WHY DID MESSIAH HAVE TO DIE?



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. ACCORDING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT 3

II. ACCORDING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT 6

CONCLUSION 10

III. JEWISH OBJECTIONS TO JESUS.....10

A. What Kind of God Do You Have?.....10

B. Jesus Did Not Bring Peace 11

C. Theological Objections.....11

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The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Matthew 1:1

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INTRODUCTION

Since the whole concept of a dying Messiah is so foreign to modern Judaism, although it was once a part of Judaism, there is a question that must be answered: "Why did the Messiah have to die?" In the course of answering this question, a second one arises: "What is the means of redemption?"

If there is one theme that seems prevalent throughout the entire Scriptures, it is the theme of redemption by blood.

I. ACCORDING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Redemption became necessary when sin entered the human sphere and separated man from God. When Adam and Eve committed that first act of disobedience, sin entered and separated them from God. From that point on, the means of bridging the separation of man from God was by means of blood. This bridging of the gap is called "redemption." In the history of God's dealing with His People, the means of redemption was always by blood.

The redemptive element of blood begins to come into the theme of Scripture at the same time that sin does, for until sin came no blood was necessary.

We read in Genesis 3:21, that just as soon as man is expelled from the Garden of Eden: *Jehovah God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skins, and clothed them.*

The skins were animal skins. The nakedness that the element of sin now revealed, needed to be covered. But the covering required the death of several animals, and so for the first time in history, blood was

shed. This provides the root meaning of the Hebrew word for atonement, which is "a covering."

The necessity of blood was a lesson soon learned by the sons of the first human couple. The time came for both Abel and Cain to bring their sacrifices before God (Gen. 4:3-16). Cain offered for sacrifice the fruit of his labors in the field. The offering was vegetable, and it was bloodless. Abel brought a blood-offering taken from his flock. When God passed judgment on the two types of offerings, that of Cain was rejected, and that of Abel was accepted. So a lesson was taught: One cannot approach God by whatever means one chooses. It is man who sinned and offended the holy God; it is God who must do the forgiving. Therefore, it is not for man to choose the means of forgiveness, but for God, and God has chosen the means to be blood. Cain had chosen to approach God in his own way, but he was rejected. Abel chose the way God demanded, and his sacrifice was accepted.

As biblical history develops in the Book of Genesis, we find that all the ones with whom God was pleased came to Him by means of blood. Noah immediately offered up blood sacrifices when he left the ark. He was followed by other great men in Jewish history: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom were careful to approach God by means of blood. When Moses received the Law at Mount Sinai, the redemptive element of blood ran throughout the entire Law with its 613 commandments.

A great summary statement for the entire Law is found in The Third Book of Moses, Leviticus 17:11: *For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life.*
It can easily be said that all of the Law revolves around this one statement. There were commandments which God gave in the Law that were to be obeyed. Disobedience was sin. If disobedience did take place, the means of atonement for the sin was blood. The Book of Leviticus opens by giving great detail to the different types of blood-sacrifices. All of these different sacrifices had the same purpose: that the Jew might be rightly related to God.

All seven feasts of Israel: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles required the shedding of blood. The Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement ceremony was greatly detailed in Leviticus 16, where careful instructions are given for the shedding of blood to atone for the sins of the Jewish nation. The Tabernacle and the Temple both were built to expedite and to make efficient the required shedding of blood for the atonement of the people's sins. The Holy of Holies that contained the Shechinah Glory, the visible manifestation of the presence of God, could be entered only once a year by only one man, the high

NOTES

priest. In order for him to enter, he had to have the blood of the Yom Kippur sacrifice with him, and this blood had to be sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of the Law itself.

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This is detailed in Leviticus 16:15-17: *Then shall he kill the goat of the sin-offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with his blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat: and he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins: and so shall he do for the tent of meeting, that dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. And there shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.*
And so the principle stood throughout the remainder of Old Testament history. But it was a burden to the individual. These blood-sacrifices had to be repeated year in and year out and they had to be done in the Temple at Jerusalem. For the Jews living elsewhere in the country, miles from Jerusalem, it was a burden to come every year to offer their sacrifices to the Lord for the atonement of their sins. Only the faithful few, those whom the prophets referred to as the Remnant, loved God and His Law enough to do so in spite of the burden it created.

Others built their own altars on mountains and hills closer to home and offered their sacrifices there. But no atonement was granted at these rival altars, and the prophets of God railed against these practices and condemned this deviation from the Law of God. Many had failed to learn the lesson of Cain: that one cannot come to God for forgiveness in any way one may choose, but one must come in the way God Himself has chosen.

It was Isaiah the Prophet who first provided the hope that the day would come when the yearly burden would be lifted. In Isaiah 53, God declared that the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, would be the sacrifice for sin.

In Isaiah 53:10-11 we read: *Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when you shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities.*
The point of Isaiah 53 is basically this: the animal sacrifices under the Mosaic Law were intended to be of temporary duration, a temporary measure only. God's intent was for there to be one final blood-sacrifice and that would be the sacrifice of the Messiah Himself.

That is why Isaiah 53 uses the same type of wording, figures and emphasis found in the Book of Leviticus. For example, in verse 10b we have the expression: *you shall make his soul an offering for sin.*

NOTES

This is a sacrificial concept; these are words that come out of the Mosaic Law itself.

And in verse 11b we read: *by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities.*
Not only are these words of sacrifice used generally in the Old Testament Law, but more specifically, we read of these very terms in Leviticus 16, which is the chapter that expounds and explains all the details regarding the *Yom Kippur* or Day of Atonement sacrifice.

This, then, was the reason why Messiah had to die: to provide the blood-sacrifice for sin once and for all. No longer would the Jews be burdened with the yearly sacrifices. All a person would need to do is accept the Messiah's death on his behalf and his sins are forgiven. Messiah had to die in order to provide that atonement, for blood is the means of redemption.

Another key issue is found in these two verses from Isaiah 53. There is a statement here that is somewhat confusing. Verse 11b reads: *by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many.*
A more literal translation from the Hebrew text would read like this: "the knowledge of him shall my righteous justify many."

The word for *knowledge* is a Hebrew word that emphasizes experiential knowledge, not mere head knowledge. This is a knowledge of the heart or a knowledge of faith. Those who have a faith-knowledge of this Servant, by "the knowledge of him," that He died for our sins, not *by the knowledge of himself*, He will, as a result, *justify* us. Justification means, "to be declared righteous." We cannot be declared righteous unless our sins have been atoned for. Our sins can only be atoned for by the shedding of blood; the Messiah's blood would be the final blood that would be sacrificed.

II. ACCORDING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Book of Hebrews in the New Testament is the counterpart of the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament. To understand Hebrews, one must first understand Leviticus. Just as Leviticus had a central verse in 17:11 around which the entire book and Law revolved, so the Book of Hebrews also makes the very same point in its central verse, Hebrews 9:22: *And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission.*
In Leviticus 17:11, the principle was that the blood made atonement for the soul. In the New Testament, using different words but giving the same message, it says that *apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission*. All things are cleansed with blood.

The Book of Hebrews was written by a Hebrew believer to a group of Messianic assemblies in Israel. It picks up the theme of Leviticus and

NOTES

the prophecy of Isaiah to show the superiority of the sacrifice of the Messiah. A number of passages bring out these things. Notice carefully how the author definitely has two things in the back of his mind: first, the Book of Leviticus with animal sacrifices; and second, Isaiah 53 with the Messiah being the final sacrifice.

In Hebrews 2:16-18 we read as follows: *For verily not to angels does he give help, but he gives help to the seed of Abraham. Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.*
This passage makes the point that the Messiah came as a Jew and underwent all the problems that a Jew had to go through in order that he might become a merciful and sympathetic high priest. The reason the Messiah came as a Jew was so that He, too, would live under the Law and take upon Himself the burden of the Law. He could clearly sympathize with the Jewish state under the Law.

Another central passage is Hebrews 4:14-15: *Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that has been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*
This passage develops further the very same point that Yeshua (Jesus) is the sympathetic high priest, for He understands what an individual has to undergo because He Himself underwent all these things.

Another passage is Hebrews 7:22-25: *by so much also has Jesus become the surety of a better covenant. And they indeed have been made priests many in number, because that by death they are hindered from continuing: but he, because he abides for ever, has his priesthood unchangeable. Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them.*
The superiority of the Priesthood of the Messiah is pointed out by the fact of the mortality of all other priests. One high priest would serve, but sooner or later he would die and a new priest would need to be chosen to begin the cycle all over again. The life-and-death cycle proved to be a disadvantage to the old priesthood. The superiority of the Priesthood of the Messiah is shown in that it abides eternally. For Jesus was resurrected, and by virtue of that Resurrection, Jesus remains a high priest forever.

Another shortcoming of the Levitical system of priesthood is found in Hebrews 7:26-27: *For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needs not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself.*
This passage indicates that the sacrifices had to be repeated day in and day out, year in and year out. The Messiah was to be the once for all

sacrifice for sin. This is what happened when Jesus came and offered up His own blood as the atonement for sin.
Also, in the old order of priesthood, the high priest had to sacrifice and shed blood for his own sins first before he could sacrifice and shed blood to make atonement for the sins of the people. Since Yeshua was sinless, He did not need to first atone for His own sins, but with His own blood made atonement for all who would accept it. He made atonement for the whole world, of course, but the atonement is only applied to those who would believe.

NOTES

The first disadvantage of the Levitical Priesthood was that the priests would eventually die. The second disadvantage of the old system was that sacrifices had to be repeated year in and year out. The third disadvantage was that the earthly priest had to atone for his own sins before he could atone for the sins of anyone else. In dealing with the priesthood we have through Jesus the Messiah, all three of these disadvantages rectified.

First, since Jesus by virtue of His Resurrection now lives forever, we never have an interrupted priesthood.

Secondly, since this was Messiah's innocent blood, this was a one-time shedding. Never again will Yeshua have to shed His blood. So another clear advantage over the Mosaic Law is that the sacrifice of the Messiah does not need to be repeated, it was *once* and *for all.*

The third situation lies in the fact that, whereas in the Old Testament system, the earthly priest had to atone for his own sins. That was not the case with our Messiah since our Messiah is a sinless Messiah. There is no need to have Yeshua first offer up a sacrifice for His own sins and then offer up a sacrifice for the sins of the others. In other words, our High Priest is a sinless priest, whereas the Levitical Priesthood was a sinful priesthood.

The concept of the question of why the Messiah had to die in the Book of Hebrews is kept in strict conformity with that which was demanded by the Book of Leviticus and by the hope of Isaiah 53. That which the Old Testament hoped for was found in the New Testament in complete fulfillment by the death of the Messiah.

The superiority of the Messiah as over against all other sacrifices is pointed out in Hebrews 9:11-15: *But Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works*

to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Unlike the animal sacrifices, the sacrifice of Jesus was to bring eternal redemption rather than temporary atonement. This is the fourth distinction between the two systems.

Furthermore, even after the animal sacrifice, the Jew was still conscious of his sins. Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, however, brings a complete cleansing of the conscience of sins. This is the fifth contrast.

Another passage is found in Hebrews 9:28: *so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation.*

Here the twofold aspect of the Messiah's career is pointed out. Yeshua first came to be the sin-offering for the people, just as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 needed to be. Also, just as the Suffering Servant was the One who bore the sins of many, Yeshua did so through His death. Then, the verse states that Yeshua will come a *second time* for a different purpose. The purpose of the First Coming was to die for sin. The purpose of the Second Coming will be to establish the Messianic Kingdom.

Once again, a contrast is drawn between the animal sacrifices and the blood-sacrifice of Jesus in Hebrews 10:1-4: *For the law having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh. Else would they not have ceased to be offered? because the worshippers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance made of sins year by year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.*

The animal sacrifices had to be repeated year in and year out. While these sacrifices provided temporary atonement, they never provided permanent forgiveness of sins. Rather, the yearly sacrifices served to remind the Jewish person of his sins; he knew he would have to bring another sacrifice the next year as well. The *consciousness of sins* was still there. But the sacrifice of Jesus was once and for all and never needs to be repeated. Acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus does not bring temporary atonement but permanent forgiveness. By accepting the substitutionary death of Yeshua for one's sins, one is not continually reminded of those sins, but one receives a complete cleansing. That is why the sacrifice of Yeshua is so superior to the animal sacrifices of the old system.

The last passage is found in Hebrews 10:10-14: *By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest indeed stands day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, the which can never take away sins: but he, when he had offered one*

NOTES

NOTES

sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet. For by one offering he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

This passage again points out how the high priest had to sacrifice day in and day out, and his work was never done. The high priest is viewed as "standing" to indicate this unfinished ministry. But Jesus, who offered Himself as a sacrifice once and for all, is viewed as "sitting at the right hand of God," thus showing that His work is complete. Furthermore, the animal sacrifices provided a yearly atonement but never permanently took away sins. But those who accept the sacrifice of Jesus are *perfected for ever*; their sins are permanently removed.

As to the question, "Why did the Messiah have to die?" according to the New Testament, the reason is twofold: first, to fulfill all Old Testament prophecies and requirements, and secondly, to bring in a permanent atonement rather than a temporary one.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of both the Old and New Testaments is that the means of redemption was by blood, and the permanent blood-sacrifice was to be the Messiah Himself. That is why the Messiah had to die according to the Old Testament. That is why Yeshua did die according to the New Testament. Who killed Yeshua was never the issue as far as the New Testament was concerned, for the Messiah had to die. It only became an issue years later because of anti-Semites seeking excuses to persecute the Jews. The only issue in the New Testament itself is whether or not one will accept the substitutionary sacrifice of Yeshua for oneself.

III. JEWISH OBJECTIONS TO JESUS

A. What Kind of God Do You Have?

Some Jewish objections to the Messiahship of Jesus rest on questioning the Virgin Birth and Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. Objections to these two matters are, however, not the real issue in themselves. The real issue is what kind of God one believes in. The question is not: "Is such a thing as the Virgin Birth possible?" Or, "Is such a thing as resurrection from death possible?" From the strictly human viewpoint, they are not. The real question is, "Can God do such things?" If He cannot, He is not much of a God. But God is God, and from all that this particular title infers, includes, and indicates, He can do anything He wants to do. The only possible limits to God are the limits He places on Himself.

If God is all-powerful, things like the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection are easy things for Him to accomplish. It is an amazing inconsistency to allow that God has created the heavens and the earth and then to doubt His ability to bring about a Virgin Birth. If He can

create the wonder and vastness of the universe and all the complexity of the single cell, the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection are very simple matters. For a Jew who believes in God, there is no reason to doubt the miracle of the Virgin Birth. The real question is, "Did it happen with the birth of Yeshua?" The Old Testament said that it would happen with the Messiah. The New Testament said that it did happen with Yeshua.

NOTES

B. Jesus Did Not Bring Peace

The most common objection one hears to the Messiahship of Jesus is this: He could not be the Messiah since He did not bring peace. Well, since He was not accepted, He could not very well bring peace, could He? Furthermore, the purpose of the Messiah's First Coming, or as the early rabbis would have it, the purpose of the coming of the first Messiah, Messiah, the Son of Joseph, was not to bring peace but to suffer and die. Peace would come through the coming of the second Messiah, Messiah, the Son of David, or as the New Testament would have it, by the Second Coming of the Messiah. So the Messiahship of Jesus must first be judged on whether He did suffer and die for sin, and then on whether those who believed in Him received their justification and forgiveness of sins. That He suffered and died for the sins of Israel is the testimony of the eyewitness accounts we have in the New Testament. That Jews have been receiving and experiencing the forgiveness of their sins through faith in the substitutionary death of Jesus has been testified by many. Both Talmudic Judaism and the New Testament agree that there would be one coming of a Messiah to suffer and die, which would precede the coming of a Messiah to bring peace. The point of difference is in the formers' claim of two different Messiahs, and the latter's' claim of one and the same person, Yeshua. So while it is true that Jesus did not bring peace, that was not the purpose of the Messiah's First Coming. This is not a valid argument against His Messiahship, for Jesus will yet come again and will yet bring peace.

C. Theological Objections

Theological objections to Jesus by rabbinical authorities have all repeatedly attacked the same areas so as to become stereotyped. These will usually center on the question of three things: first, the Virgin Birth; secondly, the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God; and thirdly, the fact that Jews cannot believe that a man can become God. Objections to the Virgin Birth have already been dealt with in this study. The kind of God one believes in is still an issue.

As to the claim of Yeshua to be the Son of God, one objection reads like this: "The New Testament knows Jesus as the son of God and as Messiah. Judaism, however, does not acknowledge a son of God who was set apart and elevated above other human beings. The Jewish conviction is that all men are equal before God, and no mortal can claim divinity."

NOTES

Here is an example of how the Messiahship of Jesus is judged purely on the basis of modern Judaism. "Jesus could not be the Messiah," the writer says, "since Judaism does not acknowledge a Son of God to begin with." The writer would have been more honest had he said that Judaism, as he knows it, which is only modern Judaism, does not acknowledge a Son of God. In the case of Reform Judaism, there would be no Messiah at all! The writer effectively ignores centuries of Jewish theological treatments that certainly do treat the Messiah as being a Son of God. Had the writer taken the time to look at the early rabbinical interpretations of Psalm 2, they would have shown him not to make such a rash statement. The Old Testament, which is the basis of Judaism, did teach that God would have a Son. That Son is the Messiah Himself. The issue is not whether Judaism acknowledges it or not. The issue is whether the Bible teaches it, and the Old Testament certainly teaches it loud and clear!

And, of course, Jews cannot believe that any man could become God, and that is why Jews cannot accept Yeshua. To begin with, the fact that a man cannot become God is very true, and no man can claim divinity. This is where modern Judaism has misconstrued the teachings of the New Testament. The New Testament never claimed that Yeshua was a man who became God. This is heresy. This goes contrary to Judaism of any form: biblical, rabbinical or otherwise, and it also goes contrary to the faith in the Messiah. Neither the New Testament nor Yeshua ever taught that there was a man who became God.

The New Testament claims the reverse: It was God who became a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. If God became a man, this man would certainly be superior to other men. He would now be the God-Man. Certainly Judaism does not dare claim that God cannot become a man if He wanted to. The God of biblical Judaism is all-powerful. God can do anything He wants to. If there is anything God cannot do, He is less than God. So the real question is: "Did God choose to become a man?" not, "Can He?" The New Testament claim is that, yes, God did become a man. It is amazing how so many rabbinical writings about Jesus refuse to discuss this very point and insist on discussing how could a man become God.

Other common objections also miss the real point. One such objection is the fact that Yeshua forgave sins, which is something only God can do. Again, this is true, only God can forgive sins. But if Yeshua were the God-Man, God who became a man, the forgiving of sins would be part of the authority of this God-Man.

Another objection of this nature centers around the fact that Jesus performed His miracles in His own name. First of all, it might be said

that many times Jesus claimed that He was doing His miracles by the power and authority of the Spirit of God. It is true that the prophets did miracles and gave God the credit, but again, the Messiah was not going to be just another man or just another prophet. Rabbinical theories taught that the Messiah, because He had the name of God Himself, would be able to do things in His own name. That is why the Messiah kept playing such a prominent role in rabbinical theology. That is why the Jewish people throughout the centuries before modern liberalism crept into Judaism, continually looked forward to the coming of the Jewish Messiah. The Messiah would have such authority and such power that He would be able to accomplish great things in His own name. Jesus claimed to be that Messiah and so should, in fact, have been able to do those things in His own name. Jesus did accomplish those things in His own name. By doing so in His own name, He substantiates His Messiahship rather than disproving it.✡

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