Thanatos

A. The noun thanatos (θάνατος) has the following cognates:
1. Thanatos (θάνατος) (noun), “physical death, spiritual death.”
2. Thanato (θανατοῦ) (verb), “to put to death, to be in danger of death, to destroy, to kill.”
4. Thnesko (θνήσκω) (verb), “to die.”
5. Apothesko (ἀποθέσκω) (verb), “to die, to be put to death.”
6. Sunapothesko (συναπόθεσκω) (verb), “to die together with someone.”
8. Epithanatos (ἐπιθανάτος) (adjective), “condemned to death.”

B. Classical Usage
1. Walter Schmithals, Dr. of Theology, Professor at the University of Berlin commenting on the classical usage of thanatos word group writes the following article, “Thanatos (Homer) means the act of dying or the state of death. But it is also used of mortal danger, the manner of death, and the death penalty. Similarly thanatoo means to put someone to death, kill, and lead into mortal danger. Living creatures subject to death are described as early as Homer as thnetos, mortal. Men are referred to as hoi thnetoi (the mortals), in contrast to the gods who possess athanasia (immortality). Only in exceptional cases are men elevated as heroes into the number of the immortal gods. Thnesko, die, and apothesko, expire (both Homeric) denote the act of dying. Where the reference is to a death shared with others we find the compound form sunapothesko, die together with someone (Herodotus; cf. the Indian custom of burning the widow). In the Hellenistic period the terms Thanatos, thanatoo, thnesko and apothesko are also used metaphorically of intellectual and spiritual death” (The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, volume 1, pages 430-431).

2. Rudolph Bultmann commenting on the classical usage of Thanatos, states, “Life is the supreme good. Except for the idea of the translation of individual heroes to the isles of the blessed, for the belief in Orphic and Pythagorean circles that death is the liberation of the soul imprisoned in the body, and for the idea of the transmigration of the soul in the same circles, death is accepted as the end of life and therefore as something terrible, for otherwise why should not the blessed gods die? (Sappho acc. to Aristotle. Rhet., II, 23, p. 1398b, 27 ff.). That death is the general lot of men (as in the old saying thanato pantes opheileometha) is no comfort. The necessity of death casts its shadow on life and calls its meaning into question. There is better comfort in the thought that life itself is a questionable good with its toil and tribulation, so that it can seem to be better never to have been born or, having been born, to die again. Death does at least bring rest, and suicide can be represented as liberation from ignominy and suffering. Yet when death comes, no one wants to die. Nor is there any knowledge of what will come after death” (Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, volume 3, pages 8-9).

3. Again quoting Schmithals, “For the Greeks, death meant the end of living activity, the closing of the life-span, the destruction of existence, even if the shade (soul) found a place in the realm of the dead (Homer, Od. 11, 204-222). Death is the common destiny of man, and its negative side is occasionally made evident, when death appears personified as a demon or monster from the underworld (Euripides, Alcestis 28 ff.). Since they had no doctrine of creation, death did not pose for them the question ‘why?’ All men by nature are subject to it, just as immortality is the natural lot of the much envied gods. Complaints about the mortality of man are frequently expressed (cf. Homer, Odyssey, 11, 488). Realization of the inevitability of death found its normal consequence in the demand to enjoy life (zoe) to the full. The maxim cited by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:32, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’, accords with many expressions of Greek and Roman thought on the matter (cf. Euripides, Alcestis, 782 ff.). Roman dining rooms of the imperial period sometimes had pictures of a skeleton with the inscription ‘know thyself’. This is an invitation to make sure not to miss the pleasures of the moment...Death itself does, however, present a problem, and the horror of it becomes a subject for reflection. A way of overcoming it is sought, and often the view appears that a man lives on in his children (Mimmerus, Frag. 2, 13 ff.). Epitaphs and great funeral monuments keep alive the memory of the deceased, proclaiming his deeds to posterity and so make death tolerable. A special characteristic of the Greeks, however, is to make death a part of life by regarding it not as a fate but rather as an act of human achievement. It is important to die gloriously, either in fighting courageously or by

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4. The problem of death is treated by Euripides and Plato in a way which is representative of all Greek thinking.
5. For Plato real life consisted of withdrawing from the constraint of purely natural circumstances and living not for the sake of pleasure but for virtue. For the man who lives thus even death loses its terrors. For why should I fear death, whose nature I cannot comprehend, rather than flee from the evils of this life, which are well-known to me?
6. Euripides in his poem entitled Alcestis treats death as always my death in which none can represent me, which I cannot master by means of general considerations, for whose terror there is no comfort and which makes all life of doubtful value.
7. Stoicism in general rejected personal immortality; the individual soul becomes submerged in the divine universal soul, which permeates the cosmos (earth, world).
8. In the mystery religions coming in from the East, man was elevated from the mortal state he had by nature to a divine state by means of initiation rites. These gave him a share in the life-force of the god concerned.
9. In Gnosticism, the dualism of Plato is intensified. Real death is life in the body; liberation from the body means victory over death.
10. In Neo-Platonism, Platonic ideas and Gnostic myths were combined to form a speculative system, in which an important part is played by the journey of the soul and its progressive purification and elevation over the world of the senses.

C. LXX Usage
1. The word group that we noted above is found in the LXX, except for *athanasia* (immortality), which occurs only in late writings influenced by Hellenism.
2. The way in which this word group is used is not much different from that in classical Greek literature.
3. The 2 principle Hebrew equivalents for all these terms with a few exceptions are:
   a. *Maveth* (מָבוֹת), “death” (Ex. 10:17; Ecc. 10:1; Isa. 25:8)
   b. *Muth* (מוּת), (verb), Qal: “to die” (Gen. 2:17; 2 Sam. 3:33; Ezek. 3:18); Poel: “to slay” (Psa. 34:21 [33:21]; Hiphil: “to be put to death” (Jer. 38:15 [45:15]).
4. The noun *thanatos* translated the following Hebrew terms in the LXX:
   b. *Dever* (דָּבָר), “pestilence, plague” (Ex. 5:3; 2 Ch. 6:28; Am. 4:10).
   d. *Muth* (מוּת), Qal: “die” (Gn. 2:17; 2 Sm. 3:33; Ez. 3:18); polel: “slay” (Ps. 34:21 [33:21]); hiphil: “put to death” (Jer. 38:15 [45:15]).
   e. *Maveth* (מָבוֹת), “death” (Ex. 10:17; Ecc. 10:1; Isa. 25:8).
   f. *Mothim* (מֹותִים), “terrible death” (Jer. 16; 4; Ez. 28:8).
   g. *Qever* (קְבֵר), “grave” (Jb. 3:22-Codex Alexandrinus).
   h. *Sheol* (שֵׁלֹל), “sheol, the grave” (2 Sm. 22:6; Pr. 23:14).

D. NT Usage
1. The noun *thanatos* appears 121 times in the NT.
2. The verb *thanatoo* is found 11 times in the NT (Matt. 10:21; 26:59; 27:1; Mark 13:12; 14:55; Luke 21:16; Rom. 7:4; 8:13, 36; 2 Cor. 6:9; 1 Pet. 3:18).
4. The NT employs *thanatos* to both the physical and spiritual death of Christ on the Cross.
5. It also uses the word with reference to physical and spiritual death of members of the human race.

E. Pneumatic death vs. Somatic death.
1. Physical death is a matter of the sovereignty of God based upon His perfect integrity and omniscient knowledge of all the facts (Psa. 68:19-20).
2. In the OT, physical (somatic) death is a consequence of spiritual (pneumatic) death (Gen. 2:17).
3. Adam died 930 years after his spiritual death (Gen. 5:5).
4. Spiritual death is separation of God as a result of the imputation of Adam’s original sin in the garden to our genetically formed old sin nature (Rom. 5:12).
5. Adam was created trichotomous but became dichotomous as a result of his disobedience in the garden.
6. Regeneration is the creation of a human spirit through faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:7, 16, 36).
7. Regeneration solves the problem of spiritual death.
8. This is taught in both the Old and New Testaments.
9. At physical death, the unbeliever’s soul is separated from his physical body and goes to Torments, a compartment of Hades (Luke 16:19-31).
10. The ultimate destiny of the unbeliever is the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:12-15).
11. At physical death, the believer’s soul and human spirit go to be face to face with the Lord in an interim body (2 Cor. 5:8).
12. The believer’s physical body goes to the grave but is raised incorruptible at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-54).
13. God prolongs life for certain believers who have positive volition toward Bible Doctrine and advance to spiritual maturity (Psa. 120:19-20, 23-24; 118:18; Prov. 14:27).
14. Death cannot be faced when the norm and standard function of the right lobe (kardia) is destroyed (Lam. 1:19-20).

F. Unique Voluntary Substitutionary Spiritual Death of Christ
1. Our Lord was born trichotomous because of the virgin pregnancy.
2. The entire human race is born physically alive but spiritually dead (Rm. 5:12).
3. This is the result of the imputation of Adam’s original sin in the garden to the genetically formed old sin nature at physical birth.
4. The old sin nature is passed down from the father through copulation.
5. But the humanity of Christ is unique from other members of the human race.
6. He was the exception since He did not receive the imputation of Adam’s sin.
7. He did not receive the imputation of Adam’s original sin in the garden because He did not have an old sin nature.
8. He did not have an old sin nature because he did not have a human father.
9. God the Holy Spirit is responsible for impregnating the virgin Mary.
10. The physical body of our Lord was a result of the omnipotence of God the Holy Spirit.
11. Therefore, in order for our Lord to suffer spiritual death it would have to be substitutionary since He did not suffer real spiritual death like other members of the human race.
12. Our Lord died 2 unique deaths occurred on the Cross:
   a. Spiritual or Pneumatic
   b. Physical or Somatic
13. Our Lord in His perfect humanity first died spiritually or pneumatically (Matt. 27:44-45), and then He died physically or somatically (John 19:30).
14. It was our Lord’s substitutionary spiritual death in the last 3 hours on the Cross, which was the payment for our sins (Matt. 27:45-46; Mark 15:34).
15. Our Lord was still alive when He said, “It is finished” (tatalestai, “it (the work of salvation) is finished in the past with results that go on forever”) (John 19:30).
16. His physical death was not the payment for our sins but rather His spiritual death when in His perfect humanity He was separated from His Father in the last 3 hours on the Cross when He was receiving the imputation of the sins of the whole world-past, present and future, and was being judged for them.
17. The humanity of Christ accomplished the following through His substitutionary spiritual death on the Cross:
   b. God the Father’s Salvation Plan for all mankind (Rom. 5:18-19; 6:10a, 8:3; Heb. 2:14-18; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 18-19; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; John 3:17; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 2 Pet. 3:9).
   c. Fulfilled the Mosaic Law (Rm. 10:4; Col. 2:11-13).
18. The humanity of Christ’s spiritual death provided mankind with redemption which that He purchased the entire human race out from the slave market of sin in which every human being is born as a result of the imputation of Adam’s sin (1 Tim. 2:6; Mark 10:45; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9).
19. The humanity of Christ’s spiritual death propitiated or satisfied the perfect justice of God (Rom. 3:22-26; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10).
20. The humanity of Christ’s spiritual death reconciled the entire human race to God (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 1:20-22; 1 Pet. 3:18).
21. The humanity of Christ was judged by the justice of God for every personal sin committed by the human race-past, present & future.
22. Salvation was completed while our Lord was still living (John 19:30).
23. Spiritual death is the result of Adam’s sin and we all sin because we are spiritually dead.
24. Our Lord in His perfect, sinless humanity died twice on the cross so that we could be born twice (John 3:1-7).

25. He died spiritually so that we could be born again spiritually.

G. 8 Classifications of Death in the Scriptures.

1. Spiritual death is the imputation of Adam’s sin to our genetically formed old sin nature at the moment of physical birth resulting in spiritual death or the total inability to have a relationship with God in time (Gen. 2:17; Prov. 14:12; Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 5:12; 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1, 5).

2. Physical death is the separation of the human soul (and in the case of the believer, the human spirit also) from the body (Matt. 8:22; Rom. 8:38-39; 2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:20-21; 2:27, 30).

3. Second death is the perpetuation of spiritual death into eternity or eternal separation from God and it is the final judgment of the unbelievers in the human race and fallen angels whereby they are cast in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:12-15).

4. Positional death is part of the Baptism of the Spirit, which identifies all believers with Christ in His death on the Cross and specifically with His rejection of human good and evil (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; 3:3).

5. Operational death is failure to produce divine good on the part of the reversionistic believer under the influence of evil (James 2:26; 1 Tim. 5:6; Eph. 5:14; Rev. 3:1).

6. Temporal death is the status of carnality or the believer out of fellowship through personal sin (Rom. 8:6, 13; Eph. 5:14; 1 Tim. 5:6; James 1:15; Luke 15:24).

7. Sexual death is the inability to copulate (Rom. 4:17-21; Heb. 11:11-12).

8. Unique voluntary substitutionary spiritual death of the impeccable humanity of Christ in hypostatic union on the cross (Matt. 27:45-46; Mark 15:34; Philp. 2:8; Hb. 2:9, 14).

H. Thanatos vs. Nekros

1. There are 2 word groups, which speak of death in the NT:
   a. Thanatos
   b. Nekros

2. Both words are used in the NT for spiritual and physical death.

3. They are synonyms.

4. The difference in usage between the 2 words is that thanatos is always used by the NT writers in reference to our Lord’s voluntary substitutionary spiritual death on the cross.

5. Nekros and its word group are never used in relation to the unique voluntary substitutionary spiritual death of Christ on the cross.