

## Why Would God Have Wanted Jesus to Die on the Cross?

There is no valid reason to deny that Jesus was put to death. The Qur'an supports the fact and the Hadiths do not deny it. The prophets of Allah had predicted it. Non-Christians confirmed it. And above all, this fact is at the heart of the Injeel which God, according to the Qur'an, gave to the Messiah, Jesus. The widespread idea that the condemnation, the humiliation and the crucifixion of Jesus would have constituted a failure or defeat, preventing the Servant of God from accomplishing his mission is false—considering that Jesus has been resurrected from the grave, one can no longer speak of failure. The idea that Allah is necessarily going to make all of his apostles “victorious” by delivering them from danger is also false—the Qur'an itself speaks repeatedly of faithful prophets whom the Jews killed and of Muslim martyrs who gave their blood for the cause of Islam. As for the verse in the Qur'an that people take to affirm that Jesus did not die on the cross, it simply teaches that it was God, and not the Jews, who was behind the death of Jesus (see the article [“Did Jesus really die?”](#)).

But the question remains:

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Jesus himself answered this question. In John 10 he compared himself to a shepherd and his disciples to sheep. He said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep... Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father” (John 10:11,17,18). In these verses we see that Jesus confirms that his death was ordained by God—it actually was God who had willed it—but he also says that he voluntarily obeyed this command to give his life. When Jesus says that the shepherd gives his life for his sheep, he indicates that his death was to serve others. He would give his life to save his “sheep.” In Mark 10:45 he adds an element concerning his death for others. He says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” A ransom is the price paid to obtain the life or the liberty of a slave or a prisoner. Jesus said that his life would serve as a ransom for many.

These words of Jesus are in perfect agreement with those of the prophets who had preceded him. In a long passage written by the prophet Isaiah it is very clearly stated that the Christ must die. He must not be saved at the last minute so that he might not suffer or experience shame. No, according to God's plan, he had to die. But the same text tells us the reason for the death of Christ.

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities... He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:5,6,10,12)

Clearer words could not be found, but would it not be unjust to make one person suffer in the place of another? Shouldn't the guilty one be the one to be punished? Will God not judge each one according to his own actions?

The Qur'an says, “Then those whose scales weigh heavy with good works will be successful. But those whose scales weigh light will have ruined their souls; in Hell will they abide” (Surah 23:102,103 – *Al-Mu-minun*). In other words, on the day of judgment, one's good actions will have to be greater than one's sinful actions. The Bible seems to speak in the same way when it says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” The Qur'an says in Surah 35:18 – *Fatir*, “No burden-bearer shall bear another's burden, and if some over-laden soul should call out for someone else to carry his load, not the least portion of it will be borne for him, even though he were a near relative.” Again, the Bible says in Romans 14:12, “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Certainly, God will judge each one of us according to our choices and our actions. But again, the Bible and the Qur'an agree in teaching that God is merciful and ready to forgive. In the Zabur David says, “For

You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You" (Psalm 86:5). In the Qur'an we read, "Ask God's forgiveness. God is ever forgiving and most merciful... God promises His forgiveness and His bounty. God is bountiful and all knowing" (Surah 2:199,268 – *Al-Baqarah*). Most of the Surahs of the Qur'an begin with the words, "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful."

What does the word "forgive" mean? Is it not to pardon, absolve, to show grace, to renounce the intention to punish, to forget or act as if a fault had not been committed? What is mercy? Is it not pity or compassion which leads one to forgive the guilty?

Obviously it is therefore possible for men's bad choices and sinful actions to be removed from the scales on the last day. But how? By what means?

### THE NECESSITY OF A SACRIFICE

Someone who does not grasp the righteousness of God might respond that no "means" are needed: God is sovereign, and if He wants to forgive, He simply chooses to do so. He says, "I forgive," and it is done—the sin is taken away.

Yes, God is sovereign. He does what He wills. But He is also righteous, and He refuses to compromise His righteousness, His integrity. The Bible says, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). Because He will never accept to do wrong, the Bible reminds us in Hebrews 6:18 that it is impossible for God to lie. But His righteousness also prevents Him from looking with favor upon the guilty. The prophet Habakkuk said to Him, "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why [would] You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?" (Habakkuk 1:13). As the Patriarch Abraham asked the Almighty one day, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). Being a God of mercy and compassion and at the same time the holy and righteous Judge of every man presents a dilemma. How is it possible to be both merciful and just at the same time? How can God forgive sin and at the same time honor and uphold his own holy commandments. If a human judge forgave the guilty parties out of favoritism toward his friends or his relatives, or because he had received a bribe, we would consider him unworthy to hold his job. A judge

has the duty to see to it the law is applied, to punish the guilty and to let the innocent go free. How would God be a righteous judge when he acquits the guilty, when the deserved sentence is not handed down.

This is what demonstrates the necessity of sacrifice for sin, a concept with which all of humanity has been familiar since the time of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. You remember that Abel offered to God some of the firstborn of his flocks and their fat. It is certainly a concept that exists in Islam. "Pray to your Lord and sacrifice to Him alone" (Surah 108:2 – *Al-Kawthar*). "And perform properly the Hajj and 'Umrah for Allah. But if you are prevented, sacrifice a Hady (animal, i.e. a sheep, a cow, or a camel, etc.) such as you can afford, and do not shave your heads until the Hady reaches the place of sacrifice... And fear Allah much and know that Allah is Severe in punishment" (Surah 2:196 – *Al-Baqarah*).

The Torah often emphasizes the idea of expiation for sin, of appeasing God's wrath. Sin must not remain unpunished. Given that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), we understand why the prescribed means of expiation was sacrificial blood. God told the Israelites, "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 for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11). The Injeel underscores this principle in Hebrews 9:22, where it is written, "And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."

So if Allah commanded men to offer the blood of animals to atone for their sins, why would He order His servant Jesus to give his life as "a ransom for many"? The answer is found a few verses later in the passage that we have just read: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Even if the Bible had not explicitly said it, we could have guessed this truth, couldn't we? When we talk about sacrifice, we are recognizing that the sinful man deserves death—his own blood should be shed; but he is asking God to accept the blood (the life) of the sacrificed animal in the place of his own. The animal is substituted for the guilty person. But here is the obvious problem: the life of an animal is not equal to the life of a man. The value of its blood is insufficient to redeem a human being. The sacrifices commanded by the Law of Moses served to teach the

principle that sin must be paid for (expiation) and that a sacrifice could, theoretically at least, remove the sin and appease the righteous anger of God. But true expiation would require the blood of a human being, blood which would represent a life of equal (or greater) value to that of the person asking for forgiveness. But the blood of a sinful man would not do the job. (This principle is symbolized by the fact that the animal to be sacrificed had to be, according to the Law, “without blemish.”) The man who has committed sin has already, in a sense, forfeited his life; if he is condemned to die for his own sin, he can hardly offer his life in the place of another condemned man. No, only a free man, a man without sin, could offer himself up as a substitute for the guilty.

This is why Jesus is the only man who could have given his life as a sacrifice for sin.

Several passages in the Bible emphasize the idea that Jesus did not sin. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 the apostle Paul wrote, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (NIV). The apostle Peter, also, declared the same truth: “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22).

Muhammad did not try to prove that Jesus had sinned. On the contrary, we see in Surah 19:19 – *Maryam* that the angel said to Mary, “(The angel) said: ‘I am only a Messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a righteous son’” (some translations of the Qur’an render these last words “a son endowed with purity”). Strangely, this state of purity is attributed by the Qur’an to no other prophet.

Let us return to the idea that God is merciful and desires to grant forgiveness, but that He is also the Judge of all the earth and must administer justice and see to it that His holy law is applied. We can now understand the solution to this dilemma, a solution which the Word of God sets forth in the Injeel in these words:

“For all men sin and come short of the glory of God, but by his mercy they are made upright for nothing, by the deliverance secured through Christ Jesus. For God showed him publicly dying as a sacrifice of reconciliation to be taken advantage of through faith. This was to vindicate his own justice (for in his forbearance, God passed

over men’s former sins)—to vindicate his justice at the present time, and show that he is upright himself, and that he makes those who have faith in Jesus upright also.” (Romans 3:23-26, translation of E.J. Goodspeed)

When Abraham was supposed to put his son to death, Allah, in His grace, intervened to save the life of the young man. According to Surah 37:107 – *As-Saffat*, God said, after providing a ram for the sacrifice, “We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.” Was this not a prophetic action on His part, symbolizing what he would later do for all people? God Himself provides the necessary sacrifice to save the soul that cannot save itself.