We’ll now look at the arguments that death **IS** a punishment from God, after a quick but necessary spoiler.

Addendum: A preview/spoiler for context

Here’s a small preview/spoiler of two crucial verses. We’ll look at them in detail later in this article, but this might get you thinking...

1 Corinthians 15:26 The last **enemy** that will be abolished **is death.**

Hebrews 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless **him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,**

Interesting, no?

We'll cover these verses (*and others*) later in the article. **I put them here so when I make certain statements below and get pedantic about the wording of scripture, you won't think I'm just ignoring what the text says.** To be clear, it might seem like I'm splitting hairs at certain points in this article. However, the reason is because I spent a long time collecting the verses on the topic and sifting through them to understand how they all harmonized. A certain level of careful reading and yes, even pedantry/hair splitting is necessary for that harmonization.

Anyway, here we go.

Arguments that death IS a punishment from God

An obvious place to start is the very first mention of death in the Bible. The fall of man and the curse are also obvious, as is the exile from the garden. We'll look at all of them because they are often used to argue that death is a punishment from God.

The first mention of death in Genesis 2

Here's the first mention of death in the Bible.

Genesis 2:15-17

15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. **16** The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; **17** but **from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.**"

Now, we need to look more closely at the phrase: "you will surely die". Some have said that the Bible makes a mistake here because Adam and Eve didn't drop dead on the very day that they ate of the tree. (*Anecdotaly, that apparent contradiction seems like it's part of the reason that many Christians hold that God was referring only to spiritual death here.*) However, that accusation fails to account for the difference between Hebrew and English verb types.

Here's a short explanation from another website.

The Hebrew is, literally, *die-die (muwth-muwth)* with two different verb tenses (dying and die), which **can be translated as "surely die" or "dying you shall die."** This indicates the **beginning of dying**, an ingressive sense, **which finally culminates with death.**

[Source.](#)

More literally, “in the day you eat of it, dying, you will die.” So you could understand it as “in the day you eat of it, [you will start] dying, [and eventually] you will die.” So while the English translation might make it seem like God was making a mistake, He wasn’t. It’s a limitation of translation, not an error on God’s part. (*Because of course, He can’t make mistakes because He’s all-knowing and all-wise.*)

Now, with that out of the way, we’ll move on to another question that’s actually the focus of this article:

Was this death a punishment from God for disobedience, or a natural consequence of their sin of disobedience?

Remember the stove analogy from this article’s intro. Is the passage above warning of a consequence, like: “If you touch that stove, you’ll be burned.” Or, was it a warning of a punishment, like: “If you go outside, I’ll ground you.”

Notice that the wording is (*paraphrasing*): “If you eat from the tree, you will die.” However, the wording isn’t: “If you eat from the tree, I’ll punish you with death” or, “...I’ll kill you”, or “...I’ll cause you to die”. The phrasing doesn’t clearly make it a punishment. In fact, I would argue that it leans slightly in the direction of a consequence, not a punishment.

However — very importantly — the wording of “...you will die” doesn’t mean that it can’t be a punishment. It certainly allows for that possibility, but doesn’t state it clearly.

Frankly, this particular verse isn’t clear on that point because of that.

An important rule of good Bible interpretation is that you never build theology on verses that aren’t clear, especially when more clear verses exist. This could be seen as a warning of a punishment, but it could also be seen as a warning of a natural consequence like: “don’t touch the stove or you’ll get burned”. Either works.

Now we’ll look at the curse passage in Genesis 3.

The curse

As you read this, notice if you see anything about death in the curses on man and/or woman.

Genesis 3:16-19

16 To the woman He said,
“I will greatly multiply
Your pain in childbirth,
In pain you will bring forth children;
Yet your desire will be for your husband,
And he will rule over you.”

17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.

18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field;

19 By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return."

Verse 19 seems like a clear reference to death. However, notice the exact wording of the curse. It seems like the ground was cursed because of Adam, but death isn't stated to be a curse here. Paraphrasing the first three lines of verse 19, God said: "You'll work hard until you die." You could argue that death is part of the curse, but that isn't stated.

The second half of verse 19 opens with the word "because", and it seems to refer back to the previous line's assertion that Adam will return to the ground. That is, Adam will return to the ground because he was taken from the ground. You could read this as death being a part of the curse, and that's not illegitimate. However, I don't see it as likely or clear.

This goes double because Eve was never told she would die.

If death was a part of the curse, then why didn't God mention Eve dying as well? Last I checked, women don't live forever, and yet there's nothing about death in the curse on the woman.

If death was a part of the curse/punishment for sin, we might expect to see God clearly state that it's part of the curse/punishment for sin.

However, we don't see that.

Again, that doesn't necessarily mean that death *isn't* part of the curse/punishment from God because of our sin. However, it's not explicitly stated to be a part of that curse/punishment. Thus, I don't think it makes sense to see death as part of God's curse on mankind based on this passage. I'm not saying it's impossible, but it would be hard to prove based on this passage alone.

The Exile from the Garden

This is just a few verses later.

Genesis 3:22-24

22 Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, **he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever**”— **23 therefore** the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. **24** So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction **to guard the way to the tree of life.**

Now, before we consider whether this verse weighs in on whether death is a punishment from God, there’s another topic we need to discuss: **is physical life or spiritual life being discussed in this passage?** (*In the phrase “live forever”.*)

Think about it for a minute.

Really, please do.

...

...

Here’s what seems to be the logical consequence of saying that the exile must be referring to spiritual death: ***If God is discussing a spiritual death/life here — and I’m not saying that He is — then we didn’t need Jesus’s death and resurrection to save us. God simply allowing us access to one specific tree would do it.*** In fact, repentance, faith, and even knowledge of God and Jesus wouldn’t be necessary if this was **only** spiritual death.

Seriously.

If this is about “spiritual death” and the Tree of Life could’ve fixed that, then Jesus’s death and resurrection would be pointless and not required because just giving us some fruit would’ve been enough. However, the New Testament tells us that the cross and resurrection were necessary; they had to happen:

Matthew 16:21

21 From that time **Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.**

The Greek word translated “must” there is “???” ([dei](#)), and it means:

Usage: The Greek word “???” ([dei](#)) is used to express necessity or obligation. It conveys a sense of something that is **required** or inevitable, often in the context of divine will or purpose. In the New Testament, it frequently appears in discussions about **what must happen according to God’s plan** or what believers ought to do in obedience to God’s

commands.

The cross and resurrection weren't optional in God's plan; they were essential. There are many other verses which say this as well, that's just an easy one to quote.

But how could the cross be essential if the life in Genesis 2-3 is a spiritual death that could be solved by us eating a piece of fruit? (Or even eating it on a regular basis; it's the same basic problem)

It doesn't make sense.

However, all of those problems completely disappear if this passage is talking about physical death.

All of them.

In fact, if this particular passage is about physical death — not saying anything about the rest of the Bible, just this passage — then it makes perfect sense. You can read it simply, literally, and no additional context is needed. Perhaps more importantly, it doesn't cause conflicts with other passages of scripture. **Thus, that seems to be the best way to understand it.**

Now, we still haven't settled if the exile from the garden is God imposing the punishment of death on Adam and Eve, and the rest of mankind too.

There's certainly an element of punishment. According to these verses, man would "live forever" if he had access to the Tree of Life. By denying man access to the tree, God guaranteed that man would die. However — and I realize this is splitting hairs a bit — but **it doesn't seem that God directly caused the death. That is, man was already going to die; God just decided not to prevent the death.**

To be sure, that's a punishment of a sort... but death itself doesn't appear to be the punishment because we were already going to die.

As an example, let's say you once got sick and the disease damaged one of your organs so much that you required an organ transplant to survive. You're even at the top of the organ donor list, so the odds are looking good. However, you then commit a crime. As a punishment, the court orders your name taken off the transplant list. Eventually, your organ fails and you die.

In that example, the court didn't cause your death; the disease caused your death. However, the court's punishment cut off access to something that could've kept you alive even despite the disease.

I think that's a fair analogy to what God did in the Garden.

(Though, Adam's "organ failure" was caused by the sin/crime.)

Thus again — and I realize I'm splitting hairs, but there's a reason for that which you'll see later (remember the spoiler verses) — we don't see a statement about God creating physical death. He might have, but you can't get there from this passage.

Fortunately, there is clarity to be found in the Bible, and we'll get to those passages later in this article,

but this particular passage isn't clear.

God reducing man's lifespan in Genesis 6

Here's the passage, and notice the context of the two verses surrounding verse three.

Genesis 6:1-8

1 Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, 2 that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. 3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Immediately after this, we get the beginning of the account of the flood. On it's face, this isn't God causing death; it's God reducing lifespans. Like the previous section, God lowering expected lifespans doesn't necessarily equate to Him creating death itself.

In fact, the lowering of man's lifespan appears to be a result of the flood. If you look at Genesis 5, the lifespans before the flood were 800+ years. But if you look at Genesis 11 and the lifespans after the flood, you see a rapid decline in how long people lived. To me, that points to a change in the Earth's ecosystem as a result of The Flood. *(If you look up the "canopy theory", you'll see some solid theories for the actual changes that occurred that produced this change.)*

If that's the case — and I personally think it is based on prior research — then this is no different from God exiling Adam and Eve from the Garden.

God removed something that allowed man to live a longer life, but man was already going to die. **Lowering maximum lifespans didn't kill people who were going to live forever; it shortened the lifespan of men who were already going to die.**

Thus, this doesn't seem to argue for God creating death itself.

What about the Angel of Death?

Have you ever started a research project on a Bible topic only to realize that something you'd been taught your entire life had no foundation in scripture? The concept of the "Angel of Death" was one of those for me. You might be thinking: "*What about the ten plagues right before the Exodus?*" Well, let's look at those verses.

Exodus 11:4-6

4 Moses said, "Thus says the LORD, '**About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, 5 and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die**, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well. **6** 'Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been *before* and such as shall never be again.

The exact phrasing is interesting and important. God says that He will go into Egypt and the firstborn will die, but He doesn't necessarily say that He Himself will do it, just that it will happen. This nuance is part of why having a good literal translation is important, as discussed in [my article on Bible translations](#).

In the next chapter, immediately after the instructions for Passover, scripture says this:

Exodus 12:11-13

11 'Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD'S Passover. **12** '**For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt**, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD. **13** 'The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy *you* when **I strike the land of Egypt**.

Now, the phrasing here is almost the same as the previous verse, but not quite. This is hard to see in English, but much easier to see in Hebrew. Again, God says that He will go through Egypt, but **notice the lack of an "I" before "will strike down"?** **That's because it's a different verb form in Hebrew that doesn't have a counterpart in English.**

That verb form is the "hifil" form (*also spelled "hiphil"; same thing*) which you can confirm in an interlinear Bible [here](#), and here's what it means:

The Hiphil stem is generally used to express causative action in active voice. In many cases the noun derived from the same root is the object or result of the hiphil verb associated with that root. For example, **the Hiphil verb ???????? means "to cause to rain**

down”; the noun ????? means “rain”.

[Source.](#)

To piggyback off of their example, a “normal” verb might mean “to rain down fire”, while a hifil verb might mean “to cause fire to rain down”. In such cases, the active party — God in this case — is still causing the action, He just may or may not be doing it directly. *(It’s clear from the end of verse 13 above that God is the active agent because He says: “I strike the land of Egypt”; more on that in a minute.)*

So more literally, it’s something more like “I will cause [someone or something] to strike down all the firstborn”. That’s a bit more awkward in English because we don’t have the hifil form, but it’s more accurate to the Hebrew sense of the passage. Again, God is the active agent, but He may or may not be actually doing the action. Keep that in mind as we look at the next passage.

Here’s the next passage in one good translation — the NASB ’95 — and then also in two bad translations: the NLT and GNT. *(And again, for more on what makes a translation good or bad, please see [my article on Bible translations](#))*

Exodus 12:23

NASB ’95 For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you.

NLT (bad) For the LORD will pass through the land to strike down the Egyptians. But when he sees the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe, the LORD will pass over your home. He will not permit his death angel to enter your house and strike you down.

GNT (bad) When the LORD goes through Egypt to kill the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the beams and the doorposts and will not let the Angel of Death enter your houses and kill you.

The two bad translations do indeed mention the “angel of death” concept, but that’s not what it actually says. The NASB is far more correct, yet there’s one addendum: “**the destroyer**” is a verb there, specifically another hifil verb. *(Which you can confirm [here](#).) Perhaps a more literal rendering would be “will not allow [the one causing destroying] to come in to your houses”.*

The New Testament References this as well:

Hebrews 11:28

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.

This verse doesn’t add any clarity, but the next passage will.

Exodus 12:26-27

26 “And when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ **27** you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to **the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.**’” And the people bowed low and worshiped.

Now, “He smote” isn’t a hifil verb; it’s a normal active verb so God definitely was doing the striking. This might initially seem to contrast with the hifil form, but there’s actually something else going on here that’ll become clear in a moment.

One option is you could say that this is like a king who says “I’ll destroy this city”, and then sends his men to destroy it while he never lifts a finger other than to give the command. We would say: “that king destroyed the city”, and be correct because it was destroyed on his orders.

Thus, it **could** have been an “Angel of Death” who did the destroying on God’s orders...

...but was it?

Maybe.

Doubtful, but maybe

However, I think there’s a better understanding, and the hifil verb form is a clue.

You might ask why I mentioned the hifil form in the first place if there was a verse that made it clear that it’s God who did the smiting.

Well, because this type of language occurs in other places where God decrees widespread destruction. However, in a few of those other places, the “agent” of the destruction is specified. That will lend some context to Exodus, so we’ll look at them.

The Angel of Death? Or the Angel of the Lord?

There’s one very famous instance of destruction from God that’ll lend some excellent context to this. Notice that I’ve shown where a hifil verb form is used:

Genesis 19:24

Then the LORD **rained (hifil)** on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire **from the LORD** out of heaven,

So more literally, “the LORD caused (*fire and brimstone*) to rain”. I’ll re-word the verse with that understanding so it reads more naturally. (*Slight word order changes when translating are fine, since different languages have different word order rules. You see this happen all the time.*)

)

Genesis 19:24 (modified)

Then **the LORD caused** brimstone and fire **to rain** on Sodom and Gomorrah **from the LORD** out of heaven,

Notice that the LORD is mentioned twice, and it seems that He's causing fire to reign down from Himself, which seems strange. However, there's a good explanation for it.

Myself and [many others](#) think this is a (*thinly*) veiled reference to the Trinity, or at least two members of it.

If the Lord caused fire and brimstone to rain down from the Lord, it makes perfect sense from a Trinitarian perspective.

Please keep that in mind as we look at two other events.

2 Kings 19:35

35 Then it happened that night that **the angel of the LORD** went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead.

The other event is recorded in two places, and comparing the two accounts gives us more information than only looking at one of them.

2 Samuel 24:15-16

15 So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. **16** When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Now relax your hand!" And **the angel of the LORD** was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

1 Chronicles 21:14-15

14 So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel; 70,000 men of Israel fell. **15** And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but as he was about to destroy *it*, the LORD saw and was sorry over the calamity, and said to the destroying angel, "It is enough; now relax your hand." And the angel of the LORD was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Now, did you notice the references to "the angel of the Lord"? Did you also notice that this "destroying angel" seems synonymous with the "Angel of the Lord"?

In many Old Testament Stories, this "angel of the Lord" is identified both as separate from Yahweh, and also as Yahweh, and he (He?) does things only Yahweh can do. Again, this makes perfect sense if it's a Trinitarian reference.

Probably the easiest example to explain is the one of Hagar in Genesis 16

Genesis 16:7-13

7 Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. **8** He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." **9** Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority." **10** Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count."

11 The angel of the LORD said to her further,
 "Behold, you are with child,
 And you will bear a son;
 And you shall call his name Ishmael,
 Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.

12 "He will be a wild donkey of a man,
 His hand *will be* against everyone,
 And everyone's hand *will be* against him;
 And he will live to the east of all his brothers."

13 Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"

Did you notice the seemingly intentional muddying of "the angel of the Lord" with God Himself? In verse 13, she even calls "the angel of the Lord" God. In verse 10, the Angel says that "I" will multiply;

that's something that Yahweh Himself can promise, but not an angel. A mere angel would say "The Lord will multiply", or perhaps "Thus says the Lord: 'I will multiply'." but a mere angel wouldn't say: "I will multiply".

There are many more examples of this, and if you'd like to read a short article on the topic, you can read [this one](#). Mike Winger also has a video on this very topic that's much more thorough, which you can find [here](#). You can also do a web search later, and I recommend that you do because it's fascinating stuff.

(And for bonus research, you can look up Jude 1:4-5 and 1 Cor 10:10, both of which attach the pre-incarnate Jesus to judgment in the Old Testament.)

Anyway...

Back to our topic of death, and if there's an angel of death.

The sum of this section is this: when God decides to wreak widespread havoc, He seemingly always calls on "the angel of the Lord". There's very good reason to think that this is a reference to Jesus in his pre-incarnate state. Thus, **if we were going to assign an identity to the "agent" who slew the firstborn in Egypt, the most likely person would be "the angel of the Lord", which is almost certainly the pre-incarnate Christ.** This is made clearer because Exodus 12:27 specifically states that God Himself did the slaying, so again, pre-incarnate Jesus makes the most sense.

Does it have to be Him?

No.

However, that seems to fit the facts best.

Regardless, if someone insists that God has an "angel of death", he must do so without chapter and verse to support that assertion.

There's simply no verse in the Bible that states that God has an "angel of death". Despite doing rather a lot of research, I was unable to find a reference to it anywhere. I could've missed it of course, but then rather a lot of other people missed it as well.

So no, God doesn't have an "angel of death."

Now, we'll move on to the next section.

Romans 5:16 & 5:18

Two specific verses in this passage are relevant to the case that God created death as a punishment. Please read verses 16 and 18 extra carefully and slowly.

Romans 5:15-19

15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if **by the transgression of the one the many died**, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. **16** The gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; **for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation**, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. **17** For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

18 So then as through one transgression there resulted **condemnation** to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. **19** For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Some might say that "condemnation" refers to punishment in verses 16 and 18, and they might also say that verse 15 says the punishment is death, so we'll examine that now.

Now, the NASB '95 is a bit wordy, confusing, and not up to its usual literalism in verse 16. Thus, here's the relevant clause in a few other translations that get it more literal and are easier to read, including my own translation of the verse

Romans 5:16

NKJV: And the gift *is* not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. **For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation**, but the free gift *which came* from many offenses *resulted* in justification.

Berean Literal Bible: And the gift *is* not as through one having sinned. **For truly the judgment from one was unto condemnation**; but the gift *is* out of many trespasses unto justification.

My translation: And the gift isn't like *what came* through *the* one who sinned. For indeed, **the judgement from one led to a guilty verdict**, but the gift of grace from many missteps *led to us* being made righteous.

The Berean Literal Bible — which has no affiliation with this website whatsoever — gets it almost exactly right but is slightly confusing, hence my translation, which I think is clearer. Now, we'll look at the two words translated "judgement" and "condemnation".

The word translated "judgement" is "?????" ([krima](#)), and it means:

Definition:

Judgment, verdict, condemnation, decision

Meaning: (a) **a judgment, a verdict**; sometimes implying an adverse verdict, a condemnation, (b) a case at law, a lawsuit.

Word Origin: Derived from the Greek verb ????? (krin?), meaning **“to judge” or “to decide.”**

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: – H4941 ????????? (mishpat): Often translated as “judgment” or “justice,” reflecting **a similar concept of legal decision or divine judgment.**

– H1779 ????? (din): Meaning “judgment” or “cause,” used in contexts of legal proceedings or divine justice.

Usage: The term “krima” primarily refers to the act of judgment or the result of a judicial decision. It can denote **a legal verdict, a sentence of condemnation, or the process of making a decision.** In the New Testament, “krima” is often used in the context of divine judgment, highlighting God’s righteous and sovereign authority to judge human actions and intentions.

The Greek word “krima” refers to a decision about guilt in a court, not “judgement” in the sense of punishment.

That’s important.

Now, the word translated “condemnation” is “?????????” ([katakrima](#)), and it means:

Definition: **Condemnation**, judgment

Meaning: **punishment following condemnation, penal servitude, penalty.**

Word Origin: Derived from the Greek verb ????????? (katakrin?), meaning “to condemn” or **“to judge against.”**

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: The Hebrew equivalent often associated with the concept of condemnation is ????? (din, Strong’s H1779), which means judgment or justice.

Usage: The term “katakrima” refers to the result or effect of a **judicial decision**, specifically the sentence of condemnation or **the state of being condemned**. In the New Testament, it is used to describe the divine judgment against sin and **the resulting state of guilt and punishment.**

Cultural and Historical Background: In the Greco-Roman world, legal systems were well-established, and the concept of condemnation was familiar in both civil and criminal contexts. **Condemnation often involved a formal declaration of guilt followed by a penalty.** In Jewish thought, condemnation was also understood in the context of divine judgment, where God, as the ultimate judge, would **render a verdict** based on adherence to His laws

And also:

Cognate: 2631 *katákrima* (from 2596 /*katá*, “down, according to,” intensifying 2917 /*kríma*, “the results of *judgment*”) – properly, **the exact sentence of condemnation handed down after due process (establishing guilt)**. See 2632 (*katakrin?*).

So “krima” refers to making a decision, and “katakrima” refers to the result of that decision.

Thus, “katakrima” could go either way. It could refer to a “verdict of guilty”, or it could also refer to the punishment of that guilt.

It’s legitimate to take it either way.

So which was intended?

I think verse 18 helps us out here, mostly because context is important.

Romans 5:18

18 So then as through one transgression there resulted **condemnation (katakrima)** to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted **justification** of life to all men.

This is a parallel statement, contrasting condemnation and justification. Thus, whichever sense is intended for “condemnation” (katakrima) should be the opposite of “justification”. The word translated “justification” is “?????????” ([dikaióma](#)) and it means:

Definition: Ordinance, requirement, righteous act, judgment, justification

Meaning: **a thing pronounced (by God) to be righteous (just, the right)**; or the restoration of a criminal, a fresh chance given him; a righteous deed, an instance of perfect righteousness.

In this context, “justification” means being pronounced to be righteous (*usually by God*). Given that Paul is making a contrast, “condemnation” should mean the opposite of justification. So the two possible meanings for “condemnation” are:

1. a verdict of guilty
2. punishment for that guilt.

Option #1 is the direct opposite of “justification”, therefore since Paul is making a contrast, it seems the intended meaning for “condemnation” is “verdict of guilt”.

This works perfectly with how “condemnation” is used in the legal field. For example, this is from law.cornell.edu:

Outside the field of property law, **a party who has been found guilty of a crime**, particularly when they are sentenced to death, **may be referred to as “condemned”**.

[Source](#).

Now, let's look at the passage again with that understanding.

Romans 5:15-19 (*modified*)

15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if **by the transgression of the one the many died**, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. **16** The gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; **for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, a guilty verdict** but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. **17** For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

18 **So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation a guilty verdict to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.** **19** For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

It seems like this passage is talking about guilt, not punishment.

Thus, it can't be used to argue that death is a punishment from God. Now, “punishment from God” is a legitimate understanding of the word, but taking it that way ignores the context. Even if ignoring the context was a good idea (*and it never is*), then this passage is unclear ***at best*** because the word could go either way. Again, it's a bad idea to build doctrine on unclear passages.

Moving on.

Romans 1:32

Mike Winger covers this verse in his series on PSA, and here is one of the arguments that he used to say that death is a punishment from God. For context, Romans 1:18 talks about the wrath of God against unrighteousness, and then a long list of wicked deeds follows, capped by this statement in verse 32:

Romans 1:32 (NASB '95)

32 and although **they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death**, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who

practice them.

Now, I might be accused of “hair splitting” with this next section, (*remember those two spoiler verses*) but the exact wording of a passage is very important. We covered in detail why in [my article on Bible translations](#) if you want to know more.

Now, Mike Winger (*unknowingly*) handicaps himself by using the ESV instead of a good translation like the NASB '95 or NKJV. Because of that, it's not hard to see how and why he got this wrong.

Romans 1:32 (ESV)

Though they know **God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die**, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Now, please take a moment to compare the exact wording of the **red** highlighted sections in the two translations. Do you see where Mike Winger went wrong and how the ESV's poor translation caused his error?

The word correctly translated “ordinance” in the NASB, and less correctly translated “righteous decree” in the ESV is “?????????” ([dikaióma](#)), and it means:

1. that which has been deemed right so as to have the force of law;

a. what has been established and ordained by law, **an ordinance:** universally, of **an appointment of God having the force of law, Romans 1:32**; plural **used of the divine precepts of the Mosaic law**: ??? ??????, Luke 1:6; ??? ??????, Romans 2:26; ?? ?????????? ??? ??????, **collectively, of the (moral) precepts of the same law**, Romans 8:4; ???????????? ??????????, precepts concerning the public worship of God, Hebrews 9:1; ???????????? ??????????, laws respecting bodily purity ((?) cf. Hebrews 7:16), Hebrews 9:10.

The lexicon even specifically mentions that the Mosaic Law is in view here.

The people who had committed the list of previously mentioned sins got the death penalty under the Mosaic Law. The NASB gets this nuance across reasonably well, the ESV... doesn't. The ESV makes it sound like God is decreeing death from on high, which isn't the point.

(*There's a reason I take every chance to mention how bad the ESV is as a translation; it matters.*)

What about God causing death in the Bible?

Virtually no one will deny that God kills people in the Bible (*effectively always in judgement for wickedness*), and we just looked at several verses which prove this. In the New Testament, there's also the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 and the entire book of Revelation, not to mention all of the other passages where God threatens judgement on the wicked.

If you want to deny that God kills people (*again, basically always in judgement for horrific wickedness*), you simply don't have a biblical leg to stand on.

However, does this fact mean that God created death itself?

I would argue that's less clear. (*Remember those spoiler verses...*)

Why is it less clear?

Well, consider Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. Cain killed Abel, but despite being the first man to kill another man, Cain is never credited in the Bible with creating death itself. Never. In fact, he's not mentioned in the Old Testament after Genesis 4, and he's barely mentioned in the New Testament as well. Even then, only as an example of unrighteousness, (*in Hebrews 11:4, 1 John 3:12, and Jude 1:11*) not as someone who created death.

Just as Cain killed someone without creating death, so also, God could kill someone(s) without creating death.

Is that sure?

No.

But it's possible and seems likely. And if we want to talk about the first murderer, that's actually the devil, not Cain.

John 8:44

44 "You are of your father *the devil*, and you want to do the desires of your father. *He was a murderer from the beginning*, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The devil is credited with the first "murder" because it was his temptation and Adam's subsequent sin that caused the death of us all.

However, it's easy to see how a modern Christian can come away from the Old Testament thinking that God created death. In fact, *for me personally — writing 3500+ years after the fact in a vastly different culture — I likely would come away from the Old Testament thinking that God did indeed create death*. However, again, I'm writing 3500+ years later in a *vastly* different culture. Thus, it's illuminating to see what those who lived at the time (*to whom it was written*) thought.

Thankfully, we can know. ?

The Jewish perspective on death

Like Christians today, the Jews wrote books on their faith. Also like today, some of them became very popular, respected, and near-universally known. One of those books is entitled "The Wisdom of Solomon". In fact, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church both consider it to be scripture, though it's not and I have [an article detailing why](#).

However, just because it's not scripture doesn't mean it's not useful. It tells us what they thought thousands of years ago. Obviously they could be wrong, and obviously it's not scripture, but it's interesting data regardless.

Wisdom of Solomon 1:11-15

11 Beware, then, of useless grumbling,
and keep your tongue from slander,
because no secret word is without result,
and a lying mouth destroys the soul.

12 Do not court death by the error of your life
or bring on destruction by the works of your hands,

13 because God did not make death,
and he does not delight in the destruction of the living.

14 For he created all things so that they might exist;
the generative forces of the world are wholesome,
and there is no destructive poison in them,
and the dominion of Hades is not on earth

15 For righteousness is immortal.

And in the next chapter:

Wisdom of Solomon 2:21-24

21 Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray,
for their wickedness blinded them,

22 and they did not know the secret purposes of God,
nor hoped for the wages of holiness,

nor discerned the prize for blameless souls,

23 for God created us for incorruption
and made us in the image of his own eternity,

24 but through an adversary's envy death entered the world,
and those who belong to his company experience it.

The footnote on “adversary’s” is as follows:

Or a devil's

Again, this isn't scripture.

However, it tells us what the Jews thought of death in scripture. That doesn't mean they're right of course because they got many things wrong, but it's interesting context anyway.

The Jews clearly believed that God did not create death, and that death came from “an adversary”, and the footnote says it could mean the devil. The Greek word used there is “????????” ([diabolos](#)), and look how it's used in the New Testament:

Matthew 4:1

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil ([diabolos](#))
.

In fact, every time you see the word “devil” in the New Testament, it's this word. Now again, **The Wisdom of Solomon isn't scripture and shouldn't be treated as such.** However, it does add some very interesting context to know what the Jews thought. That goes double because — minor spoiler — the New Testament seems to agree with them on this point.

We'll get to those verses now.

Arguments that death is NOT a punishment from God

Here's the other side of the coin, and we'll look at the strongest verse first.

Death is an enemy of God?

Because this next verse is so important to understanding this topic, we'll look at a large chunk around it so you can see the context.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

20 But now **Christ has been raised from the dead**, the first fruits of those who are asleep. **21** For since by a man *came* **death**, by a man also *came* the **resurrection of the dead**. **22** For as in Adam all **die**, so also **in Christ all will be made alive**. **23** But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, **24** then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. **25** For **He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet**. **26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death**. **27** For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. **28** When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

The important part for this discussion is verses 25-26, and especially verse 26. Here they are again so they aren't missed.

1 Corinthians 15:25-26

25 For He must reign until He has put all **His enemies** under His feet.

26 The last **enemy** that will be abolished is **death**.

Please read those two verses again and think about them for a moment.

No, really; please do.

If my reading comprehension skills are functioning right now — and they might not be, but if they are — then death is an enemy of God. Let me repeat that in big, bold, red letters so no one misses it.

According to 1 Corinthians 15:25-26, Death is an ENEMY of God.

An enemy!

Think about that for a moment. This provides an extremely clear indication that God did not create death, nor institute it as a punishment. How can God have instituted something that He Himself considers an enemy?

Now, we need to ask what kind of death is this verse talking about: physical or spiritual?

Fortunately, this is made incredibly clear by the context. Here's a smattering of verses in that chapter, both before and afterward, that make it clear. As always, it's best to read the whole chapter, but I'm not going to copy/paste the whole thing here for space reasons because it's a very long chapter. (You can read it [here](#) if you like; link opens in a new tab.

)

1 Cor 15, Selected verses

12 Now if Christ is preached, that **He has been raised from the dead**, how do some among you say that there is no **resurrection of the dead**?

35 But someone will say, “**How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?**”

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable **body**, it is raised an imperishable **body**;

You probably noticed a theme...

Those verses make it clear that it's physical/bodily death that's an enemy of God. *(And really, the whole chapter does. It's the chapter in the Bible about the bodily resurrection of the dead.)*

So, physical death is an enemy of God.

That's quite the statement.

Now, I would imagine that a PSA advocate will respond: “God created Satan and Satan is an enemy of God, so God could've created death even though death is an enemy of God.”

That's a fair argument, though it has problems. For example, there's a general consensus that Satan was an angel who fell. *(Though yes, I'm aware that there are other views.)* If Satan did fall, then God didn't create Satan as an enemy; He created Satan good, and Satan chose to fall.

There's scripture that seems to demonstrate this

Revelation 12:7-9

7 And **there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon.** The dragon and his angels waged war, **8** and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. **9** And **the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan,** who deceives the whole world; **he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.**

Again, Satan was once a righteous angel, who then sinned and was cast out of heaven. We won't go into detail in this article, but there is abundant scriptural evidence for this. *(There's a reason it's the dominant Christian view.)* We will talk about Satan and his fall more in a future article in this series, likely in *(or right after)* the article on what “ransom” and “redemption” mean.

So, Satan was righteous, then he fell and became an enemy of God. This exact same thing happens with man:

Romans 5:10

10 For if **while we were enemies** we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Notice that we were enemies too. **Why couldn't the same be true of Satan?** In fact, Satan figures into this equation more than most people realize, which we'll see in the next verse.

Who has the power of Death?

Of all the fascinating passages we'll look at, this might be the most fascinating. I've grayed out the middle because while it's a rich and important passage, it's less relevant to our current topic.

Hebrews 2:9-17

9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, **Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.**

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

12 saying,
"I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN,
IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE."

13 And again,
"I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM."
And again,
"BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME."

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, **that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.** 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Don't miss verse 14.

In fact, please read it again (*if you haven't already*).

This verse explicitly states that the one who has “the power of death” is not God, but the devil.

Now, the context of verse 9 makes it clear that we're talking about physical death, not spiritual death or “second death”.

Now, upon reading the NASB 95's translation of “*him who had the power of death*”, you might think this is a past-tense thing. However, it's a present participle in Greek, which indicates a continuously ongoing action. (*which you can confirm [here](#).*) It's the very opposite of past tense. It's a present and ongoing reality. (*And if you'd like a 3rd party source for that, you can find one [here](#).*) **Thus, it's more literally: “the one having the power of death”, present tense.**

Thus, the one having — present tense — the power of (*physical*) death is not God, but the devil.

Think about that for a moment.

No really, please do.

I'll wait.

...

...

We've already seen how the “second death” is indeed a judgement from God, but that's after physical death. In this life, it appears that physical/bodily death itself didn't come from God. Not that God can't cause physical/bodily death — of course He can, and He does many times in scripture — but death itself isn't from God.

However, while the devil has “the power of death”, scripture points to another root cause of death itself.

(*And spoiler, he has the power of death because he's brilliant at temptation.*)

The root cause of death

Thankfully, God chose to make it abundantly clear where death comes from.

James 1:13-16

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. **14** But each one is tempted when

he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. **15** Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and **when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death**. **16** Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

The word translated “it brings forth” is “???????” ([apokueó](#)), and it means:

Definition: To give birth, to bring forth

Meaning: I bring forth, give birth to (a child), a medical or physical word, marking the close of pregnancy.

Word Origin: Derived from ??? (apo, meaning “from”) and ??? (kuo, meaning “to be pregnant” or “to give birth”)

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: While there is no direct Hebrew equivalent for ??????, the concept of birth and bringing forth is often expressed in Hebrew by the verb ????? (yalad), which means “to bear” or “to bring forth.”

Usage: The verb ????? is used in the New Testament to describe the act of giving birth or bringing forth. It is often used metaphorically to describe the process of something coming into being or being produced. In a spiritual context, it can refer to the birth of spiritual life or the manifestation of sin.

The more literal nuance of “giving birth” makes a lot more sense here. Thus, according to James 1:15, sin “gives birth” to death. Let me repeat that in big bold letters so it’s not missed.

According to James 1:15, sin “gives birth” to death. Thus, the origin of death is sin.

Sin “gives birth” to death. Sin **causes** death.

This is actually stated quite clearly in a verse we already looked at:

Romans 6:23

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice that the “payer” of the wages is explicitly stated: sin itself. Sin pays out the “wages” of death.

This corroborates James, which makes it clear that the ultimate source of death is sin. Death isn’t a punishment from God, and in fact it’s God’s enemy, probably because it comes from sin.

Thus, death is a natural consequence of sin. These two aren’t the only verses that teach this either; Romans 5 says the same thing, which we’ll look at after a quick stop in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. **55** “O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” **56** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; **57** but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This doesn't clearly state that sin causes death, so I'm not quoting it for that. The important part here to keep in mind as we go forward is that second highlighted clause: “the power of sin is the law”. Please keep that in mind as we go forward.

Romans 5:12-14

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— **13** for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. **14** Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Again we see that death entered the world through sin; not God's judgement of sin, but sin itself. Consequently, death spread to all men, because sin “gives birth to” death, and all men sinned.

However, notice verse 13: “sin is not imputed when there is no law”. This is an important point that we'll examine.

The relationship between sin, law, and death.

We'll start with the verse we just looked at. Please notice that the first instance of “Law” is capitalized (referring to the Mosaic Law), but the second isn't capitalized, referring to “law” in general.

Romans 5:13

13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

So before the Mosaic law was in the world, there was still sin. But sin itself can't exist when there's no “law” at all. In fact, the purpose of the Mosaic law is explicitly stated, and it's related to sin and death.

Romans 5:20-21

20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, **21** so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign

through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And scripture expounds on this later as well:

Romans 7:5-13

5 For while we were in the flesh, **the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law**, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit **for death**. **6** But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." **8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.** **9** I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; **10** and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; **11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.** **12** So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

13 Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather **it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.**

The law showed us that sin was sinful, and what behaviors were sinful as well. There's a very real sense where without a law of some kind — even just God's moral law — sin wouldn't exist because you can't break a law that doesn't exist. Verse 8 makes this clear:

Romans 7:8

8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for **apart from the Law sin is dead**.

Consider for a moment: If God had never told Adam not to eat from the tree, could Adam have sinned?

That's the point.

Sin requires some type of "law" (i.e. a commandment) to exist. Without a law, you can't break that law. For example, you can't break the speed limit if there is no speed limit.

(And if you're wondering why God gave Adam a command — a single "law" — since He knew Adam would break it, I personally think the answer is "free will". Without the choice and opportunity to disobey God, Adam didn't really have free will or the ability to choose. God's single command gave Adam a choice.)

Thus, sin is somewhat “parasitic” because it requires a law to exist. In the Garden, Satan took advantage of the fact that there was a law (*“Don’t eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.”*) He used this law/commandment to entice Eve to sin, and then Adam wimped out and broke the command even though he knew it was wrong. (*1 Tim 2:14 says he wasn’t deceived, and Romans 5:14 uses a word that means “deliberate sin” when talking about Adam’s sin.*)

Once it became possible to sin because there was a commandment, Satan moved in for the kill.

So:

- A law makes sin possible
- Sin “gives birth” to death
- Satan wanted us to die, so he tempted us to sin.

Voila! That’s the simple explanation for how those things all work together. There’s obviously more nuance, but that’s beyond the scope of this article.

The good news

Death is an enemy of God.

Physical/bodily death isn’t something that God instituted as a punishment, but rather, it’s an enemy we have in common that He wants to save us from. I personally would include sickness and disease in “death”, since it seems obvious that they didn’t exist in Eden.

It was Jesus’s **resurrection** — not His death — that put an end to death, as it is written:

Acts 2:22-24

22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— **23** this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. **24** “But **God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.**

Notice that according to verse 24, it’s Jesus’s resurrection that put “an end to the agony of death”.

Not His death.

His resurrection.

Now, as we already saw in Revelation 21, this is a future reality because obviously people still die these days. However, Jesus's resurrection apparently made unending life on the New Earth possible.

I realize that many people have been taught that Christians will live as disembodied spirits in heaven for all eternity, but that's not what the Bible says. In fact, if you read Revelation 21 and 1 Corinthians 15, you'll find that the opposite is true. We are meant to live with glorified and incorruptible physical bodies on the New Earth. In many ways, the end will be like the beginning, like the Garden of Eden; it will be an idyllic paradise on Earth where we'll live with perfect physical bodies.

We'll talk more about that in a future article in this series, but for now, let this truth sink into your ears.

Part of the reason that Jesus died was to save us from (*physical*) death!

(Note: you might remember that we said the tree of life could've also saved us from physical death. We'll address that in a moment.)

He died not only to save us from the "second death", but also from physical/bodily death. We'll get into this more in a future article, but after Jesus died, He (*metaphorically*) kicked down the doors of Hades and defeated death itself.

Rev 1:17-19

17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; **I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19** "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.

Again, we'll go into more detail in a future article. Scripture also records the means by which we are raised from the dead.

Romans 8:10-11

10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. **11** But **if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**

It's because of the Spirit's indwelling that we will be physically/bodily raised on the New Earth in glorified/incorruptible bodies. That's good news!

The early church fathers taught this, which I know because I've been listening to them in preparation for an article on whether they supported PSA or not. No spoilers for that article here, but they definitely

did teach that Jesus died to save us from physical death.

Addendum #1 to this section

Someone might say *"If Jesus died to save us from death as you said earlier, then why do Christians still die?"* That's a good question, and God gave us the answer:

2 Peter 3:9

9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**

Contextually, the passage talks about the judgement in the day of the Lord, and also the New Earth. God doesn't end death now so that others will have an opportunity to come to repentance. I agree the wait is long, and it has been for about 2,000 years, but it will happen. I recommend you read the entire chapter, which you can do [here](#). (*Link opens in a new tab.*)

I'll also point out that PSA doesn't have such an easy explanation for why Christians still die if death was the punishment that Jesus suffered vicariously in our place as our substitute on the cross.

Addendum #2 to this section

Stepping outside of what scripture teaches for a moment to the effect of its teaching, there's a mindset difference between the understanding above and the way the gospel is typically preached these days. The Gospel today is something like: "Repent, because God's justice requires Him to inflict unspeakable torment on you if you don't" versus: "Repent, because God died to save you from death so that you could live forever with Him."

Those aren't necessarily contradictory, but the focus is entirely different.

As mentioned in the intro article, I've been reading the early church fathers a lot to see if they taught PSA. Regardless of if they did or not — and I won't get into that here, but instead save it for a dedicated article — they never focus on God's wrath and judgement. Many of them teach it, but it's not the focus like it is today.

The focus of the early church fathers is twofold:

1. What we've seen in this article, that Jesus died to save us from physical/bodily death, so that we could be alive on the New Earth.
2. The topic that will be the focus of the article on redemption/ransom later in this series.

I'm not saying that God's justice and wrath shouldn't be taught; they should be taught because the Bible teaches them. However, just because they're taught doesn't mean it needs to be the sole focus

like it is today.

The early church's gospel presentation would sound nothing like the modern church's gospel presentation, even if they believed all the same things.

The early church turned the world upside down and gathered converts in incredible numbers right from the beginning. Today, the modern church is anemic and slowly fading from relevance.

Even if you come away from this series with a new commitment to PSA, you still shouldn't ignore the other aspects of the gospel.

At least part of the reason Jesus died was so that we wouldn't need to die; so we could be saved from the wages/consequence of sin, which is death. Death wasn't a punishment from Him, it's an enemy of Him. He died to save us from that enemy.

Pick a story of a man sacrificing himself to save his friends, charging into the fray with no chance of survival to ensure that his friends lived.

- Think of Gandalf saying "Fly you fools!" before letting go of the bridge in Moria/Khazad-Dûm in The Lord of the Rings, sacrificing himself so his friends might live.
- Think of Boromir sacrificing himself to save the hobbits, also in Lord of the Rings.
- Think of Spock sacrificing himself to fix the warp drive in Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn so that the Enterprise could escape an imminent explosion.
- Think of Tony Stark/Iron Man snapping his fingers with the Infinity Gauntlet in Avengers; Endgame to save everyone.
- Think of Aslan sacrificing himself to save Edmund in The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe

There are so many more that aren't as commonly known, like the T-800 in Terminator 2: Judgement Day, Groot in Guardians of the Galaxy, Russell Casse in Independence Day, Creasy in Man On Fire, and so, so many more.

That's Jesus.

He died to save us from certain death.

And I must reiterate that physical/bodily death is **not** a punishment from God for sin, but rather a natural consequence of sin. So at least in the case of physical/bodily death, Jesus wasn't dying to save us from God's wrath as PSA teaches.

Thus, Jesus really did die to save us from our common enemy: death itself.

That hits people differently than "Jesus died to save us from God/Himself". Even if PSA is 100% true, it doesn't need to be the focus of evangelism. The early church didn't seem to make it the focus and they had no problems getting converts.

Perhaps the modern church could take a page out of their book.

What about “Spiritual Death”?

The trouble with this topic is that the Bible never defines “spiritual death”, nor even uses that exact phrase. It’s not a category explicitly mentioned, though that doesn’t necessarily mean it doesn’t exist. **Spiritual death is usually explained something like the following:**

First, the person explaining it will often quote James:

James 2:26

26 For just as **the body without the spirit is dead**, so also faith without works is dead.

Now, I want to point out that this verse doesn’t mention anything about “spiritual death”. Nothing at all. In fact, it’s using physical/bodily death as an example. If you read the passage in context, it’s about how to tell if someone has real faith or if he has “dead faith”, i.e. fake faith. It’s not about separation from God. Regardless, it’s often used to support “spiritual death”.

And then an explanation like the following is given:

Death is separation. A physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. **Spiritual death**, which is of greater significance, **is the separation of the soul from God**.

[Source](#).

Now, setting aside that “soul” is the wrong word there (*it should be “spirit”, as spirit and soul are completely different things, but I digress...*), that’s a broadly speaking accurate generalization of the common understanding of “spiritual death”.

One of only two passages that might tie these two concepts together is the following one:

Ephesians 2:1-6 + 11-12

1 And **you were dead in your trespasses and sins**, **2** in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. **3** Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when **we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

...

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” *which is performed in the flesh by human*

hands— **12** *remember* that **you were at that time separate from Christ**, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope **and without God in the world**.

Despite the rather large gap that separates verses 1 and 5 from verse 12, they certainly appear to be talking about the same time period; i.e. the one before salvation. Therefore, linking the concepts of “separate from Christ” and “without God” with “dead in your trespasses and sins” seems legitimate... if there were no parallel passages to lend clarity. In this case, there’s at least one, and we already saw it in this article.

Romans 8:10-11

10 If Christ is in you, **though the body is dead because of sin**, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. **11** But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Remember that Romans and Ephesians were both written by Paul.

Thus, it seems obvious that Ephesians 2:1 — like Romans 8:10 — is talking about bodily/physical death, not spiritual death.

Even if Ephesians was talking about spiritual death, it would be one of only two passages that establishes a connection of any kind.

Probably the clearest passage where something like “spiritual death” is mentioned is the parable of the prodigal son, right near the end where the father is talking to the irate older brother. Here are the two relevant verses in the one translation that gets the Greek tenses correct, instead of the usual NASB 95, which whiffs the tenses here. (*Though honestly, I’m not sure that matters to our topic, but more correct/literal is always a good thing.*)

Luke 15:31-32 (*Literal Standard Version*)

31 And he said to him, Child, you are always with me, and all my things are yours; **32** but to be merry, and to be glad, it was necessary, because **this your brother was dead, and lived again**, he was lost, and was found.”

Given the story in the parable, “dead” can’t mean physical/bodily death. This is clearly a metaphorical death and there are two ways to understand it. **(1)** this is a reference to “spiritual death”. **(2)** This is slightly idiomatic, like how we might say “he’s dead to me” in modern times to indicate that something is completely cut out of your life.

Either understanding works.

However, deciding that #1 is correct means you are basing the entire category of “spiritual death” on a single passing mention in a single verse. That’s a bad idea, especially when that mention has alternate understandings that work just as well.

Further, I would like to emphasize the tenuous nature of the verses. Ephesians 2:1 with the context of Romans 8:10 seems to clearly be about physical death, and it would be easy to take Luke 15:32 as idiomatic like “he was dead to me”. It seems like a bad idea to get dogmatic about passages that have legitimate alternate understandings.

Those two passages are the only examples of “spiritual death” that I can find. All the others either don’t mention death or could easily be referring to physical/bodily death.

For example, there’s a passage in John 5 that’s regularly cited as being about “spiritual death”. However, when you read it in context, it’s clearly about physical/bodily death, not “spiritual death”.

John 5:21-29

21 “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. **22** “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, **23** so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. **24** “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

25 “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. **26** “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; **27** and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man. **28** “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, **29** and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.

Consider: which “type” of death is this about?

Especially given verse 21 about raising the dead, and verse 28 about “all who are in the tombs” hearing, is this about physical life/death, or “spiritual” life/death?

It seems like it’s clearly about physical/bodily life/death, not “spiritual death”.

Obviously there’s a “spiritual death” component if we define that as “separation from God”. However, that’s not what this verse is talking about. Given the mention of raising the dead, and especially of tombs, it seems clear that physical death/life is in view here. That’s very important because of the mention of “eternal life” in verse 24.

Remember that according to 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 21, we won’t spend eternity as disembodied spirits in heaven. Instead, we’ll spend them with glorified physical bodies on the New Earth, which in many ways appears to resemble the Garden of Eden. (*It’s sort of a “bookend” on the story of mankind that way; it ends similar to how it began.*)

)

To phrase that another way, we will live eternally in bodies on the New Earth. Notice, “live eternally”. Another way to say that is “have eternal life”.

Seriously.

If this passage is indeed about physical death/life, wouldn't that also make “eternal life” in verse 24 about physical/bodily death/life?

Maybe?

It seems so, or at least likely.

There's another verse that's often used to talk about “spiritual death”, but please notice that death isn't mentioned at all in this verse. If you look at the rest of the chapter or the previous chapter, you'll see that anything resembling “spiritual death” is never mentioned.

Isaiah 59:1-2

1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short
That it cannot save;
Nor is His ear so dull
That it cannot hear.

2 But **your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God,**
And **your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.**

The idea that sin separates us from God is certainly present. However, it's not called “spiritual death”. In fact, with the exception of the Prodigal son — and maybe Ephesians 2 if you ignore Romans 8:10 — there's almost no support for the phrase “spiritual death” in the Bible, even though the underlying idea is quite biblical. (*That is, being separated from God leads to death.*)

Many Christians seem to have “spiritual death lenses” whenever they look at scripture.

One big problem is that many Christians — even Christian teachers — want to say that when scripture says “death”, it means “spiritual death” and not physical/bodily death. That's not always a problem, but it certainly can be. They see “death” in a passage and unless the context clearly indicates that it's physical/bodily death, they assume that spiritual death is in view. Sometimes they say it's “spiritual death” even if the context clearly states that it's physical/bodily death. (*The passage above in John 5 is a perfect example of this.*)

In summary, while there is a smidgen of support for the phrase “spiritual death”, there is no reason to assume that “spiritual death” is in view when you see the word “death” in the Bible, unless the context clearly dictates it.

It's effectively always physical/bodily death, even arguably in Ephesians 2, **even if you ignore Romans 8:10**. Here's a slightly more literal translation of the verse

Ephesians 2:1-2 (LSV)

1 Also you—**being dead in trespasses and sins**, **2** in which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience

Why can't that be physical death?

Why can't that be similar to our phrase "dead man walking"?

We use it to indicate someone who is most certainly going to die — either because of some incurable terminal disease or because he's been sentenced to death — even though that man isn't dead yet. We've already established that sin "gives birth" to death, so therefore, any man who practices sin is dying. (*Especially apart from faith in Christ.*)

It doesn't have to be "spiritual death". (*And that's even ignoring Romans 8:10.*)

Certainly, the Prodigal Son passage that we saw earlier could argue for "spiritual death" as a category, albeit a rare one with alternate understandings. Thus, for now, we'll proceed on the assumption that it's a real category. I personally think it's dubious, but for the sake of argument, we'll proceed on the assumption that it's a real category.

That leads to an important question:

Did Jesus die a "spiritual death" on the cross?

As defined above and by virtually all Christians who use the term, "spiritual death" means separation from God. That is, the person who's "spiritually dead" has been separated from God and fellowship/communion/relationship from Him. If Jesus died a "spiritual death" on the cross, then — at least for a few hours on the cross — Jesus was separated from God and fellowship/communion/relationship with Him.

Think about that for a moment.

Really, please do.

While you're doing that, consider the Trinity for a moment in this context.

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Keep those ponderings on the back burner for a minute while we look at the passage that's most often used to say that Jesus suffered "spiritual death" on the cross. That is, it's used to say that God turned away from Jesus while He was on the cross.

Matthew 27:45-51

45 Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. **46** About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "**MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?**" **47** And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, *began* saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." **48** Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. **49** But the rest of *them* said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." **50** And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. **51** And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

Did you notice that the words were in BOLD lettering? That's because the NASB puts quotations of the Old Testament in caps to alert the reader that the Old Testament is being quoted. Here, Jesus is quoting Psalm 22:1, and we'll include several of the verses afterward. However, I recommend that you read the entire Psalm to get the full context, which you can do [here](#). (*Link opens in a new tab.*)

Psalm 22:1-5

1 My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?

Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.

2 O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer;
And by night, but I have no rest.

3 Yet You are holy,
O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

4 In You our fathers trusted;
They trusted and You delivered them.

5 To You they cried out and were delivered;
In You they trusted and were not disappointed.

Keep verses 4 and 5 in your mind for a moment. **Psalm 22 is a direct and clear prophecy of the cross, and virtually no Christian will deny this.** There are many reasons for this, but I'll copy/paste the easiest and most obvious verses that establish this. (*There are other verses as well, but I'm just grabbing the most obvious ones.*)

Psalm 22: Selected verses**7 All who see me sneer at me;**

They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,

8 “Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him;**Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”** (*Matthew 27:43 directly alludes to these two verses.*)

...

16 For dogs have surrounded me;

A band of evildoers has encompassed me;

They pierced my hands and my feet.

...

18 They divide my garments among them,And **for my clothing they cast lots.** (*Matthew 27:35 directly alludes to this.*)

...

24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;**Nor has He hidden His face from him;**

But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.

Please read verse 24 again.

Did you read it again? You might even want to read it a 3rd time. **If Psalm 22 is a prophecy of the cross — and I think you’ll agree that it is — then we need to look at the whole prophecy.** You can’t just look at one part of the prophecy and say “See! This one part supports my position!” and then not consider the rest of the passage. That’s terrible Bible study. That’s reading your position into the text instead of trying to determine what the text is saying. (*Called “eisegesis”.*)

Not reading the whole context is a huge mistake.

Another huge mistake is not considering the cultural context of a statement. Ray Vander Laan has a wonderful (*though imperfect*) video that mentions the cultural context surrounding this. He spent years in Israel studying with Rabbis, and made it part of his life’s mission to help Western Christians understand the context in which the Bible was written. I have a couple of his videos embedded in my article: [Seeing the Bible from the Hebrew Cultural Perspective](#).

Anyway, to summarize, he talks a lot about the Hebrew concept of “remez”, or “hint”. The idea is that you would quote one part of the Bible, and the listeners knew the Bible so well that they would instantly know what came after it. (*The shorter video embedded in the article link above explains this well.*) Related to this concept of “remez” is how they referred to the Psalms.

Remember, the Jews didn't have chapter numbers in the 1st century. **If you wanted to reference a psalm, you did so by the first line of the psalm.** (Again, see the link above for the evidence.) When Jesus quoted the first line of Psalm 22, I'm 99.9% sure that He was pointing back to a prophecy about Himself. (Though of course I could be wrong.) **Jesus was saying "Look at Psalm 22 because I'm fulfilling that prophecy right now!"**

...and that includes verse 24 because it's part of the prophecy.

(Again, check out the videos embedded in my article [Seeing the Bible from the Hebrew Cultural Perspective](#) for ironclad evidence of this.)

Let's look at it one more time:

Psalm 22:24

24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
Nor has He hidden His face from him;
 But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.

So, did Jesus suffer "spiritual death" on the cross? And as you answer, remember that the prophecy of Psalm 22 clearly states that God didn't turn His face away.

Given the prophecy of Psalm 22:24, I don't see how it's possible that Jesus suffered "spiritual death" on the cross because again, the prophecy specifically states that God didn't turn his face away.

This is the danger of not checking the context; you miss things. Every Bible teacher knows this, and every single one has broken this rule at some point or another because none of us are perfect. I've broken it (*though again, not intentionally*). The best teachers do it rarely and only accidentally, and I aspire to that. I'd like to think I'm successful, but then again, man's capacity for self-delusion is nearly unlimited.

Additionally, there are some serious problems with the idea that Jesus suffered "spiritual death" on the cross. There are also consequences if he suffered the other kinds as well, and we'll look at those now.

Logical consequences of the PSA position

We defined three types of death early in this article:

- **Physical/bodily death**, which is defined as the cessation of life in the body.
- **Spiritual death**, which is defined as separation from God.

- **The Second death**, which is defined as being cast from the presence of God at the final “Great White Throne” judgement.

So now, we’ll consider these things one-by-one and see what would it mean if — as PSA claims — Jesus suffered each one as a punishment vicariously in our place as our substitute.

Physical/bodily death

No one will deny that Jesus indeed suffered physical/bodily death on the cross. (*Well, no one except some Gnostic heretics from the early church.*) However, PSA says that physical/bodily death (*usually in addition to spiritual death*) is the punishment that God instituted for our sins. We’ve already seen that this isn’t the case, but we’ll pretend it’s true for a moment for the sake of argument.

If — as PSA claims — physical/bodily death is God’s punishment for sin, and Jesus took our punishment vicariously on the cross in our place as our substitute, then why do Christians die?

Anyone?

According to the PSA position, wouldn’t our sin be punished twice in that case? Once when Jesus died, and once when we die?

This difficulty is easily solved if you accept that physical/bodily death isn’t a punishment for sin. But accepting the PSA premise for the sake of argument, Christians dying then makes no sense, especially in the light of several verses:

John 5:24

“Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.**”

Notice, “passed out of death into life”. If death is the punishment for sin instituted by God, then why would Christians die if Jesus took that punishment? The obvious answer from the PSA camp is that “eternal life” doesn’t happen until the New Earth. However, that really doesn’t answer this objection. Again, wouldn’t the PSA position mean that our sin is punished twice? That is, once when Jesus took it and once when we die?

This is part of the reason that even if you hold firmly to PSA, you shouldn’t consider physical/bodily death to be a punishment for sin, but rather a natural consequence of sin.

Next, we’ll return to the idea that Jesus suffered “spiritual death”.

“Spiritual Death”

(We'll ignore Psalm 22 for the sake of argument for a moment.)

There are two versions of this position; a clearly heretical one that breaks the Trinity, and then another one that doesn't.

We'll look at the heretical one first.

The Heretical Version

At first glance, it might seem like Jesus suffering "spiritual death" on the cross as a vicarious punishment for our sin makes more sense than Him suffering physical/bodily death. However, it actually has rather a lot of problems, and one of them is more serious than the others. **Remember that "spiritual death" is defined as separation from God.** If Jesus suffered "spiritual death" on the cross, that would mean that Jesus was separated from God.

Think about that for a moment.

IF Jesus suffered "spiritual death" on the cross, then Jesus — the second person of the Trinity — was separated from God. IF that's true, then was God separated from Himself? Doesn't that break the Trinity?

If one member of the Trinity was separated from the other two, doesn't that break the Trinity? Okay, perhaps it was "only" for a few hours on the cross, but doesn't that still break the Trinity?

Consider:

- **If** you are going to define "spiritual death" as separation from God
- **And if** you say that Jesus suffered "spiritual death" on the cross
- **Then logically:** Jesus was separated from God at the cross.
- **Thus:** the Trinity ceased to exist for a few hours on the cross.

Further, consider the following: *(The first two lines are repeats.)*

- **If** you are going to define "spiritual death" as separation from God
- **And if** you say that Jesus suffered "spiritual death" on the cross
- **And if** you say that Jesus is God Himself come in the flesh
- **Then Logically:** Jesus was separated from Himself on the cross.

My logic could be flawed, but I don't think it is. *(Please leave a comment explaining how it's flawed if you see a flaw; Unitarians, please read [this article of mine](#) before commenting about this.)* This is part of the reason that "spiritual death" doesn't make sense even from a PSA perspective.

If Jesus wasn't actually separated from God on the cross, then He didn't suffer "spiritual death" and all these problems completely disappear... but that creates other problems for PSA. For example: what kind of death did Jesus die in punishment for our sins? (*We'll look at if He suffered the "second death" in a moment.*)

The non-heretical version

Now, there's another, slightly modified, version of "spiritual death" that might work better. Well, sort of. To explain it, I copy/pasted a Q&A question from one of the videos in Mike Winger's PSA video series.

Question: what are your thoughts regarding the actual punishment? Do you accept the argument that Jesus was cut off from the father and taking the punishment like we would be?

Mike Winger's answer: I don't think he was, he was ontologically separated from the father; the, the Trinity was never broken. Never. I am sympathetic to the view, and this is what Turret and said in in his defense of penal substitution in the 1500s, I'm sympathetic to his view of the beatific vision — that's the phrase that they would use, the idea that Christ, and I showed this a little bit earlier — that he lost that full, full awareness, full present-tense awareness of the relationship of goodness and joy that he had with the Father. The constant experience of the glorious wonder that it is to be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in relationship to each other, so there's an awareness of a thing versus the thing itself.

[Source.](#) (*Starting at about 1:23:16*)

So, for those who don't know what the "beatific vision" is, here's an explanation:

The beatific vision is a theological concept that describes the future reality in which believers will get to see God face to face. The word beatific is derived from the Latin word beatifica, which means "to make happy or bless." The word vision is derived from the Latin word visio, which means "the act of seeing." Literally, then, beatific vision refers to a sight that makes one happy.

As it relates to theology, the beatific vision is the unhindered and unfiltered view of God that believers will have in the new heaven and new earth. This coming reality will make us happier and more joyful than anything else we have experienced. We will dwell in the holy presence of God and see His glory.

[Source.](#)

So, according to this understanding, Jesus was always seeing the Father in His full glory even when Jesus was on Earth. On the cross, the punishment for our sins was — I suppose — that Jesus could no longer see it. **According to this understanding of PSA, Jesus being deprived of seeing God's full glory was the actual punishment that Jesus took vicariously in our place as our substitute.**

Now, do you see the problem with that?

I'll give you a hint: Psalm 22:24.

Psalm 22:24

24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
Nor has He hidden His face from him;
But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.

The prophecy in Psalm 22:24 explicitly states that God ***didn't*** hide His face from Jesus. So this "loss of the beatific vision" version of "spiritual death" directly contradicts scripture and thus it can't be true, even though it's less problematic than the more common view of "spiritual death".

Admittedly, the "loss of the beatific vision" position does indeed avoid the Trinitarian problems. However, it also completely ignores scripture.

Obviously ignoring scripture is a no-go. It ignores scripture in another way as well, but we'll get to that in a moment.

"Spiritual death", round #3

Now, I'm going to "Steel Man" The PSA position by providing it with another rescue that I've literally never heard anyone mention before. (*Someone probably has though; I'm not that original or smart.*) So here's the basic idea:

If we say that the "loss of the beatific vision" was the punishment, but then also affirm that Psalm 22:24 says that God the Father didn't turn his face away, then what if Jesus Himself metaphorically "closed his eyes" so He stopped seeing it?

This position actually solves some of the deeper problems with PSA. For example, there's always been the question in my mind of God "pouring out wrath" on Jesus and God punishing Jesus, because Jesus *is* God. I've always wondered how Jesus could punish Himself or "pour out His wrath" on Himself because He is God. This provides a potential explanation.

The explanation is that Jesus deprived Himself of the “beatific vision” by (metaphorically) “closing His eyes” so He could no longer see it. Thus, we have — for lack of a better way to put it — Jesus (*who is God*) closing His eyes to God’s glory and in effect punishing Himself by depriving Himself of the “beatific vision”. This avoids Psalm 22:24 issues and also explains how Jesus could “pour out His wrath” on Himself.

The trouble is, this explanation effectively amounts to Jesus “closing His eyes”.

The problem with this “solution” is that scripture records that Jesus’s death was necessary; it was unavoidable, it had to happen.

Matthew 16:21

From that time **Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.**

Some translations have “it is necessary” instead of “must”, which is slightly more literal. The point remains the same: Jesus had to die. Thus, Jesus’s physical/bodily death was necessary. It was not optional in the plan of salvation.

However, the “loss of the beatific vision” view makes Jesus’s death unnecessary, and frankly, so does the “spiritual death” view.

Seriously.

Consider:

1. If you hold to the “The Father turned His face away” view and say it’s “spiritual death” (*and ignore the Trinitarian issues and Psalm 22:24*), then why couldn’t the Father have done that at any point?
2. If you hold to the “loss of the beatific vision” view — either the “Father turned His face away” or Jesus “closing His eyes” — then again, **why couldn’t that have happened at any point in Jesus’s life? Why did it have to be at the crucifixion?**

This is an honest question.

Scripture teaches that it was necessary for Jesus **to be killed. That’s speaking of **physical/bodily death**.**

But contradicting that, the “spiritual death” view of PSA — regardless of the version — makes Jesus’s physical/bodily death unnecessary.

How then can it be true?

Again, Jesus's physical/bodily death was necessary for God's plan of salvation. Necessary. It wasn't optional, it was necessary. **However, despite it being necessary, death is still God's enemy, and the devil still is the one "having the power of death".**

Now, you might ask: "*How in the world do you square that circle, especially without PSA?*" Well, there is a way. Sadly, there just isn't room in this already obscenely long article, and we need the rest of this article for context. Thus, we'll look at it in the next article.

"Spiritual death", round #4

IF the punishment for sin is spiritual death, then Jesus would've had to take that punishment in our place vicariously as our substitute. Further, this punishment is explicitly described in the New Testament, and it certainly sounds very problematic for PSA.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

6 For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, **7** and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, **8** dealing out retribution to **those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10** when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

(Note: we'll ignore the "eternal" aspect for now, including the question of how Jesus's temporary suffering could substitute for eternal suffering. That'll fit better in a later article, so we'll ignore it for now.)

Notice the phrase "away from the presence of the Lord". Contextually, because of the end of verse 8, "the Lord" is obviously Jesus. So then, according to PSA, the punishment that Jesus took vicariously in our place as our substitute was separation from Himself? Does that make sense? It seems to twist things into logic knots from which there's no escape.

Even if we try to "rescue" this and say that the punishment is separation from God generally and not Jesus specifically so Jesus isn't somehow separated from Himself, that still causes all the Trinitarian issues we saw under the heretical version of the "spiritual death" understanding.

If Jesus took our punishment of being "away from the presence of the Lord" vicariously in our place as our substitute as PSA seemingly must claim, then the Trinity must have been broken at the cross.

Further, Jesus must have been separated from Himself on the cross because He is the Lord, and the punishment is explicitly described as being “away from the presence of the Lord”.

How does that make sense?

Further, if you consider the “*depart from Me, I never knew you*” passage and a few others, it certainly seems like the punishment is God “turning His face away” from us since being “away from the presence of the Lord” seemingly necessitates that. Thus, ***IF*** Jesus took our punishment in our place vicariously as our substitute as PSA claims, and our punishment was God turning His face from us... But there again, we’ve violated Psalm 22:24.

Even the “loss of the beatific vision” position gets hammered hard by this passage because the punishment is explicitly described as being “away from the presence of the Lord”. The “loss of the beatific vision” position doesn’t have Jesus being “away from the presence of the Lord”, it has Him not seeing the glory of the Lord.

Those are two different things.

Okay, we can try another Steel-Man style “rescue” and say that since God is omnipresent, someone can’t actually be separated from God. Thus, this separation is simply us being in a place where God doesn’t make His presence known or felt. ***Well, that does work better in that it avoids Trinitarian issues, but we’re essentially back to the “loss of the beatific vision” view, which makes Jesus’s physical/bodily death and resurrection unnecessary.***

Further, does “*being in a place where God doesn’t make His presence known or felt*” really align with being “away from the presence of the Lord”? I suppose if you’re willing to stretch things rather a lot — almost to the breaking point but perhaps not quite beyond it — it makes some sense. (*I wouldn’t stretch scripture that much, but I suppose someone could.*) However, that still makes Jesus’s physical/bodily death and resurrection unnecessary, and shocker, stretching scripture in one place means you’ve outright violated it in another.

It’s a problem.

I haven’t found a way that makes sense to understand the position that the punishment that Jesus took vicariously in our place as our substitute was “spiritual death”. It just has so many problems.

“Spiritual death”, round #5

This section exists solely to point out a fatal flaw with a subset of the “loss of the beatific vision” understanding. (*I realized this just before publishing, which is why it isn’t folded into the sections above*). That subset is the only “rescue” that maintains any shred of scriptural fidelity, but it requires rather a lot of assumptions that aren’t supported scripturally.

Here are those assumptions:

1. The punishment that Jesus suffered vicariously in our place as our substitute was the loss of the beatific vision
2. The way this punishment was administered was that Jesus metaphorically “closed His eyes” to God’s glory, including His own.
3. The loss of the beatific vision is equivalent to the phrase “away from the presence of the Lord”.
4. Jesus’s physical/bodily death was necessary for Him to metaphorically “close His eyes” and lose sight of the beatific vision

If you are willing to accept all of those assumptions, then it’s possible that PSA could be true... except that it still runs afoul of Psalm 22:24

Psalm 22:24

24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
Nor has He hidden His face from him;
 But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.

Here’s the problem: **If Jesus “closed His eyes” to suffer the loss of the beatific vision, then that means that Jesus — who is God in the flesh — hid His face from Himself.** That still runs afoul of Psalm 22:24. It still means that God — Jesus in this case — hid His face from Himself.

Again, that doesn’t make sense.

I suppose you could say that Jesus “closing His eyes” doesn’t count as Him hiding His face from Himself. I’m not sure how you would support that scripturally, or even logically, and you would be up to 5 dubious assumptions if you include the 4 above. However, that would be the only possible way to make PSA work if you were committed to the idea that “spiritual death” was the punishment that Jesus suffered vicariously in our place as our substitute.

“Second Death”

As we saw at the beginning of the article, the “second death” is the result of the Great White Throne Judgement. Since Jesus is the one conducting that particular judgement, I don’t see how Jesus could’ve suffered it. Nevertheless, we’ll discuss it for completeness.

If you remember from the beginning of this article, the “second death” is being thrown into the lake of fire after the final judgement. However, we know for sure that’s not where Jesus went when he died because scripture tells us where he went while He was dead.

1 Peter 3:18-20

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us

to God, **having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient,** when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.

Now, we won't go on a rabbit trail and investigate who the "spirits now in prison" are, mostly because it doesn't matter for the focus of this article. Some say it's fallen angels, some say it's righteous dead men, and some say it's wicked dead men; those are the main views.

Regardless of who you think it is, none of those groups were in the lake of fire during the time Jesus was physically dead. Thus, Jesus obviously didn't suffer the "second death" because no one else was in the lake of fire while He would've had to be there. He definitely didn't kick Himself off the Great White Throne of Judgement to throw Himself into the lake of fire.

So no, Jesus didn't suffer the "second death" as a vicarious punishment in our place as our substitute.

I know, you're shocked. ?

Multiple types?

We've just seen some major problems with each of the three different "types" of death when viewed through the PSA lens. However, perhaps those problems would disappear if Jesus suffered multiple types of death on the cross?

Well, first I think we need to discard the "second death" as an option. I don't think there's a single soul — living or dead — who holds to that position. (*Though, there were some really strange heresies in the early church, so maybe.*) Thus, I think it's safe to discard it.

So what if Jesus suffered both physical/bodily death and spiritual death in a penal substitutionary fashion?

The problem with that is it doesn't eliminate any problems that I can see, and rather combines the weaknesses of both views to make the overall position even weaker still.

There's only one exception to that, which is someone could say that Jesus's physical death was necessary for Him to lose sight of the "beatific vision".

I have no idea how someone would support that idea scripturally, but someone could take that position . However, the trouble with taking that position is that there isn't a single shred of biblical proof for it, nor even evidence. Really, there isn't even a hint of such a thing, at least as far as I've been able to see.

PSA's "death problem"

To recap this section:

- If Jesus suffered **physical/bodily death** in a penal substitutionary manner, it creates the following problems:
 - Sins are punished twice; once when Jesus died and once when the Christian dies
 - Death is stated to be an enemy of God that He will defeat
- If Jesus suffered **“spiritual death”** in a penal substitutionary manner, it creates the following problems:
 - It ignores the prophecy of Psalm 22:24
 - It makes Jesus’s physical death unnecessary, despite scripture calling it necessary
 - It breaks the Trinity (*Unless you subscribe to the “loss of the beatific vision” version*)
 - If you subscribe to the “loss of the beatific vision” version, it creates the problem of Jesus’s death being unnecessary.
 - If you say that Jesus’s physical/bodily death was necessary for the “loss of the beatific vision”, there’s no scripture to support that assertion.
 - It ignores 2 Thessalonians 1:9, which says that the penalty is being “away from the Lord”
 - If you understand “the Lord” in context as Jesus, it means that Jesus was separated from Himself, which makes no sense.
 - If you understand “the Lord” as God generally, you both ignore the immediate context and also require breaking the Trinity.
 - If you understand “away from the Lord” as literal, it again requires breaking the Trinity. (*Somewhat alleviated by understanding this as a loss of the “beatific vision”, but again, that still makes Jesus’s physical death unnecessary.*)
- If Jesus suffered **the “second death”** in a penal substitutionary manner, it creates the following problems: (*Not that I think any of you think this, but for completeness...*)
 - It ignores the fact that Jesus is the judge on the Great White Throne
 - It ignores 1 Peter 3 which tells us where Jesus went while dead, and it wasn’t to the lake of fire.

All these things create a problem for PSA, namely: **What kind of death is left?**

Remember, PSA says that the punishment for sin is death, and Jesus took that punishment vicariously in our place as our substitute. So, **which kind of death did Jesus suffer as our substitute?**

Seriously?

Which kind?

I don’t think there are any kinds left.

While PSA passed its first test with flying colors (*that man’s sin deserves God’s wrath*), it’s been struggling ever since. Now, its core premise doesn’t seem to make any sense anymore given what we’ve just seen about the different “types” of death.

There’s one more thing we need to discuss before we get to the conclusion.

What about Elijah and Enoch?

Any discussion of death in the Bible would be incomplete without discussing Elijah and Enoch, the two men who never died.

Genesis 2:21-24

21 Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah. **22** Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. **23** So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. **24** Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

And Hebrews comments on Enoch, just in case we were in doubt:

Hebrews 11:5

5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Enoch never died; he didn't "see death". The same is true of Elijah, who was taken up into heaven seemingly much like Enoch, though we don't have details for Enoch so we can't be certain. You can read the whole story of Elijah being taken up in 2 Kings 2 [here](#) (*link opens in a new tab*), but since it's basically the same as Enoch and Enoch established the precedent, we'll just focus on the fact that two men never died.

How does PSA explain this?

They died before Jesus did, so the argument that Jesus's death on the cross enabled it doesn't make much sense.

However...

There is a counter-argument. (*Yes, I realize that this series sometimes sounds like I'm having a back-and-forth argument with myself; there's a reason for that.*)

While doing research on this, I couldn't find anything from a PSA perspective to explain this. Nothing. It seems like PSA supporters never address this, which is odd. Oddly, the only thing I found was a vague reference to them having been saved "on credit" in the snippet of a search result. Not on the page, just the snippet.

I suppose that makes some sense.

Not a lot, but some.

There's another explanation that seems to make more sense though. We saw earlier that the Tree of Life could've prevented physical death, and there are indications that the Tree of Life wasn't destroyed in the flood, but rather "moved to heaven", or perhaps to wherever Enoch and Elijah went.

Revelation 22:1-2

1 Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 2 in the middle of its street. **On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month;** and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Thus, God could've kept them physically alive with the Tree of Life until Jesus's work for our salvation was accomplished. That makes perfect sense and doesn't require any twisting. This would probably work with any perspective, so it's not an argument against PSA.

Conclusion

We started by looking at the three kinds of death in the Bible: **(1)** physical/bodily death, **(2)** "spiritual death" (*defined as separation from God*), and **(3)** the "second death", which is the Great White Throne judgement. We saw that the "second death" was indeed a punishment from God for sin.

Then we looked at the arguments that death is a punishment from God. Genesis 2 and 3 were inconclusive since they could've only been a warning of consequence, not a punishment. We looked at God reducing lifespans and that also doesn't make death a punishment from God, because all of them were going to die anyway. (*And the shortened lifespans were likely a result of the post-flood changes in the ecosystem anyway.*)

We then looked at the "angel of death" and discovered that such an angel doesn't exist. In fact, it was God Himself who struck during the 10th plague, and most likely the pre-incarnate Jesus. We also looked at a few passages in Romans which — when properly understood — don't make God the author of death. Additionally, we also saw that the Jews never thought that death itself was from God.

We then looked at the argument that God didn't create death, starting with the fact that **death is an enemy of God. Then we saw that the devil was the one who has — present tense — "the power of death" and that that was true because he is a tempter and that James says that sin "gives birth" to death, making death a natural consequence of sin.** We saw that sin gets its power from law, because you can't break a law that doesn't exist.

We looked at “spiritual death” and saw that while there is a case for it, it’s weak and only mentioned once. We saw that Jesus’s words on the cross were from a prophecy in Psalm 22, and that prophecy specifically stated that God didn’t turn His face away from Jesus, and thus Jesus didn’t suffer “spiritual death” on the cross.

Further, we looked at the logical consequences of if Jesus suffered each type of death on the cross and saw that they were all very problematic. We then looked at Elijah and Enoch, but they don’t weigh in on the PSA debate.

Wow, even the recap is super long. Sorry about that, but the Bible has a lot to say on the topic and I didn’t want to split it into multiple articles.

The next article will be something of a mid-series recap, which will be a springboard to talk about the mechanics of How Jesus’s death and resurrection save us from physical/bodily death by making it possible for us to be resurrected on the New Earth.

If you have been reading this series and wondering what Jesus’s death accomplished, this should answer that. (*Or at least half of it; we’ll start talking about the other half after that article.*)

I’ll see you there.

God Bless and have a wonderful day. ?