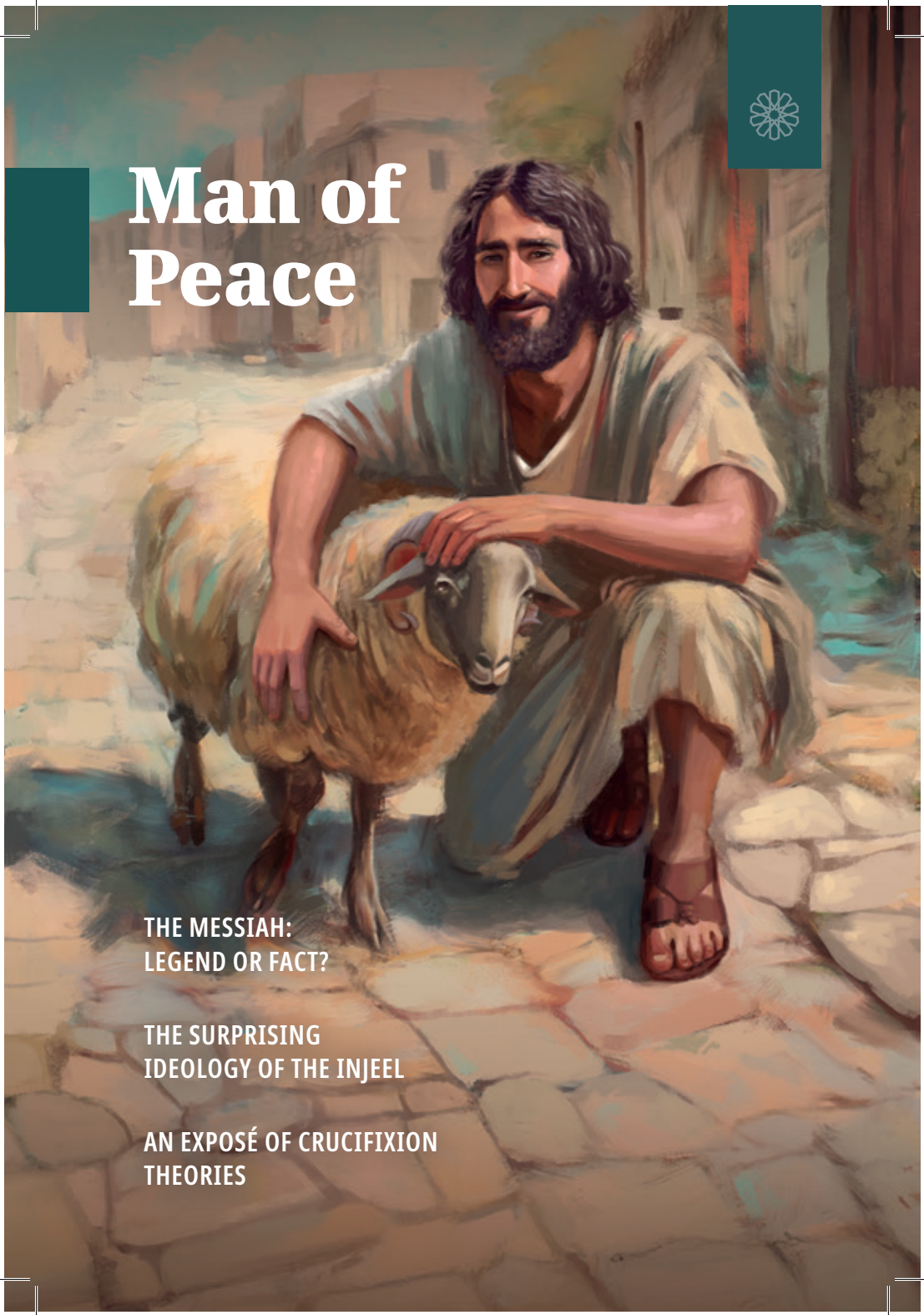
Man of Peace



THE MESSIAH:
LEGEND OR FACT?

THE SURPRISING
IDEOLOGY OF THE INJEEL

AN EXPOSÉ OF CRUCIFIXION
THEORIES

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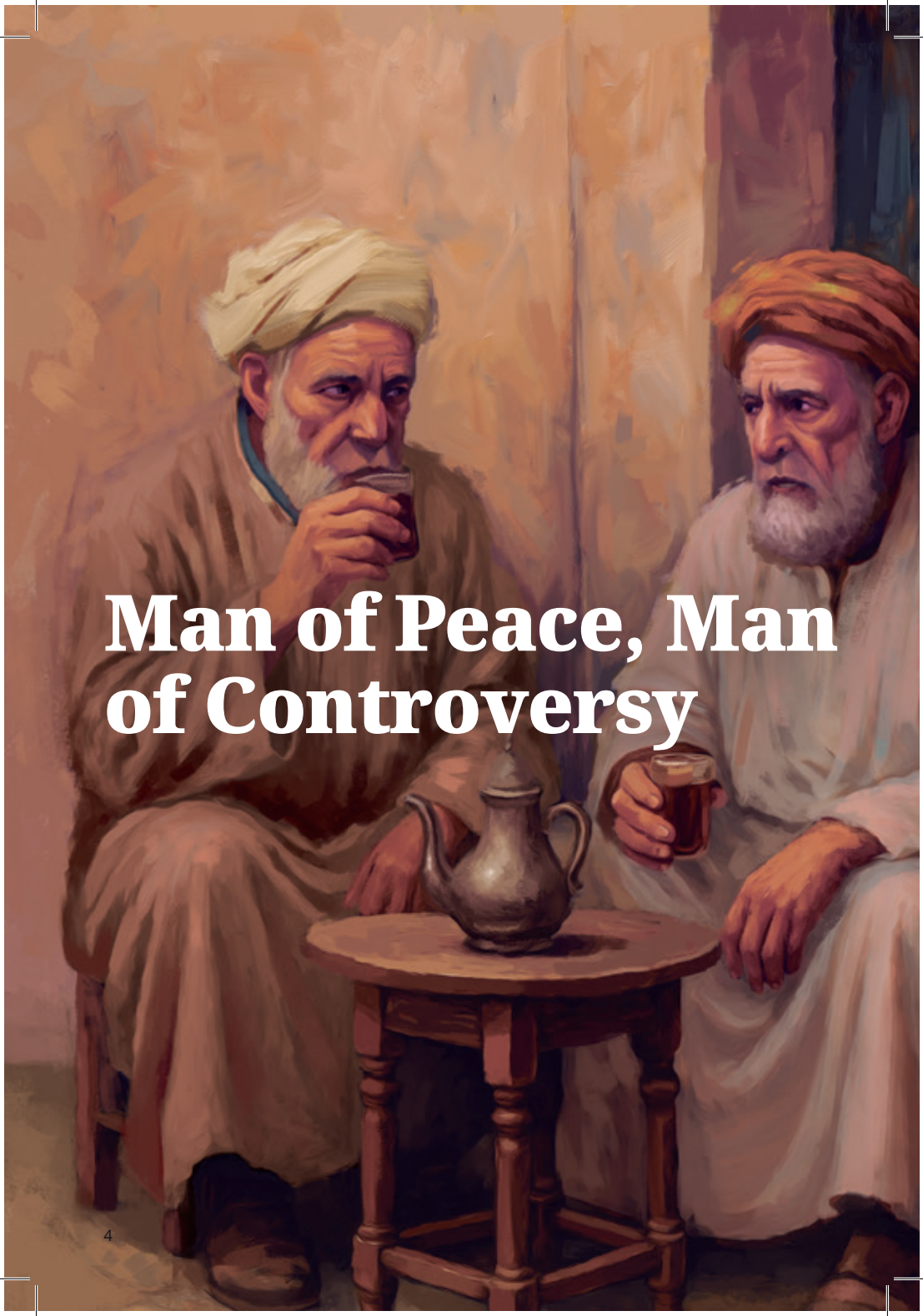


Man of Peace, Man of Controversy

01

"The world is going crazy," Muhammad told his brother over a cup of tea. "We've lived in this village for 70 years. We've seen revolution, war, modernization, and cultural changes. You would think we could keep up—but when I look at the world around me, I don't even recognize it."

"I know," Abdullah nodded gravely, his face creased with wrinkles. "So much has changed. I don't even like reading the newspaper anymore. War, crime, famine—everything is so depressing! And there is so much hatred toward Muslims—it always hurts when I see another conflict somewhere in the West where the Muslims are made to look like evil terrorists."

"What can we do, my brother?" Muhammad shrugged. "Someone is writing a script to make it

seem like we are bad people. But if they would send some news reporters here to our village, we could show them. We have been living side by side with our Christian neighbors for hundreds of years. We visit them on Christmas, and they visit us during Ramadan. We do business with them, we speak with them on the street, our children play together—we don't have any problems with Christians."

Abdullah chuckled and said, "Try getting a Western news agency to pick up that story. The people want exciting stories with blood and explosions. They aren't interested in hearing about how we live peaceably."

"My daughter showed me a video last week," Muhammad mused. "There were some Christians and Muslims debating each other about Isa al-Masih. It turned ugly. The Christians shouted at the Muslims for being 'Jesus haters,' and the Muslims shouted back at them for being 'polytheistic infidels.' " He sighed. "It shouldn't come to this point. There is too much misunderstanding."

"I agree," Abdullah nodded. "There are many Christians who believe in only one God—and we Muslims don't hate Isa al-Masih. We respect him. That is what they don't understand about us. The honorable Qur'an is filled with ayat about him. He is one of the greatest messengers—second only to Prophet Muhammad himself, peace be upon him."

Muhammad heaved another sigh. "That's very true, my brother. But there cannot be any progress unless people agree to sit down and listen—truly listen—to each other."

Shared Admiration of the Messiah

Christians and Muslims have lived together since the Hijra when the prophet Muhammad and his converts migrated to Medina. In most cases, relationships have been warm, cordial, and mutually respectful. Although there have always been incidents of sectarian tension and religious persecution, many religiously mixed nations have positive histories between these two great Abrahamic faiths.

Something that unites Muslims and Christians is a shared admiration of the Messiah. Both religious groups believe that Jesus was sent by God, that he had a miraculous birth, that he healed people's diseases, that he knew people's thoughts, that he could create, and that he preached a powerful message. This message is not recorded in the Qur'an but rather in the Injeel (Gospels), which was written down by Jesus's disciples. When we read his teachings, we gain even more admiration for the Messiah. Let's look at a few things that this widely beloved teacher said.

Something that unites Muslims and Christians is a shared admiration of the Messiah.

The Golden Rule

Jesus taught a startling moral lesson that has come to be known as the Golden Rule. It is found in the Injeel, and it summarizes in one single phrase all the previous laws and prophetic utterances that God sent to His people. Jesus said,

> "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

This moral teaching requires us to empathize with other human beings, asking ourselves what we would prefer if we were in their place. It's easy to think like a conqueror, asking no questions and having no feelings for the victims we leave behind. But in a society where people consistently apply the Golden Rule, there can be no lying, no stealing, no gossiping, and no adultery. Each person would ask, "How would this make the other person feel? Would I want them to do the same thing to me?"

This surprisingly simple moral check teaches us to do what is right, even when no one is looking.

God Loves Us like a Father

Jesus taught that God's love and compassion for us are stronger than that of an earthly father. In all his teachings, he told his followers to address God as their spiritual Father, their Heavenly Father. In one teaching, when speaking about asking God for the things we need, Jesus said,

> "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:7–11)

Jesus encouraged his followers to view themselves as God's children and to relate to Him with the same trusting spirit that little children

feel for their own parents. It is not a literal or a biological parenthood, but a spiritual one—God, the originator and sustainer of our lives, is not merely a faraway concept. He is close beside us, interested in all our suffering and joy. When we pray, it is like opening our hearts to someone infinitely kinder and more protective than our earthly father. This spiritual-relational ideology undergirds all the teachings of Jesus.

Sincerity Rather Than Show

Jesus also taught that sincerity in one's religious devotion is preferred over external displays. In his day, as in ours, there were many so-called religious leaders who went through the motions of giving alms, praying, and fasting for the sole purpose of being praised by other people. He said,

> "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.
>
> "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Matthew 6:1–6)
>
> "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Matthew 6:16–18)

According to Jesus, sincerity of heart is more important than public honor. However, he did not say that honor is unimportant, only that it must be subservient to a real moral and spiritual worth for which God bestows that honor. By

prioritizing true heart worship, Jesus taught that we may place ourselves in a position where God promises to reward us and honor us openly.

The Greatest Among Us

Jesus taught about an upside-down kingdom in which the greatest are those who serve. In a world where people are often greedy, selfish, and domineering, Jesus reminded his followers that true greatness consists of one's ability to sacrifice for the needs of others. These are the ones in our families and societies whom we truly admire—those who have what's best for us in mind and will go to any length to defend, uplift, and care for us. This is the strong servant leadership exemplified in the Injeel.

Once, the mother of two of Jesus's disciples came and asked privately for her sons to be seated in the two most important positions next to Jesus in Heaven. The other disciples, when they heard that she had asked this favor on behalf of her sons, were unhappy. They began arguing among themselves about which of them should have the greatest importance. Jesus knew that this spirit of rivalry and position-jockeying would lead to a spirit of supremacy which would destroy all he hoped to accomplish

in his spiritual mission. He wisely instructed them:

> "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25–28)

Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

MATTHEW 20:26

And Jesus did not merely speak about strong servant leadership; he exemplified it in his life. Once, Jesus attended a religious feast with his disciples in which it was customary to have a servant come and wash everyone's feet before eating (see John 13:1–17). Unfortunately, when they looked around, there were no servants to be seen. While everyone wondered to themselves how they would get their feet washed, Jesus quietly rose up, took the towel and basin of water, and began washing the feet of his own disciples—his spiritual students. They were shocked and tried to protest, but he said, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

His teachings are clear and reveal a deep spiritual strength. Excessive pride, arrogance, and greed lead only to the tearing down of society. But serving with kindness and mercy will bless others and lead them to appreciate and respect us in very special ways.

Love Your Enemies

Jesus taught that we must forgive our enemies and, yes, even love them. This was a very radical teaching for his day, and it remains radical today. When we have been hurt, when we have lost face, and when our prospects are endangered by people who wish ill toward us, it is easy to respond with vengeance. But this makes us no better than animals, who attack anything that frightens them. God created us to have moral sensibilities that allow us to rise above the ugliness of our enemies.

Jesus challenged his listeners to rise above evil by imitating God's mercy. If we imitate God's goodness, this is what qualifies us to be God's spiritual children. Jesus said,

> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:43–48)

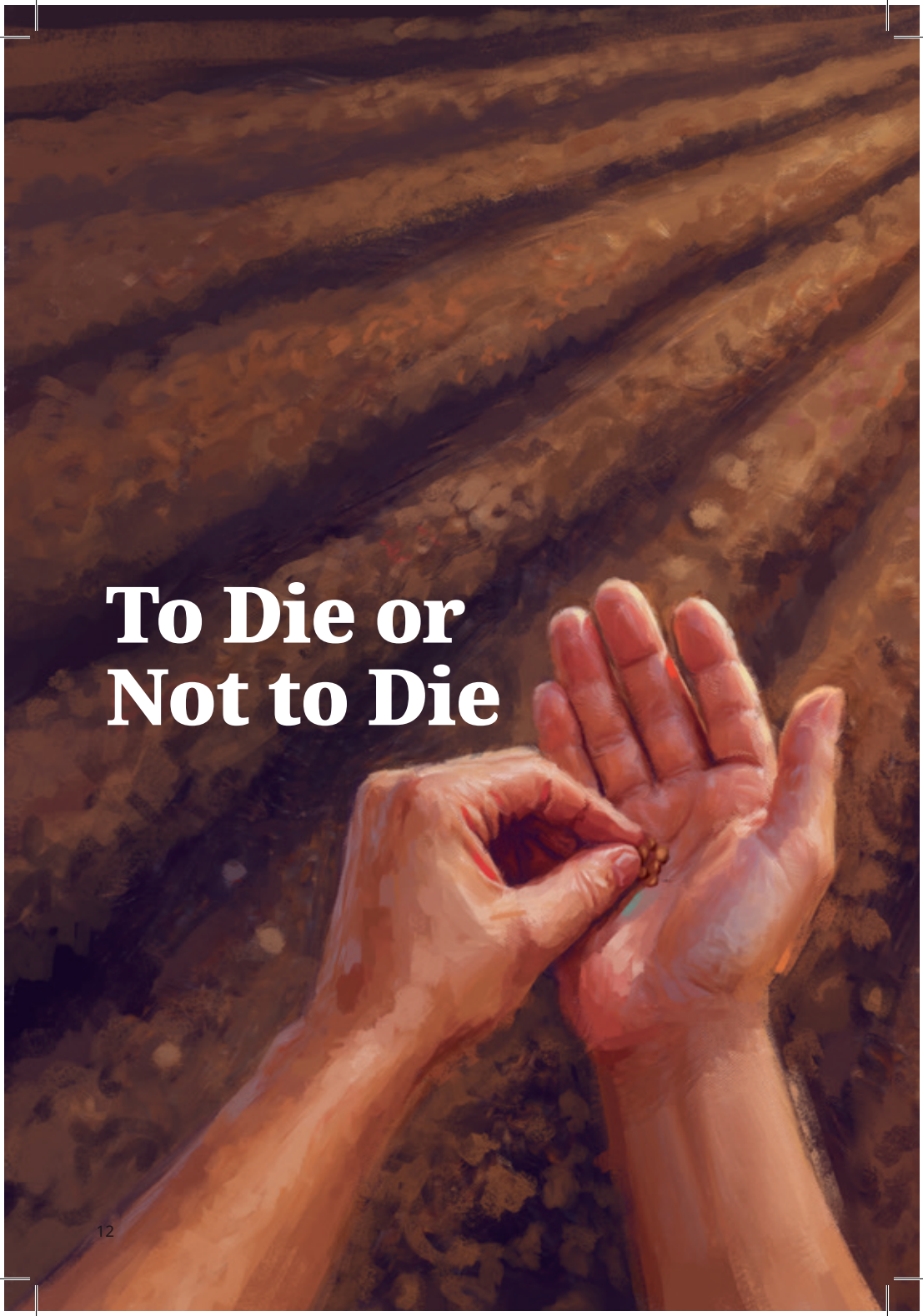
The Controversy Behind the Man

Most people would agree that these teachings would create a better society if followed carefully. If we did to others only what we wished them to do to us, if we concerned ourselves with serving and helping rather than lording ourselves over others, and if we focused on inner devotion rather than external show, a great change would take place in our communities!

But these represent only a handful of some of Jesus's most important teachings. His miraculous birth and life are only one part of what the Injeel describes. And so, although there are many points of agreement, there are also a few important aspects that Muslim and Christian scholars have differed upon. It is for this reason that Jesus Christ is perhaps the most universally beloved and yet the most controversial figure in history.

One of these controversial points relates to the end of Jesus's life on this earth. Did he die and rise to life again before ascending into Heaven, as Christian scholars argue, or did he *not* die, as Muslim scholars argue?

Surprisingly, although this topic has been a divisive point between Muslims and Christians, it has not always been as controversial as it is now. A brief look through history will help us see how our ancestors have handled this discussion.



To Die or Not to Die

02

Jesus lived for about 33 years on this earth, preaching and healing people and telling them about the coming Kingdom of Heaven. He taught people to look to God as a loving Father instead of a stern, fearful judge. He rebuked religious hypocrisy and treated little children kindly. But then, his time on this earth was finished. What happened next has intrigued believers for centuries. In fact, the question of what happened next did not have agreement among Islamic scholars for the first 500 or more years of Islamic theology. Multiple ideas emerged. It has only been in recent decades that the Islamic world has developed a consistent teaching on what happened to Jesus.

A straightforward reading of the Qur'an offers us several clues to Jesus's fate. Maryam 19:33 tells us the following:

> "Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!"

Here, Jesus speaks about his birth, death, and resurrection—but does not say exactly when his death would happen. Some scholars have suggested that Jesus will die and be resurrected during a 40-year period after he returns a second time. If this is the case, it is interesting that this ayah has omitted the details about his ascension and his more than two millennia in Heaven. If Jesus's death is supposed to happen at a much later date, we would expect the ayah to read something like the following:

> "Peace on me the day I was born, the day I ascended to God, the day I will return, the day I will die, and the day I shall be raised alive!"

This timeline of events, however, is not explicitly stated in the text. We simply read that there was or will be a point in time when Jesus will die and be raised again.

Another passage that speaks about Jesus's death is in Ali 'Imran 3:55.

> "(And remember) when Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee [Arabic: mutawaffika] and causing thee to ascend unto Me, and am cleansing thee of those who disbelieve and am setting those who follow thee above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me ye will (all) return, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein ye used to differ."

The Arabic term *mutawaffika* is from the word *tawaffa*, which means to cause to die. The root of this verb carries connotations of completing or fulfilling, as in, completing someone's life and gathering their soul. The plainest reading of the word is that God is causing Jesus to die. It is very interesting how the Injeel describes Jesus dying upon a cross. At the very last moment, he cried out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), and then breathed his last breath. The ideas of completion and dying go hand in hand.

In any case, this ayah describes a certain order of events: God will cause Jesus to die and then cause him to ascend—it does not say that God will raise Jesus to Himself first and then at some later date send Jesus down again and cause him to die. The first event is death; the second event is ascension.

Furthermore, this passage says that God will set Jesus's followers above the disbelievers until the Day of Resurrection. The order of events in this ayah, then, is:

1. Jesus dies.
2. Jesus ascends.

3. Jesus's followers are honored above disbelievers.
4. The Day of Resurrection occurs.

It may surprise you to see this sequence in the text—but it is right there for anyone to discover. And it exactly mirrors what the Injeel teaches: Jesus died, then ascended, and then will return on the Day of Resurrection.

A More Complicated Ayah

While there are some very straightforward ayat that seem to confirm the historical death of Jesus, there is one more passage that complicates the discussion. It is precisely because of An-Nisa 4:157 that Islamic scholars had at least eight different interpretations during the first 500 years of scholarship regarding what happened at the end of Jesus's life. This ayah reads as follows:

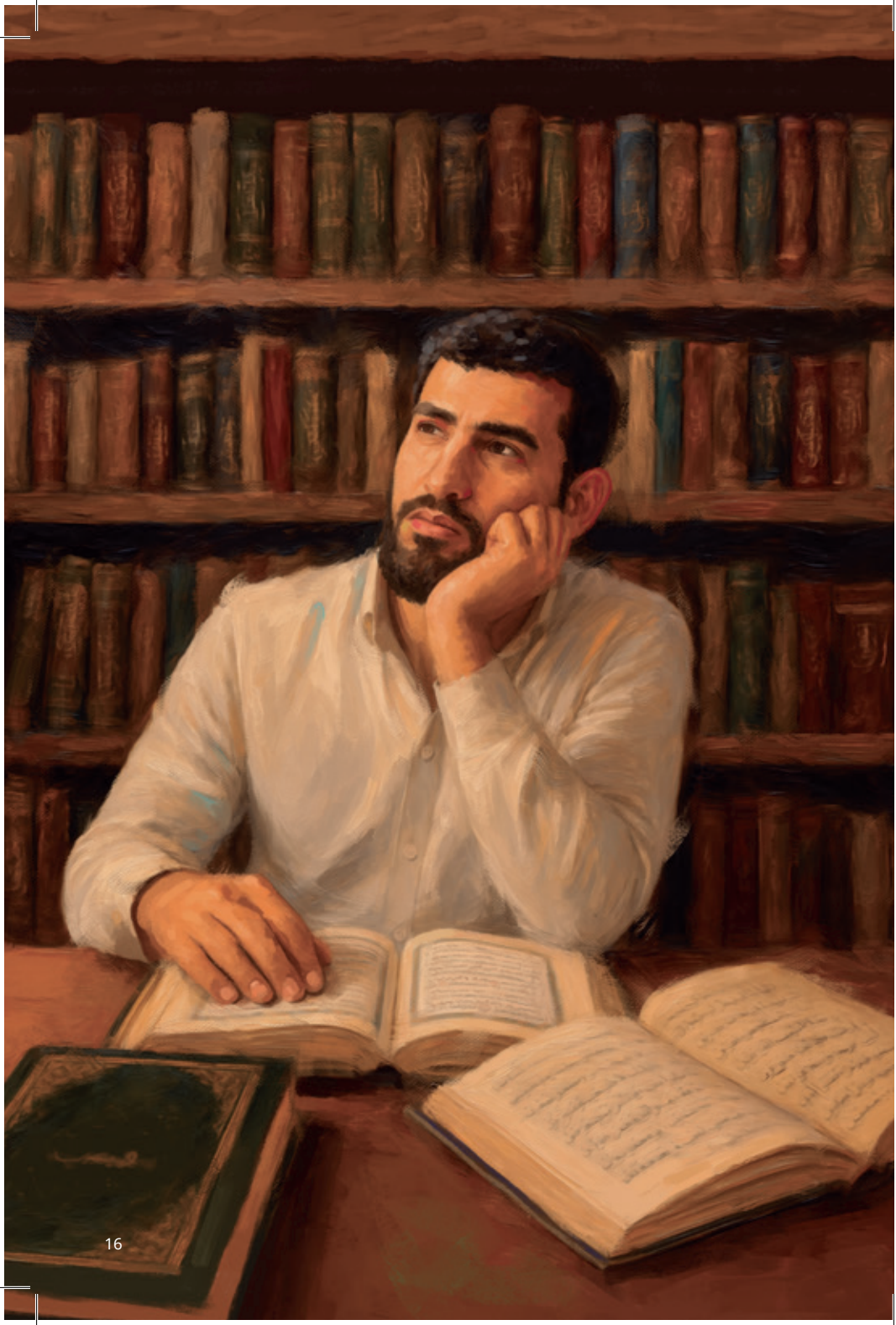
> "And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger - they slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain."

This ayah has raised a number of questions for Islamic scholars. The difficulty began with the phrase "it appeared so unto them." Did this mean that it appeared that they killed Jesus when he did not die? Did it mean it appeared that they killed Jesus when someone or something else killed him? Or did it mean it appeared that they killed Jesus when they actually killed someone or something else?

Early scholars differed widely. Their interpretations can be categorized in at least eight different ways:

1. Jesus was literally killed.
2. Something else (such as knowledge) was killed.
3. An unknown person was substituted and killed.
4. A known person (such as Judas) was substituted and killed.
5. An unknown volunteer stepped in and was killed.
6. A known volunteer (such as Serges) stepped in and was killed.
7. An unknown person or thing was punished.
8. A known person (such as Pilate) was punished.

What is very interesting about this fascinating ayah is that none of the seven most important ahadith collections have anything to say about it. We may search the vast collections of Sahih Muslim, Sahih Bukhari, Sunan Tirmidhi, Sunan ibn Majah, Sunan Abu Da'ud, Sunan an-Nasa'i, and Malik



ibn Anas's Al-Muwatta and find absolutely nothing about the crucifixion or non-crucifixion of Jesus. Even the popular, treasured collections of Sahih Muslim and Sahih Bukhari are completely silent on the question of whether Jesus was crucified.

The big picture, then, is one of uncertainty. Islamic scholars like Al-Rasi, Al-Sijistani, and Al-Ghazali believed Jesus himself was crucified. Scholars like Al-Farra, Al-Dinawari, and Al-Maturidi believed it was knowledge itself that was killed—that is, knowledge of the event was destroyed and must forever remain veiled in mystery. Ibn Abbas believed Judas was killed; Ibn Ishaq favored Serges as the replacement; Ibn Munabbih, Al-Suddi, and Ibn Jurayj all suggested an unknown volunteer stepped in to be killed, and so on.

With this much doubt and confusion, it makes sense why the ayah says, "Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture." If we base our conclusion solely on the data that is available in these few ayat, we are certainly conjecturing. There is simply not enough information to form a conclusion properly. That's why it is imperative for anyone who wishes to know what happened to Jesus to read about his life directly from the Injeel. This is the primary source from which we can know historical facts about the life of the Messiah.

No one—Christian or Muslim—should feel ashamed about reading the Injeel to find light and truth. Even Muhammad, when he was in doubt or had questions, was compelled to search for clarity from Christians and Jews who had access to God's truth.

> "And if thou (Muhammad) art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee. Verily the Truth from thy Lord hath come unto thee. So be not thou of the waverers." (Yunus 10:94)

As we can see, the Qur'anic texts about Jesus's death are written in plain Arabic—there are no riddles or plays on words. It is written plainly, but the confusion comes because there is not enough information.

Perhaps this is because God intends for us to read His holy words in the honorable Injeel—words that can bring clarity and confidence—for if God cannot change, then His words cannot change either. Let us turn briefly to His words in the Injeel to find out the rest of the story about what happened to Jesus.

The Sacrificial Ram

03

The prophet Abraham trudges slowly up the mountain with his beloved son. His mind replays the words of God as they come to him: “Abraham, take now your son whom you love and offer him as a burnt sacrifice on the mountain of which I will tell you.” Despite the intense love he feels for his son, Abraham does not delay obedience. Now, he is here on the mountain.

“Father,” his son asks, “we have the fire with us, and we brought wood, but where is the animal for the burnt offering?”

Abraham cannot bear to tell him—not yet. “My son,” he replies, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering” (Genesis 22:2).

Reaching the summit, the prophet builds a stone altar and arranges the wood upon it. Then, ten-

derly explaining God's commandment to his son, he lifts the boy and puts him upon the wood. He takes a knife from his belt and raises it with agonizing effort, ready to slay the child of his own body.

Suddenly, a voice stops him: "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (vss. 11, 12).

Lifting his eyes, Abraham sees a ram caught by its horns in the bushes. Quickly, he takes the ram and sacrifices it instead of his son. Then he names the place "Jehovah Jireh," which means, "The Lord Will Provide."

The Lord Will Provide

The Bible, which includes the Tawrat, Zabur, Injeel, and books from many other prophets, teaches us how we can escape from the fire and find entrance into Paradise. The way of eternal happiness is not based on our own good works but rather upon a substitute that takes our place. Just as Abraham's son did nothing to escape death, we also can do nothing except trust the provision that God will make for us.

Some people feel that salvation is like bartering in the marketplace. If we give a certain amount of spiritual currency—praying, giving alms, fasting, and so forth—then God is obliged to give us mercy. Unfortunately, this way of thinking (which has more in common with human commerce than divine grace) disadvantages many people. What about poor people, who might not be able to give as much money to charity? What about women, who might not have as much time to pray as men? What about handicapped individuals, who cannot read and memorize God's Word? It does not seem fair to say that these individuals will miss out on Paradise because they cannot perform as well as others.

Others have focused on the metaphor of a scale that tips one way for our sins and another way for our virtues. Some people believe that as long as there is at least an atom's weight more good than evil, they have a ticket to eternal bliss. But this manner of thinking offers another logical problem: are there not many evil people in the world who, on the outside, appear to be generous and philanthropic?

Imagine that you are a woman who is married to a rich billionaire. Your husband gives millions of dollars to build homes for orphans. He donates for medical research that has saved countless lives. He prays fastidiously and even appears on national television to encourage people to live good lives of charity and faith. But when no one is looking, he behaves wickedly toward you, his wife. He abuses you emotionally and physically. He insults

> ***God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.***
>
> GENESIS 22:8

you, slaps you, pulls you by your hair, and screams at you. Before long, you are completely traumatized but see no way out. No one would believe you if you tried to get help—after all, he seems like such a wonderful, generous man.

His scales are tipped toward the good side, aren't they? He has helped thousands of people. What does one life—your life—count in the balance? When weighed against the thousands of lives he has helped, it barely moves the scale. Your suffering counts for nothing.

"Oh, but it does," you might say. "My suffering might not weigh much in comparison to all the good he has done, but it has weight for me. It is heavy for *me*. I am only one life, but I matter too."

And that is precisely the point. The concept of scales and weights is imperfect because some of the world's most evil people have also been incredibly generous. Some have even been pious. Do they deserve to have an eternal reward from God? This is the logical conclusion we would reach if we assumed we must work our way to salvation.

Abraham's story, however, teaches us that God provides the means and the way to salvation. Entrance into the glory that He has prepared for us is not something we earn, but a gift we receive. This gift comes to us through God's provision, just as He provided a ram as a substitute for Abraham's son to escape death.

The Substitute

Instead of analyzing our deeds on a scale, God's view of us is very black and white: either we have a record of sin, or we do not. There is no in-between. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), which means that even one tiny sin labels us as a sinner worthy of death. And unfortunately, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

The picture is very bleak: all of us have, at least once in our lifetimes, told a lie, taken something that doesn't belong to us, or had a lustful thought.

Think about it: Did you ever take a pencil that belonged to a classmate? Have you told a little white lie? Have your eyes ever lingered on an immoral picture?

The payment for you is death—eternal death. Unless, of course, you can find someone to receive the payment for you.

The early messengers in the Bible foretold a Messiah who would come to be our substitute—someone who would pay for our sins. The prophet Isaiah wrote,

"Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
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.

"He was oppressed and He
was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to
the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,

So He opened not His mouth.
He was taken from prison and
from judgment,
And who will declare
His generation?
For He was cut off from the land
of the living;
For the transgressions of My
people He was stricken.
And they made His grave with
the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done
no violence,
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

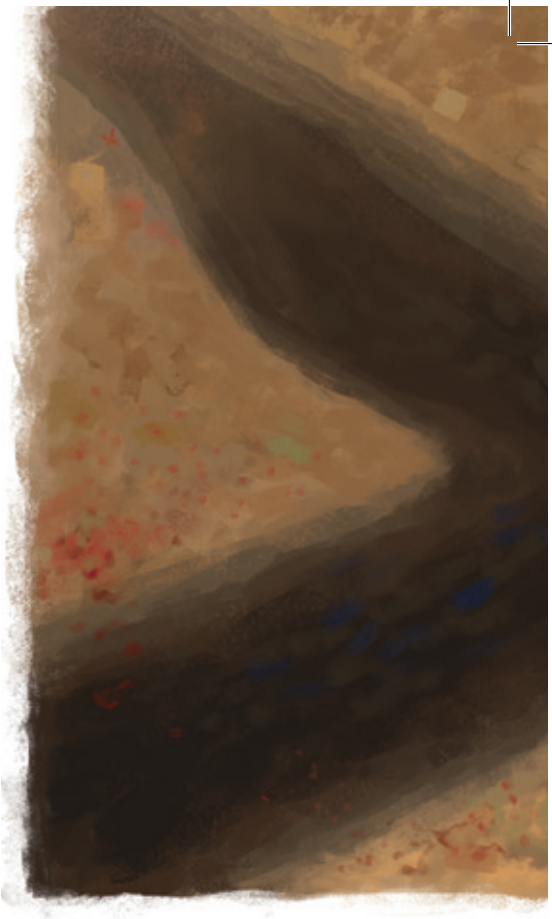
"Yet it pleased the *Lord* to
bruise Him;
He has put Him to grief.
When You make His soul an
offering for sin,
He shall see His seed, He shall
prolong His days,
And the pleasure of the *Lord*
shall prosper in His hand.
He shall see the labor of His soul,
and be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous
Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear
their iniquities.
Therefore I will divide Him a
portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil
with the strong,
Because He poured out His soul
unto death,
And He was numbered with
the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the
transgressors." (Isaiah 53:4–12)

The Jesus of History

Islamic sources—the Qur'an and ahadith—accept that Jesus was the Messiah. Muslims all around the world know Jesus by two titles: Jesus, son of Mary (Isa ibn Maryam), or Jesus the Messiah (Isa al-Masih). No one contests that Jesus was the Messiah, and no one suggests anyone else who might be another Messiah. However, it is not always understood what Messiah means. What was the Messiah supposed to do? What does the title Messiah indicate?

Jesus, as our Messiah, fulfilled this role of the "offering for sin." He "bore the sin of many" so that "by his stripes" (that is, the stripes of a whip) we may be "healed." This occurred outside the city gates of Jerusalem in the first century CE. Historical documents from Roman and Jewish writers (none of which had any motive to support or promote the movement of Jesus's followers) provide evidence for a real, historical event in which Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on the order of Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea. Even though Jewish scholars generally deny that Jesus was the Messiah, historical accounts from Jewish sources confirm the physical, literal, visible death of Jesus.

Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian who neither liked Christians nor had any interest in supporting their narrative, recorded around 94 CE that it was Pilate who sentenced Jesus to death on a cross. Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman historian and senator, also referred to Jesus's crucifixion in his final work, Annals (written around 116 CE). Tacitus, like Josephus, hated Christians and had no interest in forwarding their narrative. If the crucifixion of Jesus had not been a strongly attested historical fact, it would have been in his interest to write that Christians followed a mythical leader or that they were deceived in their belief that Jesus had died. Instead, Tacitus and Josephus were historians living



just a few years after Jesus's death who wrote about the crucifixion as a historical fact.

The death of Jesus by crucifixion is also written about extensively within the Bible. In fact, the Bible contains a total of 396 references to the event, not counting the dozens and dozens of prophesied predictions from early prophets. The death of Jesus is the central fact of the Bible. Jesus himself promised that his death would be the means of bringing us eternal life. He said,

> "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

And,

> "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

But what actually happened at the cross? And how does it guarantee us grace, peace, and mercy from our Father in Heaven?

To Give a Life

04

Jesus had been telling his 12 disciples about his impending death, but none of them believed him. Peter, the hot-tempered and outspoken disciple, had openly rebuked Jesus for saying something so discouraging. The Bible says,

"And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.' " (Mark 8:31–33)

The disciples had been hoping their master, the Messiah, would be a great military leader—a king! They were zealous to see him overthrow the Roman armies that held their nation captive. With his miraculous ability to multiply food, raise the dead, and heal the injured, surely their army could become invincible! His words about suffering and dying didn't make any sense to them. It seemed like weakness, even though Jesus had explained that it demonstrated his great power. He told them,

> "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." (John 10:17, 18)

Jesus was about to demonstrate power, not weakness. He knew exactly when it would be time for him to die for all the people in the world as a sin offering. Everything had been prophesied down to the exact day.

Foreshadowing of the Coming Sacrifice

To understand the prophecy that pinpointed the exact time for the Messiah's death, we must first go back in time to ancient Egypt. You may have heard the story of Moses trying to convince Pharaoh to let the Jewish people leave. They were slaves at that time, and Pharaoh did not want to lose his workforce. Moses, by the power of God, brought ten different plagues upon Egypt, and each time, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the people go. It wasn't until the tenth plague that Pharaoh finally changed his mind and allowed them to leave.

The first nine plagues included bloody water, frogs, lice, flies, a livestock disease, skin boils, hail, locusts, and a mysterious period of darkness. The tenth plague was the worst of all: the death of the firstborn of both humans and animals.

In order for the people of Moses to escape this deadly, irreversible plague, God sent special instructions so that the firstborn of any believing family would not die. He told them to select a perfect, healthy lamb and kill it. They must put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of the house. Then, they must enter the house and stay inside all night while the destroying angel went about his work. When the angel saw the blood of the lamb above their door, he would pass over and do no harm to the firstborn inside.

It happened exactly as Moses told them. That night, all who believed and followed God's instructions put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and stayed safely inside their homes, protected by the sign of the blood. But all throughout Egypt, a great cry was heard. The firstborn

> ***I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself.***
>
> **JOHN 10:17, 18**

of both humans and animals were slain by the unseen hand of the angel! Quickly, Pharaoh told them to leave Egypt, and they departed. Ever afterward, the people of Moses celebrated the Feast of Passover, because it was on that night that the destroying angel "passed over" those who put their faith in the solution God had provided.

Moses brought the people into the wilderness, where they heard God's words at Mount Sinai. There, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments—rules that would promote their happiness and safety for all time. He also gave Moses a ceremonial worship system that would help the people understand God's ways. Based on these instructions, they constructed a beautiful, elaborate traveling sanctuary that could be taken down and set up anywhere they traveled. Then they instituted worship practices in this sanctuary that would teach the people about the solution God had provided. Through the worship rituals, the devout believers could see an explanation of how God would ransom them from the eternal death that must come upon all sinners and how they could find entrance into Paradise.

Within this glorious sanctuary, or tabernacle, lay a hidden prediction of God's salvation. The ritual for receiving forgiveness from God involved sacrificing a perfect lamb in the sinner's place—just as in Abraham's story and just as in the Passover story in Egypt. Moses, through God's special instructions, specified exactly how to choose the sacrificial animal and what to do with it. He said,

> "Let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the

tabernacle of meeting before the *Lord*. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him." (Leviticus 1:3, 4)

Penitent worshippers would lay their hand on the head of the animal and confess their sins. Then, they would kill the lamb and give it as a burnt sacrifice. Then "it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him"—that is, the ritual taught them to look forward to one who would come to die a sacrificial death for all who confessed their sins and believed in the sacrifice.

Hundreds of years after Moses died, when Jesus began his public ministry, John the Baptist (Yahya) looked at him and declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36) Even though Jesus's own disciples were hesitant to understand his true mission, John the Baptist understood it right away.

All throughout the history of God's people, there has always been a foreshadowing of one who would come to give his life in order to take away our sins. But when would this occur? To find out, we must turn to the prophet Daniel.

An Astonishing Time Prophecy

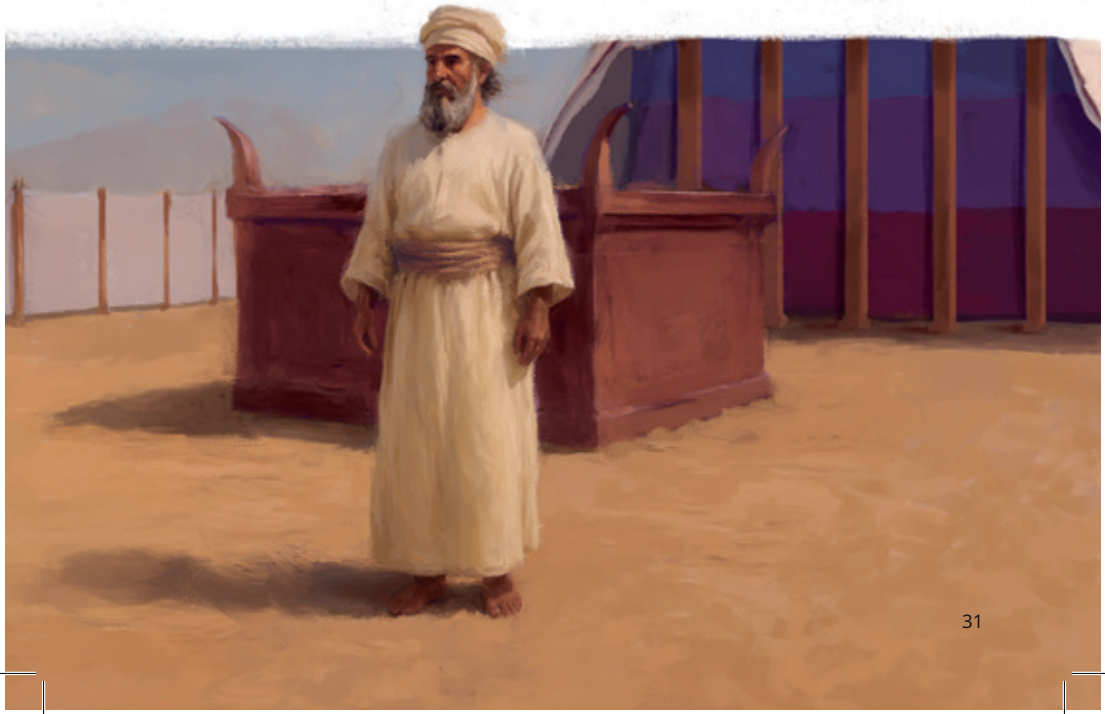
During one woeful period in Jewish history, the enemy nation of Babylon (which existed in what is now modern-day Iraq) attacked Israel and took most of the people captive. The Babylonian armies destroyed Jerusalem and the beau-

tiful temple there. However, God promised through the prophets that the people would go home and rebuild the city after 70 years of captivity (see Jeremiah 29:10–14).

The prophet Daniel was one of the captives who was taken from Israel to Babylon. When the 70 years were nearly over, he began praying earnestly for God to fulfill His promise and take the people home. God sent him an astonishing vision that spoke not of 70 literal years but of 70 prophetic weeks. Daniel was very surprised, because he understood that each prophetic day represents one literal year in earth time (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). That means that 70 prophetic weeks actually meant 490 prophetic days, or 490 literal years.

Daniel struggled with this prophecy. What would happen in 490 years? Was God changing the timeline? They were supposed to go home after 70 years in captivity. Did God change His mind, or was the prophecy speaking of something entirely different? Listen to the words of the vision that Daniel wrote down:

"Seventy weeks are determined
For your people and for your
holy city,
To finish the transgression,
To make an end of sins,
To make reconciliation
for iniquity,
To bring in
everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy.



> "Know therefore
> and understand,
> That from the going forth of
> the command
> To restore and build Jerusalem
> Until Messiah the Prince,
> There shall be seven weeks and
> sixty-two weeks;
> The street shall be built again,
> and the wall,
> Even in troublesome times.
>
> "And after the sixty-two weeks
> Messiah shall be cut off, but not
> for Himself. . . .
> Then he shall confirm a covenant
> with many for one week;
> But in the middle of the week
> He shall bring an end to sacrifice
> and offering." (Daniel 9:24–27)

Here we can see a number of incredible things that are foretold to occur at the end of these 70 prophetic weeks—or 490 literal years. First of all, we see that God is planning to do something to deal with the problem of sin. This solution will:

1. Finish the transgression.
2. End sin.
3. Make reconciliation for iniquity.
4. Bring in everlasting righteousness.

At the same time, someone called "the Most Holy" would be anointed—that is, chosen and set apart for a special work, much like a royal coronation. Who would this be? A few phrases later, the vision identifies this special person: it is "Messiah the Prince."

Daniel's first problem was to figure out a starting date for this time prophecy. Four hundred and ninety years is a highly specific time period, so if he could know when it was supposed to begin, all he needed to do was count forward, and that's when he could expect Messiah the Prince to arrive. Thankfully, Daniel's vision described the starting point for the prophecy: the countdown would begin "from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem." Remember, Daniel was having this vision while a captive far from home. Jerusalem was in shambles from the Babylonian army. At some point, someone with authority would give a command to restore and rebuild it—Daniel understood that would be the moment to begin counting down until the Messiah's arrival.

However, he could not count the full 70 prophetic weeks (490 literal years). In a vision, he learned that the 70 weeks would be divided into three distinct segments: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one final week. Messiah the Prince would arrive after the first two segments—therefore, Daniel must count 69 weeks (or 483 earth years) starting at the time of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem.

> ***And after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.***
>
> **DANIEL 9:26**

An Exciting Prophetic Fulfillment

During the time of the Jewish captivity, the empire of the Medes and the Persians conquered Babylon. The Persians were more favorable to the Jews, and in the year 457 BCE, the Persian king Artaxerxes passed a decree allowing the Jewish people to return to Israel and rebuild Jerusalem. It is from this year that we begin counting down to the arrival of the Messiah. Adding 69 prophetic weeks, or 483 earth years (making sure to skip the "0" since there is no zero year), we come to 27 CE.

The Injeel states that Jesus was baptized "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1). When we study the life of the Roman emperor Tiberius Caesar, we see that his 15th year as Roman emperor was indeed 27 CE.[1]

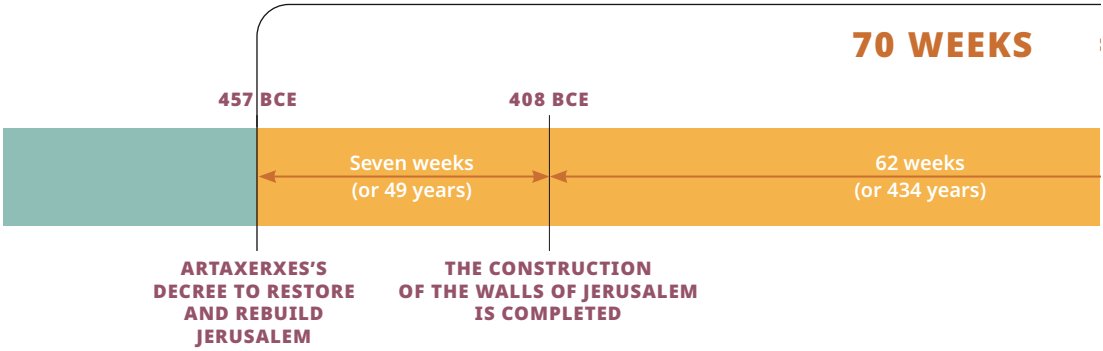
The Bible explains that Jesus went down into the water to be baptized, in the same way the priests were submerged underwater when they were anointed for ministry. When he came up, the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove, and God spoke affirmation to him out of Heaven (see Luke 3:21, 22). Jesus's baptism was the coronation of the Messiah's earthly ministry and the start of the final week (or seven literal years) in the 70-week prophecy.

Daniel's prophecy said that many other important things would happen during the last week, or the last seven years. We now know that this last period of seven years began in 27 CE. Let us remind ourselves what the prophecy predicted would occur:

1. Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself.
2. He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week.
3. In the middle of the week, he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.

Here we see an interesting term being used. The Messiah will be "cut off." This is a phrase that is used all throughout the Bible to mean "killed." For example, when God gave the law of Sabbath-keeping, see how He specified the consequences for breaking the law—being "cut off" means the same thing as being put to death:

Timeline of events in Daniel 9



> "You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people." (Exodus 31:14)

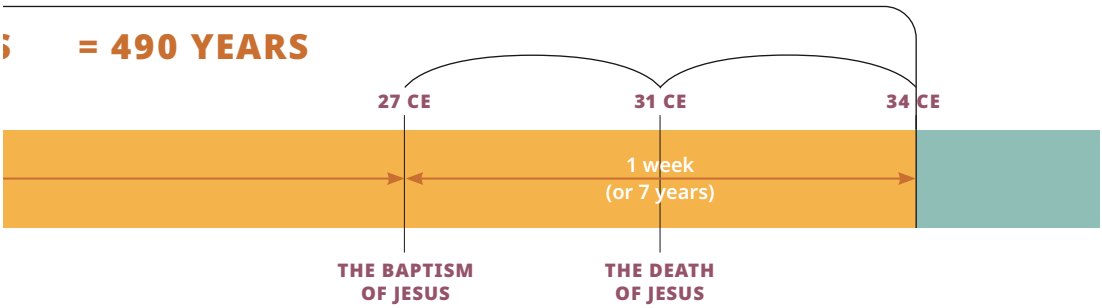
For the Messiah to be "cut off," then, clearly means that he would be put to death.

The prophecy states that the Messiah would confirm a covenant with many for one week (that is, the last seven years of the prophetic period), but in the middle of the week, he would bring an end to sacrifice and offering. Which sacrifice and offering is it speaking about? Certainly, at that time there was only one type of sacrifice and offering: that which took place in the sanctuary or temple. It was the sacrifice of animals that worshipers would offer to seek forgiveness for their sins. Daniel's prophecy predicted that the Messiah would do something that would make this entire system of sacrifices obsolete, and it would happen "in the middle of the week."

When is the "middle of the week"? Again, according to the Bible's "day-for-a-year" prophetic time, half of a prophetic week would be three and a half years. Did anything interesting happen three and a half years after Jesus's baptism? Indeed. Three and a half years later, Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross.

Everything happened exactly as planned.

The death of Jesus was not an accident or a show of weakness. It was not an unplanned mob ganging up on him. It was the precise fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus, the



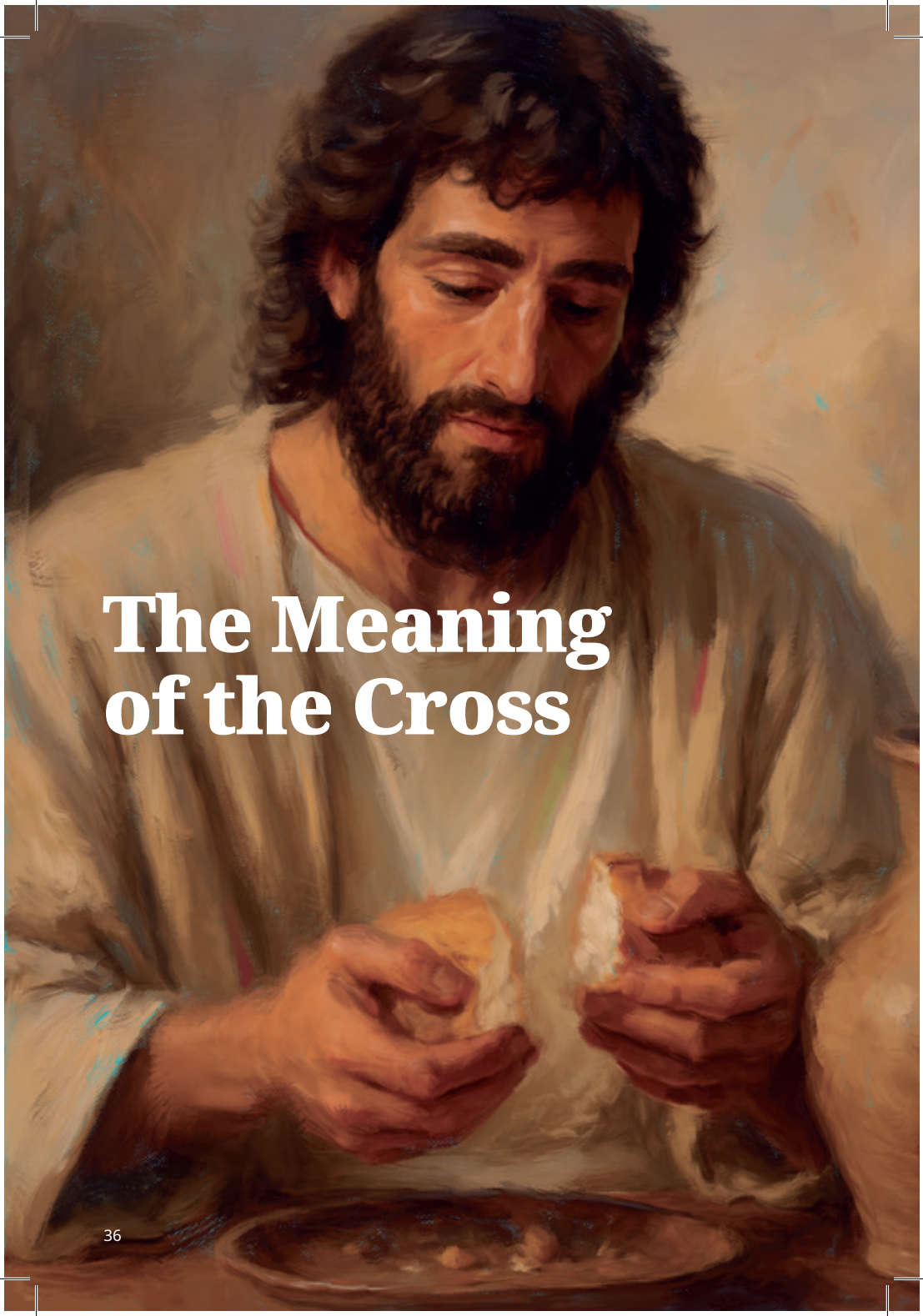
final, perfect sacrifice for sin, gave his life willingly to receive the just consequences for our sins. For over a thousand years, the Jewish people had been sacrificing lambs, but these were just symbols for the real lamb that was coming. Finally, the symbol had met reality, and the system of sacrifices became obsolete. Jesus died as a substitute for all sinners who believe in him. Only Jesus the Messiah could fulfill this role as a sacrifice for sin because only Jesus is entirely sinless. Only his sacrifice is pure and perfect.

Remember, there are only two options: you have the stain of sin upon you, or you do not. There are no scales and balances. It is an either-or, black-and-white question: does sin remain upon you?

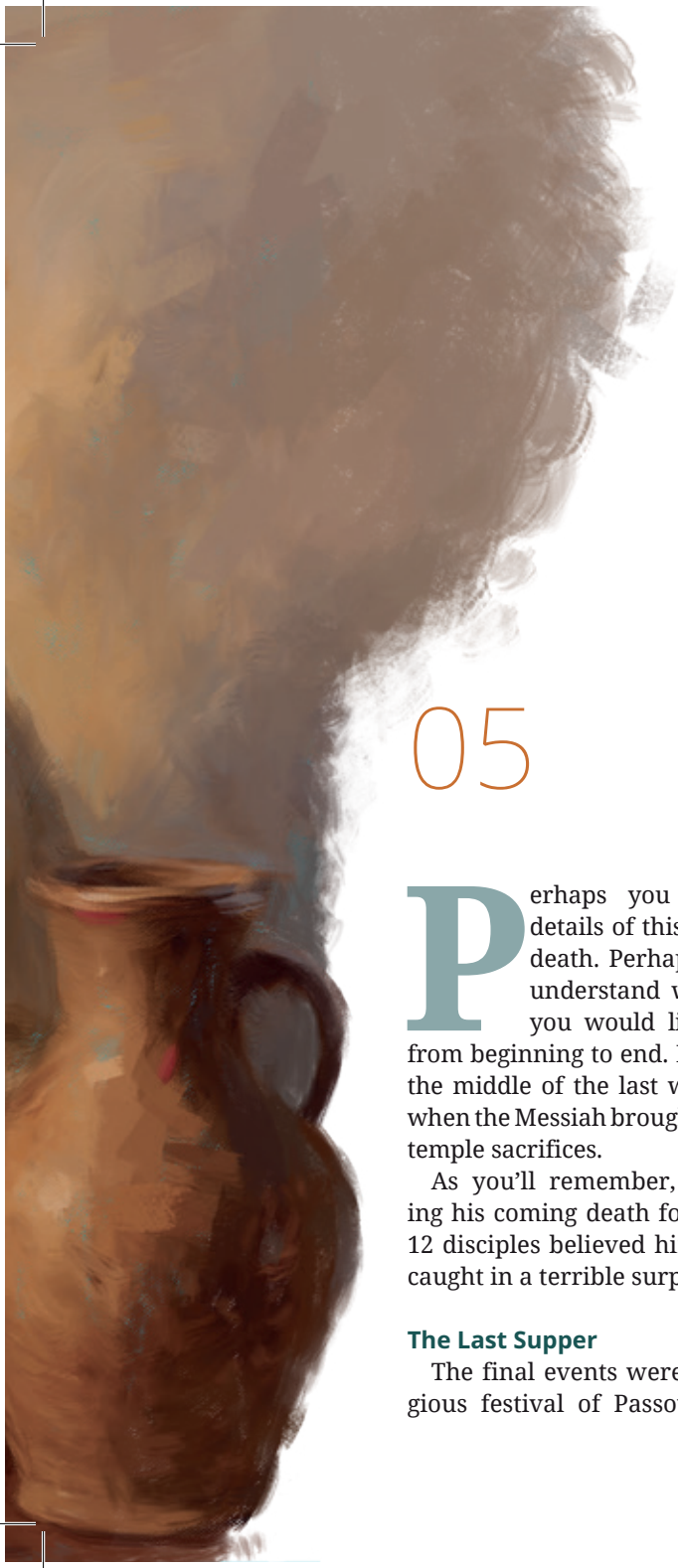
When Jesus died for our sins, it means that he stood in our place and received our punishment, allowing us to walk out clean and clear. The stain of sin is gone. We are free. This marvelous plan for upholding God's law and yet saving the life of the lawbreaker was conceptualized in the heart of God long before the Messiah appeared in ancient Palestine. Everything was predicted, and everything occurred just as planned.

Reference

1. Historians note that Tiberius Caesar began reigning as a co-regent with his adoptive father in 12 CE and had full control of the throne after his father's death in 14 CE. However, according to historians like Tacitus and Suetonius, the Roman system of reckoning counts the ruler's first year on the throne as an "accession year," which means it is not counted in the total years of one's rule. Therefore, Tiberius' reign would begin in 13 CE, making his 15th year 27 CE.



The Meaning of the Cross



05

Perhaps you have never heard the details of this story of Jesus's sacrificial death. Perhaps you are just starting to understand what it really means, and you would like to hear the full story from beginning to end. Let's travel back in time to the middle of the last week of Daniel's prophecy, when the Messiah brought an end to the ceremonial temple sacrifices.

As you'll remember, Jesus had been foretelling his coming death for a while, but none of his 12 disciples believed him. They were about to be caught in a terrible surprise.

The Last Supper

The final events were set in motion at the religious festival of Passover. All throughout Jeru-

salem, the Jewish people were gathering to celebrate that great night of deliverance in Egypt when they painted the blood of the sacrificial lamb upon their doorposts and the angel of death passed over them. Jesus gathered with his 12 disciples in a borrowed upper room where they were to eat the ceremonial meal together. Now known famously as the Last Supper, none but Jesus realized it would be their last meal before his death.

In those days, it was customary for a servant to wash the dusty feet of all who came to dine—but in this borrowed room, there were no servants provided. None of the disciples wanted to humble themselves to this lowly role. With calmness and dignity, Jesus took a basin and a towel and began to wash his disciples' feet. His action shocked them, but it was done for a purpose: Jesus wanted to leave them one last example to follow. He did not leave them an example of domination, power, and control, but of selfless sacrifice and service.

> "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.' " (John 13:12–17)

After this, they ate the meal together. However, it was no ordinary meal. Jesus infused it with spiritual significance. The prophetic sacrifice that he would soon make would bring an end to the animal sacrifices the Jews had been offering for centuries. He was the true sacrifice, the final sacrifice of which all others were only a symbol. But in order for his sacrifice to benefit anyone, it must be received into the soul the same way food is received into the body. As they ate, Jesus spoke of the food and drink as metaphors for the way we must accept his sacrifice. It would not be enough merely to know about it or to look at it from a distance. His sacrifice must become the fuel of our lives, just as food fuels the body. It must be a joy and relief to our spirit, just as a cool drink refreshes us on a hot day.

> "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.'

> "Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' " (Matthew 26:26–29)

As they ate and drank together, Jesus announced that one of the 12 would betray him that night. For the second time that evening, the disciples were shocked. They wondered who would do something so terrible. Jesus's most beloved disciple, John, was leaning against him at the table, and Peter motioned for him to ask Jesus who the betrayer would be. When John asked him quietly, Jesus said, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." Then he dipped a piece of bread and handed it to Judas Iscariot.

Judas was a very well-respected disciple. In fact, he was the treasurer of the group and held the money bag to pay for any needs that arose while they traveled. No one would have suspected him. But as soon as Jesus had given him the piece of bread, the Bible says that "Satan entered him." Jesus, knowing all things, told him, "What you do, do quickly" (John 13:27).

The others didn't know what Jesus meant. Since Judas held the money bag, they assumed that Jesus wanted him to go and buy more things for the feast, or perhaps give something to the poor. Judas rose and went out into the night to betray his master. (See John 13:28–30.)

The Garden of Gethsemane

When the feast ended, Jesus and the 11 remaining disciples went out some distance from the city to the Garden of Gethsemane, a quiet grove of olive trees where Jesus liked to go for prayer. It was late, and everyone felt tired after eating. Jesus asked them if they could stay awake and pray with him—but everyone fell asleep.

Jesus prayed alone in great agony. It was at this time that he began to feel the terrible spiritual weight of all the sins of the world descending upon him. Like a sacrificial animal, he bore the guilt and shame of all our sins (see Isaiah 53). These sins came upon him invisibly but with a weight that crushed his spirit and made him sweat great drops of blood.

He woke his disciples up and urged them to pray so that they would not enter into temptation. As he was speaking to them, suddenly a mob of people with swords and clubs arrived with Judas. Judas had agreed to betray Jesus's location to the religious leaders who

envied his popularity. When the mob arrived, Peter tried to defend Jesus. He drew a sword, and as he scuffled with the high priest's servant, he cut off the man's ear. Jesus immediately stopped him.

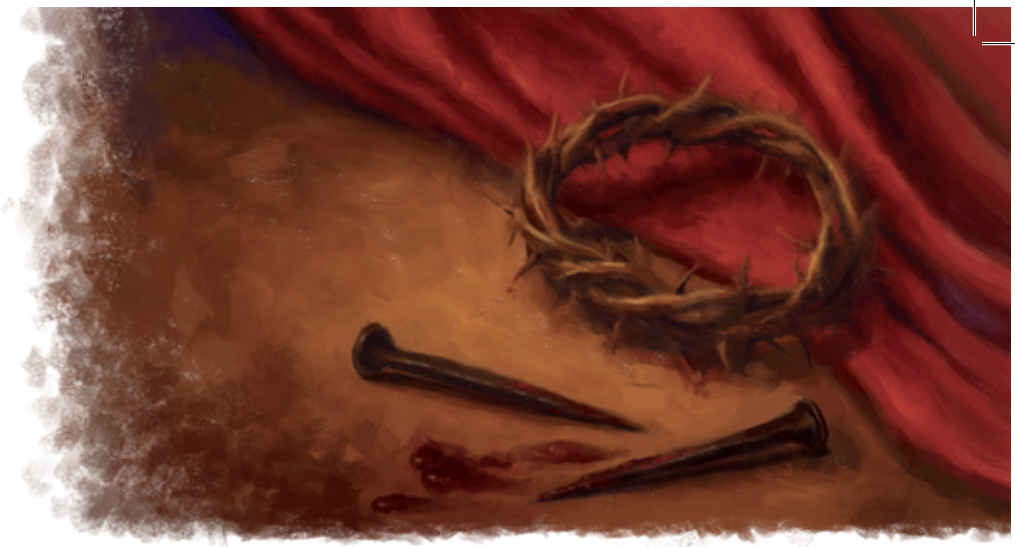
> "Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?'
>
> "In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.'
>
> "Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled." (Matthew 26:52–56)

A Mock Trial

That night, Jesus was passed back and forth in a mock trial. First, he went before Annas and the Jewish high priest, Caiaphas. Here, he was convicted of blasphemy for calling himself the Son of God (see Matthew 26:62–66). However, since the Jews were under Roman control, they did not have the right to punish anyone with the death sentence. Therefore, Jesus was sent to Pontius Pilate, the Roman ruler of that region. Pilate was not interested in Jewish religious squabbles, and he was upset at being disturbed late at night. However, there was something about Jesus that made him hesitant to condemn him. He sent Jesus to King Herod, but King Herod sent him back to Pilate.

The Jews would never be able to enforce a death sentence for blasphemy, as the Roman court had no such law. Rome was always careful about political uprisings, so the Jews leveraged this against Jesus, saying that he claimed to be a new king over the Jews. The Bible says,

> "Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?'
>
> "Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?'
>
> "Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?'
>
> "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.'



"Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?'

"Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'

"Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?' And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no fault in Him at all.' " (John 18:33–38)

The Jews, however, were not satisfied. The mob began shouting for Jesus to be crucified. They told Pilate that if he did not execute Jesus, then he was not a true friend of Caesar, the emperor of the Roman Empire. This accusation could be deadly for Pilate's political career, so he reluctantly agreed.

At Calvary

Pilate's soldiers took Jesus and scourged him with whips. Then, in mockery, they put a purple robe on him. They twisted a crown of thorns and put it on his head. Then the people mocked him, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" and they struck him with their hands (see John 19:1–3).

The soldiers took Jesus to Calvary, a place outside Jerusalem's city gates where criminals were executed. There, Jesus's hands and feet were nailed to a wooden cross, which was then erected between the crosses of two common thieves. As they put Jesus on the cross, he breathed out a prayer, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Everyone mocked and reviled Jesus as he endured the torture of the cross. The Jewish rulers sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the

chosen of God" (Luke 23:35). One of the two criminals beside him said, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other thief told him to be quiet. He reminded the man that they were both there because of crimes they had committed—but Jesus had done nothing wrong. Then he turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus replied, "Assuredly I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:39–43).

After these things, all nature seemed to break loose. A strange darkness arose in the middle of the day that lasted for three hours. Jesus lifted his eyes toward Heaven and cried out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) Then he died. Immediately, a great earthquake shook the ground, and the rocks were moved out of their places. Graves opened and exposed dead bodies.[1] In the Jewish temple, the sacred veil split in two, signifying that the system of rituals had now been finished in the one true sacrifice. Today, it is no longer necessary for Jews to sacrifice a Passover lamb or for Muslims to sacrifice lambs at Eid al-Adha. The Messiah, the one to whom all these sacrifices pointed, already died!

A Roman soldier stabbed Jesus in the side with a spear, just to make sure he was fully dead. Everyone could see that Jesus was dead.

In a previous chapter of this magazine, we saw how Islamic scholars grappled with the story of Jesus's death. We saw that there have been at least eight different attempts at explaining what happened on the cross. But here we can see clear proof. The Jews and the Romans were all convinced that Jesus was dead.

Think about this: If God had allowed Judas or someone else to be crucified in the place of Jesus without making the facts clear, then God cannot blame the Christians for being deceived. In such a scenario, God would be the one causing the confusion! Let us thank God that it is not so. God guides us into truth, not deception, and He has given us abundant evidence that it was Jesus the Messiah who died to fulfill the prophecies in Scripture. It was Jesus the Messiah who fulfilled the purpose of all the sacrifices. And it is Jesus the Messiah who died for your sins and for mine.

Resurrection!

Jesus was taken down from the cross and buried in a donated tomb. Because it was almost time for the Sabbath to begin, the women followers of Jesus did not have time to properly embalm his body. They hastily wrapped him in linen, laid him in the tomb, and planned to return on Sunday morning so that they could give him a respectable burial. Roman soldiers were placed on guard around the tomb so no one could come and steal the body of Jesus.

All day on the Sabbath, the disciples hid together with terrible sadness and guilt. They had all forsaken Jesus. The one they thought to be a king had been killed. They still did not understand the prophecies or the great, majestic work that had just been accomplished before their eyes. Now that Jesus had paid for the sins of the world, he would resurrect with great power and a mighty earthquake.

Early Sunday morning, some of the women took embalming ointments to the tomb so they could complete what they had started. However, when they arrived, the tomb was empty! An angel had rolled the stone back from the entrance, and the Roman soldiers had fallen down like dead men. The angel was sitting on the stone when the women arrived, and he told them,

> " 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.'
>
> "So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word." (Matthew 28:5–8)

After this, the disciples saw the risen Messiah for 40 days. They even touched his scars and ate fish with him because he wanted to prove that he was not a ghost. Jesus was truly alive with a real body! (See John 20:24–28; 21:1–14.) The one who died and rose again was Jesus. There is no confusion—only the simple truth.

The Ascension

After 40 days, Jesus went with his disciples to the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. He told them to tell everyone in the world about what he had done. He promised that the Holy Spirit would come to empower them for this immense task. Then, as they watched, he went up in the air, and a cloud removed him from their sight.

> "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.' " (Acts 1:10, 11)

The Meaning for You and Me Today

Every story in the Bible finds its fulfillment in the truth that Jesus died and rose again. Every prophecy in the Bible hinges on the truth

that Jesus died and rose again. And every spiritual symbol in the Bible points toward the truth that Jesus died and rose again. This is the central fact of all the Bible.

Because of Jesus's death as our substitute, our sin offering, we may each find free and full forgiveness for our sins. This is what allows us to stand with confidence in the Judgment. Just like the ram replaced Abraham's son on the altar, so Jesus replaces all of us. He lived a perfect, sinless life and chose to take our death sentence for us.

We can live life in one of two ways: trusting our own good deeds to save us in the Judgment—which can never give us true security—or trusting the real, historical Jesus and the perfect sacrifice he made on our behalf. We have already seen that this sacrifice was planned and prophesied for hundreds of years. In fact, the death of the Messiah was foretold all the way back in the Garden of Eden. After Satan deceived Adam and Eve, God told him,

> "I will put enmity
> Between you and the woman,
> And between your seed and her Seed;
> He shall bruise your head,
> And you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:15)

Satan's spiritual offspring would strive against Adam and Eve's offspring. But one very special descendent would come through the line of Eve. God said that Satan would be able to bruise this person's heel in temporary damage. But this person would bruise Satan's head in permanent damage. This occurred at the cross. Jesus died, being nailed in his feet and in his hands, but he rose again on the third day. His perfect, sinless life, offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, opened a path to Paradise for any who wish to escape the grip of Satan. This is how he bruised the head of Satan and struck permanent damage to Satan's kingdom of darkness. The spiritual slaves who are held in sin, addiction, anger, revenge, guilt, and sorrow now have a way to be free—eternally free! Moreover, Jesus claims that anyone who confesses faith in his sacrifice will, like him, escape the clutches of death. Jesus said,

> "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (John 11:25, 26)

If you would like to accept the death and resurrection of Jesus on your behalf, it is very simple. You may follow four very easy steps:

1. Confess with your mouth that you believe in Jesus Christ's death as your substitute.

2. Ask Jesus to forgive you for all the sins you have ever done.
3. Believe that you are forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness immediately upon praying this prayer.
4. Invite Jesus to be Lord over your life and help you to follow him.

From ages past, God's plan to cleanse the world of sin has been made plain. Our ancestors—even from the time of Adam, Abraham, and Daniel—foresaw the day when Jesus would die as a substitute for us.

A touching story is told of an old woman who had only one grandson. She raised him lovingly, but when he became older, the young man went his own way. He began to spend time with disreputable people and eventually entered a life of crime.

One day, the grandmother received word that he had committed a crime worthy of death. He was in jail and would soon be executed. The old woman hurried to the jail to intercede for her grandson, but no one would listen to her.

As if by chance, one of the guards told her that the young man would be executed the following day when the giant bell in the courtyard rang. However, if for some reason the bell did not ring, the criminal's life would be spared.

The next day arrived, and the young man was led to the gallows to be executed. The noose was put around his neck, and the executioner waited for the signal of the bell. However, it did not come. Perplexed, all eyes turned to look at the giant metal bell. They were horrified to see blood coming from inside. They rushed over and discovered the old grandmother had gone inside the bell and wrapped her body around the metal clapper. When the rope was pulled to ring the bell, her body had shielded the clapper from ringing against the bell, but it had mutilated and killed her in the process.

Sobered by the sight, the executioner set the grandson free. His grandmother had given her life so that he could escape a rightful death.

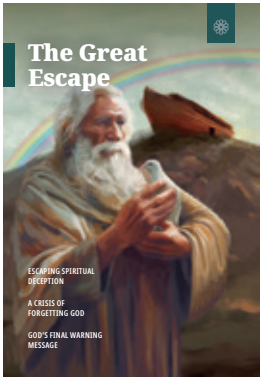
In the same way, Jesus gave his life willingly and lovingly for you. He was not a sinner like you and me but was innocent, sinless, and truly righteous. God allowed him to die to fulfill the law of God and to show the greatest love for humanity in opening the door to Paradise. He wants you to live eternally, free from sin and shame. He wants you to have perfect confidence in the Judgment, knowing that your sins have all been wiped away.

Won't you respond to his loving invitation and declare your faith in him today?

Reference

1. These dead bodies were resurrected after three days when Jesus was resurrected, and these people went into Jerusalem and gave witness to what had happened. See Matthew 27:52, 53.

Further Reading



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