

The Four Deaths of Humankind

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Our feline friends allegedly possess nine lives. Their human masters may indeed experience more than one kind of death. In fact, God's Word reveals that each person may undergo as many as four deaths.

Those who are living in sin are said to be **dead in sin**. Two groups of people may suffer from this death. Those who are intelligent enough to be responsible for their own actions, but who have not obeyed the Gospel are one of these groups. Paul describes the Ephesians before they obeyed the Gospel as "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). This phrase simply indicates that they were separated, alienated from God because of their sins and were thus under condemnation of God because He abhors sin. Those who have become Christians, but who have ceased to serve the Lord comprise the other group. Both individuals and entire churches become spiritually (Rev. 3:1). Christians who live in sinful pleasures are "dead while they live" (1 Tim. 5:6). Although physically alive, such folk are spiritually dead and will be eternally separated from God if they don't repent (Jam. 5:19-20). The doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy is nowhere taught in the Bible.

Because of God's mercy and Jesus' sacrifice, men can **die to sin**. Paul asked fellow-Christians the rhetorical question, "We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?" (Rom. 6:2). The sinner, having put sin to death in his repentance, is then buried in the water-grave of baptism, from which he is raised — sins now forgiven — to serve his Savior in "newness of life" (vv. 3-4; 2 Cor. 5:17; Acts 2:37-28). In one's obedience to the Gospel, **he dies unto sin** that he might live unto righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24). One dies to sin when he is "made free from sin" through obeying the doctrine of Christ (Rom. 6:17-18) as earlier set forth (i.e., vv.2-4). Without thus dying to sin, one will suffer "the second death" (Rev. 20:14-15).

God's "death sentence," including **physical death**, was triggered by Eve's first bite of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:19). This death applies without choice to rich and poor, good and evil, rulers and those ruled, for, "it is appointed unto man once to die...." (Heb. 9:27). This death brings sorrow because it severs earthly ties with loved ones. However, through Christ the promise and hope of a glorious resurrection awaits the Lord's faithful ones (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

The worst of all deaths is the irremediable **death of the soul**. Jesus warned men of it (Mat. 10:28). John described it as "the second death" (Rev. 20:14-15). Eternal death (i.e., separation from God and consignment to unending torment with Satan and his angels [Mat. 25:41]) is the fate of those who "obey not the Gospel" (1 The. 1:7-9). Each person has the power to determine whether he or she will suffer this death (Rev. 2:11).

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