



WHY DID MESSIAH HAVE TO DIE?



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By Charles Lee Feinberg, Th.D., Ph.D.

THE CONCEPT that the Messiah had to die in order to become the Saviour of the world and of Israel also, is foreign to almost all in Israel today who are unbelievers. This idea was rejected with force by Peter himself when Christ first spoke of it. In Matthew 16:22, 23 it is recorded: "And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." It was hard for the contemporaries of the Lord Jesus Christ to understand. When He said (John 12:32): "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself"; the Spirit of God notes (John 12:33): "But this he said, signifying by what manner of death he should die." The crowd understood Him to be speaking of His death, for we read: "The multitude therefore answered him, We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth forever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" (John 12:34). But the Scriptures are certain that He had to die. Why, then, did Messiah have to die?

There are those who have presented as their opinion the claim that Messiah Jesus died because of

PERSONAL FAULT.

This was the position of the people and leaders

of His day, who thought He violated the Mosaic law in the matter of blasphemy. They considered Him grievously at fault for declaring Himself equal with God. The Sanhedrin wanted Him silenced by the Roman authorities, because they were convinced that He was guilty of sin. Yet note the accusation placed over His cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews." Is that a crime? Was crucifixion a just punishment for that? David was King of the Jews too, but was he worthy of death on that account? But was Jesus at fault at all? Did He ever fail in any slightest particular? Was there any shortcoming? Thousands of men through the centuries have had to forfeit their lives because they have violated the laws of an orderly society. Was this true in the case of Jesus the Messiah? The Bible clearly teaches His sinlessness. Just as the Passover Lamb in Egypt had to be without blemish (Exodus 12:5), so Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be God's spotless Lamb. Isaiah 53:7: "He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Judas who betrayed Him had to admit at the very end: "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood." (Matthew 27:4). Pilate's wife warned him at the time of the judgment (Matthew 27:19): "Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Vacillating Pilate tried to shift the blame for any decision from himself by saying: "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man; see ye to it." (Matthew 27:24). But what did Christ say of Himself in this matter? (John 8:40, 46): "But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God." And

"which of you convicteth me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe me?" Paul said of Him (II Corinthians 5:21) "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him." The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews (4:15) maintained that He was "one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Peter who fellowshiped with Him throughout His ministry could say of Him (I Peter 2:21-23): "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." The gospel records tell us that He did not accede to the temptations of Satan, as we all are so prone to do. Matthew 4:1-11. In His youth He was obedient as a dutiful son to His earthly parents, as it is written (Luke 2:51): "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and he was subject unto them." All who knew anything of His life could see that He lived a life of constant prayer. He prayed in every time of crisis, before every crisis, and day and night. Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 11:1; John 17.

Some time ago in a city of Europe, the daughter of the principal notary, who had died suddenly, was found, on a post-mortem examination, to have swallowed on the advice of her supposed friends, a large number of religious medals, in order to bring about a cure for cancer. You may smile as you see the tragedy of this superstition and ignorance. But you must realize, too, that it is only the sinless Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His divine nature, power, and sinlessness that can benefit any one of us.

If Messiah did not have to die of fault, could it have been because of the

VICIOUSNESS OF HIS ENEMIES?

The martyr theory enters here and has many advocates even today. It claims Christ died for a worthy and glorious cause, because His enemies viciously hounded Him to the death of the Cross. Let us never doubt that His enemies were most cruel. When Herod's venom was aroused against the One born King of the Jews, he ordered all male children in Bethlehem and its vicinity, from two years old and under, to be slain, in order to make certain of the death of the Babe born in Bethlehem. Herod was devilishly cruel! The Pharisees and scribes of that day (John 7:45-47) considered the multitudes who followed Christ, as ignorant of the law and accursed. They gave commandment, further, that He should be taken and arraigned before the authorities. (John 11:57). In the latter part of His ministry, we read (John 7:1), He could not walk openly, because there were those who sought to kill Him. Before that, the people of Nazareth had tried to cast Him from the hill upon which their city was built. Luke 4:29-30. He met enmity and hatred and opposition on every hand. But the important truth is that His enemies could not prevail in their designs! Repeatedly it is stated (John 7:30): "They sought therefore to take him: and no man laid his hand on him, because his hour was not yet come." (John 7:44): "And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him." John 8:20. "And no man took him; because his hour was not yet come!" Friend, nothing is clearer in the gospel records than that Christ's enemies wanted to put Him to death long before He did die by cruci-

fixion, but they could not do so!

Now, if the Messiah of Israel did not die because of personal shortcoming or fault, and He was not put to death because of the inveterate and relentless viciousness of His enemies, why, yes, why, then, did He have to die? He had to die because of

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION.

There is only one satisfactory reason for the death of Christ, only one reason why Messiah had to die. The Bible reveals it was to accomplish God's work of redemption. It was the very heart of God's redemptive plan. The Scriptures are full of this glorious message. Hear it, O Jewish friend. (John 3:16): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 10:15: "I lay down my life for the sheep." John 12:32: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." Matthew 20:28: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Matthew 1:21: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Galatians 3:13-14: "for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus: that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Hebrews 9:27, 28: "And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment; 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." I Peter 1:18-20: "Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or

gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ: who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times for your sake." I Peter 2:24: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body upon the tree." I Peter 3:18: "Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." Only thus could He redeem the world and become the Saviour of Israel and all the world.

All the world has sung the praise of Princess Alice of England. One of her children having died of a contagious disease, she was in the room where another was dying, and the court physician said to her, "You must not breathe the breath of this child, or you yourself will die." But seeing the child mourning because of the death of her brother, the mother stooped down, and in sympathy kissed the little one, caught the disease, and died. All the world sang the heroism and the self-sacrifice of Princess Alice; but when our race was dying, the Lord Jesus stooped down and gave us the kiss of His everlasting love, and died that we might live.

We must do more than know that Messiah had to die for us; we must receive that death for us if we would have eternal life. The death has been accomplished; what is your decision?

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