

One God

Jesus Died

by Sean Finnegan

Someone once asked the question: "Can God microwave a burrito so hot that He cannot eat it?" To answer yes implies that God cannot eat extremely hot burritos. To answer no implies that God cannot heat it to such a level. This sort of question is flawed because it consists of a contradiction. It is similar to saying, "Can God make a square circle?" The definition of "square" is that there are four right angles with equal sides, whereas the definition of "circle" is that there are no right angles and only one side. Thus, the question involves a contradiction of definition and is therefore meaningless. Sometimes we ask questions like this in the realm of theology. The reasoning usually starts with the assumption "God can do anything," and quickly progresses to "He could become man and die if He wanted to." I believe that the statement, "God died," is just as meaningless as the burrito question.

It is my position that there are certain attributes that God cannot change. For example, God cannot lie, cheat, steal, covet, become weak, commit suicide, die, etc. This is because these sorts of qualities contradict God's attributes by definition. So let us consider how the Bible defines God with respect

to mortality and see what can be concluded.

Isaiah 57:15

For thus says the high and exalted One **Who lives forever**, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.

Daniel 4:34

"But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored **Him who lives forever**; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation.

I Timothy 1:17

Now to the King eternal, **immortal**, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

I Timothy 6:15 and 16

...He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone **possesses immortality** and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

(Also see Deuteronomy 32:40; Psalms 41:13; 102:12, 24-27; Isaiah 40:28; etc.)

God lives forever; He is immortal. ("Immortal" means cannot die.) This is part of Who God is. If He

died, then He would have to cease being God. There is just no way around it. In fact, death can be a test of deity. If someone claimed to be God, then he or she should also be immortal. If this person were shot with a gun, then he should not die. In fact, no matter what was done to him or her (including dropping a nuclear bomb on the head), such a person would continue to live—all because if someone claims to be God, he must be immortal. This does not mean that all immortal beings are God, but it does mean that if someone claims to be God, then he better be immortal.

I once discussed this apparent contradiction (how could Jesus be God if he died) with an assistant pastor in a local church. He told me that Jesus did not really die, just his body did. Jesus continued to live. His soul (mind/consciousness) left his body upon death. Thus, Jesus died but continued to live. This is certainly an interesting proposition. But, how would you test it to see if it were true or not? How do the Scriptures speak of the death of Christ? Are special words used that would imply that his soul migrated, ascended, or escaped? Consider the following verses.

Matthew 17:22 and 23

And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men;

and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved.

John 10:11

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd **lays down His life** for the sheep."

John 18:32

to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of **death He was about to die**.

John 19:33

but coming to Jesus, when they saw that **He was already dead**, they did not break His legs.

Revelation 1:17 and 18

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, and the living One; and **I was dead**, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

(Also see Mark 9:31; Luke 9:22; John 15:13; 18:31; Acts 2:23 and 24; 3:15; 5:30; 7:52; I Corinthians 15:3; I Thessalonians 4:14; etc.)

No fancy or ethereal words are used. Jesus died; they killed him; he laid down his life (soul); he said of himself, "I was dead." Jesus died just like the millions of humans who preceded him. It is as simple as that. If "died" really meant "continued to live," then we are back to square circles—meaningless definitions. The Bible teaches repeatedly that death is like sleep (Daniel 12:2; John 11:11-14; Ephesians 5:14). There is not any activity, planning,

knowledge, or wisdom in death (Ecclesiastes 9:10). In fact, those who are dead do not think at all (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Death is like dreamless sleep—a cessation of consciousness. The only escape from death is resurrection (John 5:28 and 29; I Corinthians 15:21-23; I Thessalonians 4:14-17).

If Jesus did not *really* die, then are our sins *really* paid for? The Old Testament, which serves as our schoolmaster, may shed some light on what being a sacrifice for sin means.

Leviticus 4:14-16, 18 and 19 when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting. Then the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and **the bull shall be slain** before the LORD. Then the anointed priest is to bring some of the blood of the bull to the tent of meeting;

...and **all the blood he shall pour out** at the base of the altar of burnt offering which is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. He shall remove all its fat from it and offer it up in smoke on the altar.

Could you wound, maim, or nearly kill the sacrificial animal for it to take effect? Absolutely not! The animal must die because, as Paul said, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Someone had to die. Fortunately, God in His grace allowed animals to be substituted for the people who sinned. Yet, as

the book of Hebrews explains in detail, the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to Christ and what he would do on behalf of mankind.

Hebrews 7:26 and 27

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest [Jesus], holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when **He offered up Himself**.

Hebrews 9:24-26

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages **He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**.

In order for our sins to be paid for, Jesus had to die (cease to live) as our substitute sacrifice just like the animals in the Old Testament. Jesus' death makes possible our forgiveness,

justification, reconciliation, and escape from the wrath to come.

Romans 5:6,8-10

For while we were still helpless, at the right time **Christ died** for the ungodly.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us.**

Much more then, having now been **justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

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.

Colossians 1:21 and 22

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, yet **He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death**, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

I Thessalonians 5:9 and 10

For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **who died for us**, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

Taking all of this into account, we can conclude the following:

1. God cannot die;
2. Jesus died;
3. If he did not *really* die, then our sins are not *really* paid for;

Jesus is not God.

I do not think there is a way around this conclusion. If there is, then I would like to know.

(You can email me: sean@KingdomReady.org). This seems to be the best way to understand Jesus' death. If Jesus is not God, but God's supreme representative commissioned to speak His words and perform His will, then how remarkable is it that he obeyed his whole life through to the death! He could have failed. He could have given in to temptation. Yet, he humbled himself to the disgrace of a criminal's death on a cross. And, having died, he remained asleep, totally unconscious of his three-day sojourn in utter darkness, until at once God Himself shattered the darkness by raising His beloved Son from death to life eternal. It is a beautiful story, which I believe is cheapened when Jesus is thought to be God—one who would not have been able to fail, could not really be tempted, and did not really die.

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