

# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



October 27, 2013

## Shall We All Die?

God can be a terrible adversary or a loyal friend; not because He's fickle, but because of how we choose to treat Him. It is in our best interest to approach Him with respect and reverence.

*“So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die?’” (Num. 17:12-13).*

--◇--

The desperate tone of these words suggests a catastrophic threat facing the Israelites. Surely, their circumstances must have been hopeless to prompt such an outcry.

Actually, the truth is a little more complicated than that. They were in no immediate danger of dying, but they had good reason to be scared to death.

The story begins in the preceding chapter with the account of Korah's rebellion. Korah and several co-conspirators had challenged Moses' leadership, demanding an equal role as leaders of the people. In rejecting Moses, of course, these men were rejecting the God who had put Moses in that position. God crushed the rebellion personally by having the earth swallow up the rebel leaders and their families, and consuming the others with fire from heaven.

There would be no more challenges to Moses' leadership.

Nevertheless, the rest of the nation apparently had not gotten the message. The very next day, they complained about the brutal way in which God had put down the uprising. Immediately a terrible plague broke out among them, and before Aaron could intervene, over 14,000 people perished.

It was in the aftermath of all this death and destruction that the Israelites uttered their cry of doom. What did they mean by it?

There are two possibilities. Some suggest that the Israelites were reacting as a defeated enemy. The spirit of rebellion still lurked deep in their hearts, but they knew any further resistance was futile. Their cry, “whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die” was factually incorrect, but reflected the terror with which they now viewed God. They saw Him as a brutal tyrant eager to blast away at the slightest provocation.

Others see this language as proof that the Israelites were genuinely sorry for their haughtiness, and wanted to be

restored to God's good grace. “Shall we all utterly die?” was their plea for mercy.

Whatever their motive, there are two important lessons we should learn from this episode.

First, God does indeed hold the power of life and death. Our fate is in His hands, and He can do whatever He wants with us. He is not a man, a peer with whom we can bargain. He is our Creator and Judge, and is not to be trifled with. Until we can purge our hearts of every trace of arrogance and see God for what He is, we will always be at risk of offending Him. And that's bad news.

But the second lesson involves a straightforward answer to their question, “Shall we all utterly die?” Yes, we will. Someday, somehow, the time will come when all of us must leave this life for the next. That should come as no surprise; yet we often live as though we won't. Everything God has done has been in the interest of preparing us for that end. We should therefore honor Him as a friend who is patiently working in our behalf, not as an enemy to be feared—and treat Him accordingly.

— David King