

Messiah, the Final Sacrifice

Since the whole concept of a dying Messiah is so foreign to modern Judaism, although it was once 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 to run throughout all of the Scriptures, it is the theme of redemption by blood.

According to the Hebrew Scriptures

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 blood. 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 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" (Genesis 3:21). 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. 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 skins of the animals may have covered their nakedness, but it was the shed blood of the animals that covered their sin.

As biblical history develops in the book of Genesis, we find that all those with whom God was pleased came to Him by means of blood. Abel brought to God a blood offering. Noah immediately offered up blood sacrifices when he left the ark. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were careful to approach God by means of blood. When Moses received the law at Mount Sinai, the redemptive element of blood ran through all of its 613 commandments. A great summary statement for the 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. (ASV)

It can easily be said that the entire law revolves around this one statement. There are commandments that 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 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 presented in the Temple at Jerusalem.

It was Isaiah the prophet who first provided the hope that the day would come when the burden would be lifted. In Isaiah 53, God declared that the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, would be the sacrifice for sin (Is. 53:10-11).

The point of Isaiah 53 is basically this: 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. This, then, was the reason 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 would be forgiven. Messiah had to die to prove that atonement by blood was the means of redemption.

According to the New Testament

The book of Hebrews was written by a Messianic Jew to a group of Messianic Jewish assemblies in Israel. It picks up on the theme of Leviticus and the prophecy of Isaiah to show the superiority of the sacrifice of the Messiah. A number of passages bring these things out. Notice carefully how the author has two things in the back of his mind:

1. The book of Leviticus and the animal sacrifices;
2. Isaiah 53 with the Messiah being the final sacrifice.

Hebrews 2:16-18 states:

¹⁶ For verily not to angels does he give help, but he gives help to the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ *For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.*

(ASV)

This passage makes the point that Messiah came to earth as a Jew. Just like any other Jew, He had to live under the law and take upon Himself the burden of the law. Therefore, He could clearly sympathize with the condition of the Jewish people under the law and thus could become *a merciful and faithful high priest*.

There are many advantages in the priesthood that we have through Messiah Yeshua, and we will look at the most important ones:

1. By virtue of His resurrection, Yeshua now lives forever. Therefore, we never have an interrupted priesthood.
2. Since Messiah's blood was innocent blood, this was a one-time shedding. Unlike the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, Messiah's sacrifice does not need to be repeated. It was "once and for all."
3. In the Jewish sacrificial system, the earthly priest had to atone for his own sins. This was not the case with our Messiah who was sinless.
4. Unlike the animal sacrifices, which provided a temporary atonement, the sacrifice of Yeshua brought eternal redemption.
5. Even after the animal sacrifice, the Jew was still conscious of his sins. Faith in the sacrifice of Yeshua, however, brings a complete cleansing of the conscience.

In summary, the sacrifice of Yeshua never needs to be repeated. Acceptance of the sacrifice of Yeshua 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 instead receives a complete cleansing.

Hebrews 10:10-14 repeats some of these points and makes a new one:

¹⁰ *By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Yeshua Messiah once for all.* ¹¹ *And every priest indeed stands day by day ministering and offering often times the same sacrifices, for which can never take away sins:* ¹² *but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God;* ¹³ *henceforth electing till his*

enemies be made the footstool of his feet. ¹⁴ *For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified.* (Heb. 10:10-14, ASV)

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 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.

Furthermore, the animal sacrifices provided only a temporary atonement; they needed to be repeated yearly. They never permanently took away sins. However, those who accept the sacrifice of Yeshua are perfected forever; their sins are permanently removed.

In summary, the New Testament provides two answers to the question of why the Messiah had to die:

1. He had to die to fulfill all Old Testament prophecies and requirements.
2. He had to die to bring in a permanent atonement rather than a temporary one.

Conclusion

The teaching 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 Jesus *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 of the New Testament itself is whether one will accept the substitutionary sacrifice of Yeshua for oneself or not.