

Since the whole concept of a dying Messiah is 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 go 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. In the history of God's dealing with His people, the means of bridging man's separation from God was always by blood.

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. 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 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 skin of the animals may have covered Adam and Eve's 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 613 commandments.

A great summary statement of the law is found in the third book of Moses, in 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. This 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 at the Temple in Jerusalem.

It was Isaiah the Prophet who first provided the hope that the day would come when this burden would be lifted. In Isaiah 53, God declared that the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, would be the sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 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 Jews be burdened with the yearly sacrifices. All a person would need to do is to 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 Jewish Messianic assemblies in Israel. It picks up the theme of Leviticus and the prophecy of Isaiah to show the superiority of the sacrifice by the Messiah. A number of passages bring these things out. Notice carefully how the author definitely has two things in the back of his mind:

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

Hebrew 2:16-18 states:

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. (ASV)

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

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

1. By virtue of His resurrection, Messiah Jesus 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 Jesus brought eternal redemption.
5. 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.

In summary, the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah never needs to be repeated. Acceptance of this sacrifice does not bring temporary atonement, but permanent

forgiveness. By accepting the substitutionary death of Messiah for one's sins, one is not continually reminded of those sins but receives a complete cleansing.

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

By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Messiah Jesus 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 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. (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 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 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.

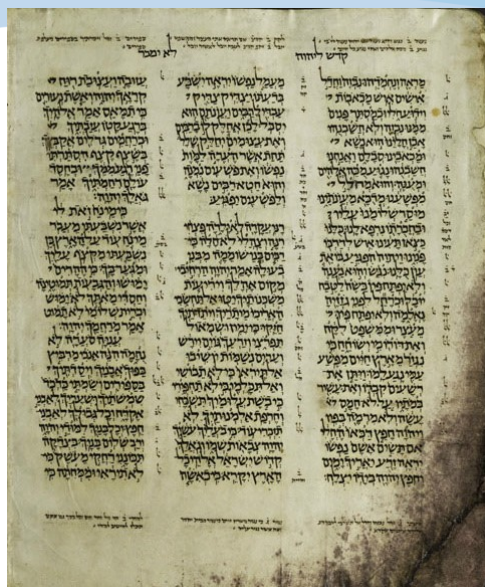
In summary, the New Testament provides two answers to the question of why the Messiah had to die:

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 Jesus 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 for 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 Jesus for oneself or not.

Alppo Codex, circa 930 A.D.
Masoretic text containing Isaiah 53



He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.
(Isaiah 53:11)

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