

BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED

WHY DID MESSIAH HAVE TO DIE?

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INTRODUCTION

If there is one theme that seems prevalent throughout the entire Scriptures, it is the theme of redemption by blood. While the concept of a dying Messiah was once an integral part of Judaism, today it may seem so foreign that a modern Jewish person might ask: "Why did the Messiah have to die?" In the course of answering this question, a second one arises: "What is the means of God's redemption for man?"

ACCORDING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Sin and Redemption Connection. Redemption became necessary when sin entered the human sphere in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve committed their first act of disobedience to God, resulting in their separation from Him. From that point on, bridging the separation between man and God was by means of blood. This bridging of the gap is called "redemption." The redemptive element of blood comes into the theme of Scripture at the same time that sin does; for until sin came, no blood was necessary.

Blood as the Means of Redemption. In the history of God's dealing with His People, the means of redemption was always by blood. We read in Genesis 3:21, that just as soon as man was expelled from the Garden of Eden: *Jehovah God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skins, and clothed them.*

Adam and Eve. Because of their sin, for the first time in history, blood was shed. God covered their nakedness that the element of sin now revealed using animal skins, an act necessitating the death of several animals. The root meaning of the Hebrew word for atonement quite significantly means "a covering."

Cain and Abel. Later, when Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices before God (Gen. 4:3-16), Cain offered the fruit of his labors in the field. The offering was vegetable and bloodless. Abel brought a blood-offering taken from his flock. God rejected Cain's offering and accepted Abel's offering. 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.

Noah and the Patriarchs. 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. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all 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.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF BLOOD ATONEMENT

The Law. 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. Disobedience was sin. 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 these different sacrifices had the same purpose: that the Jew might be rightly related to God.

The Feasts. 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 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. 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.

Prophecy, Isaiah's Light on the Future of the Sacrifice System. It was Isaiah the Prophet who first provided the hope that the day would come when the yearly burden of blood sacrifices performed in Jerusalem would be lifted. In Isaiah 53, God declared that the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, would become 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 that the animal sacrifices under the Mosaic Law were intended to be 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.* This is a sacrificial concept, and these words come from the Mosaic Law itself.

Another key issue is found in Isaiah 53 verse 11b, which reads: *By the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many.* Those who have a faith-knowledge of this Servant, by "the knowledge of him," that He died for our sins, He will justify. Justification means, "to be declared righteous." We cannot be declared righteous unless our sins have been atoned for by the shedding of blood.

Yom Kippur in Leviticus Points to Messiah. Not only are 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 one's behalf, and one's sins would be forgiven. Messiah had to die in order to provide that atonement, for blood is the means of redemption.

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. Leviticus has a central verse in 17:11 around which the entire book and the Law revolved: *Apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission.* The Book of Hebrews 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 the shedding of blood there is no remission.

Introduction. The Book of Hebrews was written by a Hebrew believer to a group of Messianic assemblies in Israel with two things in the back of his mind: first, the Levitical principle of animal sacrifices; and, second, the prophecy of Isaiah 53 that the Messiah would be the final sacrifice.

By further way of introduction, Hebrews 2:16-18 and 4:14-15 emphasize that Messiah was a Jew who could identify with His people under the Law and the sacrifice system. It was necessary for *Yeshua* (Jesus) to die in order to fulfill His destiny of overcoming the deficits of the Levitical system that pointed to Him.

A Better Priesthood. The Book of Hebrews emphasizes how the ministry of *Yeshua*, our High Priest, is superior to the sacrificial system. The author of the Book of Hebrews points out the disadvantages of the Levitical priesthood. First, all priests would eventually die. Second, sacrifices had to be repeated year in and year out. Third, the earthly priest had to atone for his own sins before he could atone for the sins of anyone else. Fourth, the Jew's consciousness of his own sin was not erased by the sacrificial system. Fifth, the priest's job was never completed, as indicated by the standing priest. In *Yeshua* the Messiah, all these disadvantages were rectified.

1. *Yeshua's* Resurrection. Since *Yeshua* by His resurrection now lives forever, we never have an

interrupted priesthood. The superiority of the Priesthood of the Messiah is pointed out by the fact of the mortality of all other priests. Hebrews 7:22-25 states:

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.

2. One Sacrifice for All. 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. 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, sanctified 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.

3. *Yeshua's* Sinlessness. Hebrews 7:26-27 states:

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

The Levitical sacrifices had to be repeated day in and day out, year in and year out. The shedding of Messiah's innocent blood made His sacrificial death a sufficient sacrifice once and for all.

4. Cleansing of the Conscience. Under the old system, the Jew was still conscious of his sins even after the animal sacrifice. Faith in the sacrifice of *Yeshua*, however, brings a complete cleansing of the conscience of sins. As Hebrews 10: 1-4 states:

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.

5. The Seated High Priest. In Hebrews 10:10-14, Messiah is described as being seated:

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

The high priest is viewed as "standing" to indicate this unfinished ministry. But *Yeshua*, 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.

CONCLUSION

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. All the Old Testament prophecies and requirements were fulfilled to bring in a permanent atonement rather than a temporary one. ■

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