

THE DEATHS OF CHRIST

Isaiah 53:9 *1* And He appointed Him His grave with the wicked, but He was with a rich man in His death (literally, deaths).

The prophet Isaiah foretold the events on the cross some 700 years before it happened. He saw Jesus dying an ignoble death yet being buried with honor. And he also saw that Jesus' death was more nuanced than the physicality of the cross for He prophesied here about the deaths (plural) of Christ.

Isaiah continues, "Yet it pleased Yahweh to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when you shall make *his soul* an offering for sin, he shall see [his] seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of *his soul*, [and] shall be satisfied:" (Is 53:11,12)

Jesus suffered horribly on the cross. Mankind afflicted Him in the most humiliating and excruciating of ways. (The word "excruciate", which means to inflict intense pain, comes from the word, "crucify.") In fact, the cross was the instrument used by mankind, which included you and me, to pour out all of its hatred for everything, God and, on the cross, God removed every excuse we might have to refuse Him.

Jesus' physical sufferings ended the moment He died. And the devil's attack on Jesus, as we shall see, ended then too. But Isaiah's eyes here were not drawn toward the obvious pain inflicted by crucifixion nor to the attacks by the hordes from hell, rather He was struck by the existential aspect of Jesus' sufferings—the assault on the core of His being which was hidden from human eyes.

Three words are used here to describe the interaction between the Father and Son—*daka'* (to bruise) which literally means to crush completely or to obliterate with violence, *challah* (to put to grief) which means to inflict with disease, and *'amal* (travail) which implies a means a long, painful and laborious effort.

We cannot begin to imagine the intensity of these words because we cannot imagine the intense hatred Father has for sin. Sin is that which has kept and keeps Him from fully enjoying what He desires and loves most, humanity.

And as we shall see, although both Jesus' soul and body suffered for the payment of our sin, it was His soul that bore the brunt of God's wrath, and rightly so. Even though our bodies are complicit in our sinning, the human soul bears full responsibility because the body only obeys its dictates.

God's fury was poured out upon Jesus' soul, not for punishment, but because the Representative soul in the Representative Man needed to be obliterated in order for the new man to be completely free from any vestige of rebellion.

I might be getting technical by talking about these distinctions, but the Bible is precise in its language. And we lose something in the translation when we don't adhere to its language. Even with precise language, however, mystery still abounds for we can only touch the fringes of who God is and what He has done.

So to understand Christ' sufferings and their affect, we must comprehend two things—first, the nature of man and then, through that lens, the nature of the Christ's sacrifice.

And as God is tri-part, so too is the crown jewel who was made in His own image. Paul clearly identifies these parts in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 as spirit, soul and body. Now is not the time to unpack this but suffice it to say that many a Christian's growth has been stunted for lack of this knowledge. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hos 4:6)

Because of our ignorance, much that God provided on the cross is neither proclaimed nor apprehended by Christians and so its power cannot be apprehended. One can only appropriate what is heard in faith to be his or hers.

The large blessing of the cross (and it is a gargantuan blessing) most Christians appropriate is the forgiveness of sins because that is the extent of the preaching of the cross. Mind you, I am disparaging forgiveness of sins because we will forever worship God with this in mind, but this is the starting or access point into everything God has provided.

Now prior to the incarnation, Jesus was Spirit. “God is a spirit,” John declared. But in the incarnation, Jesus took on flesh and blood. With union with Man was the ultimate end, a body was required for Jesus in order to flesh out the sacrifices of the Old Testament and perfect them.

The cross was, in fact, the culmination of the many hints and innuendos hidden in the writings of Moses and in the declarations of the prophets. So if we just understand the cross through the lens of the gospels, we miss much of what happened there because the crucifixion did not happen in a vacuum. Jesus said as much while He walked toward Emmaus. “He began in Moses and in all the prophets” to explain His sufferings and resurrection.

Paul also declared the gospel to be “the death, *burial* and resurrection” of Christ (1 Cor 15:1-4). It is clear to us that Jesus suffered on the cross and His resurrection occurred three days later. But what of the time when He was hidden from view? Was that irrelevant and inconsequential? And was it part of his sufferings or part of his glory? Or possibly both?

Unlike the other events on the cross, there were no other witnesses to verify what happened behind the stone. There was only One. That is why it is so important to look to Moses and the prophets because, in the Spirit, they foresaw and foretold what could not be seen by the natural eye.

So beginning with Moses, there were two major yearly events which typified the sufferings of Jesus and their intended results—the Passover and the Day of Atonement. While the Old Testament contains, in the books of Moses, many other types of Jesus’ death, like the smitten rock, the brazen serpent and the life of Joseph, et al, these two are memorialized and codified, and so, they take on more significance.

The Passover depicts our freedom from the power of darkness and our potential to enter into all that the God has for us. It doesn’t really deal with sins committed, just the effect. The Day of Atonement, however, speaks of God’s access to us, and ours to Him because on that Day, sin was dealt with.

Atonement is rightly said to be “at-one-ment” because one day a year, a Representative Man entered God’s presence to stand before Him face to face.

For the Israelites, however, that day also reminded Israel that God's presence was still out of reach.

But in Christ's enactment of this day, God finally broke through, never to be behind a barrier again because He ripped the curtain in two from top to bottom. The cross removed every barrier between God and Man, and between Man and God. Now there is not even an infinitesimal distance between God and every man, woman and child. The only distance that exists is in our conscience and our perception.

And these two things (our release and freedom in the Passover and our access in the day of Atonement) were fully realized on the cross. God judged, as He did in the Passover, this world system while He passed over and released us. And as in the day of Atonement, He removed every excuse you and I have because He in one event, dealt with every sin which was ever committed and eviscerated the Sin principle that animated Mankind. And He did this while telling you and me that He was on our side.

So how do the sacrifices offered on Passover and the Day of Atonement foreshadow the cross where God did, in reality, what He desired to do all along? Let's first look at the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16 describes the requirements God demanded before the High Priest could enter His presence. Remember, this Day was all about dealing with the sin issue. And while the High priest first needed to make sacrifices for his own, Christ did not because He, not only was not the perfect Son of God, He was also the Perfect Son of Man.

And since our whole being is tri-part, the one sacrifice for the Day of Atonement contained three separate sacrifices. As with much of Scripture, to understand the whole, you must understand the parts. The cross embodied each of these sacrifices.

The three sacrifices which were required to remove sin from Israel on the Day of Atonement included two goats for the sin offering and a ram for the whole burnt offering. The two goats were killed before the ram was sacrificed.

There were two goats because one was not sufficient to atone for sin. Two goats were required because the sin issue was greater, as I said, than just sins

committed. The nature which manufactured sin also needed to be dealt with. God needed both to forgive the sins committed and to destroy the sin factory within, and in this two-in-one sin offering, He did both.

Both goats were placed before God and lots were drawn to seal their fate. One goat was chosen to be slaughtered before the Lord with some its blood splashed on the brazen altar and some brought before God within the veil and sprinkled on the mercy seat.

The other goat, however, would neither die by human hands, nor die a prescribed death. It would die alone with no eyewitnesses. The High Priest would put his hands upon this goat's head and confess every sin Israel committed and that goat became Sin and the sin-bearer.

It would then be led into a land cut-off, a barren land where a domesticated goat would have no defense. Though both goats were substitutionary, this goat became the sin-bearer and carried their sin far away—as far as the east is from the west.

Once these two sacrifices were enacted, even though the second goat had not yet died, the offerings were accepted as finished because then, God smelled the sweet aroma of the whole burnt offering. The ram, or whole burnt offering, was never sacrificed for sin. It was a free-will, thank and love offering as it were.

So though Jesus' soul would go to hell to suffer, He could say, "It is perfectly perfect. It is completely complete" on the cross before He breathed His last. Additionally, from Jesus' perspective, He had accomplished what He came for. What was to occur in hell was something done to Him. His work or activity was over.

The first goat was sacrificed for its blood. In one sense there is nothing spiritual about this. Blood spilt was proof that something died. The blood was brought before God as a testimony of that. But with God's interest in blood, we must pay close attention and consider it more deeply because the blood of animals point to Jesus' blood which speaks of better things.

In the book of Leviticus, God equates blood with one's life. There is nothing more precious than blood because there is nothing more precious or valuable than life. If blood was given, it meant that the entire life was first given. Sin required your

life. But, instead of demanding *your* blood for the payment for what is rightfully owed, He, in His mercy, accepted Another's as payment and as your substitute.

Blood was used primarily in three ways in Scriptures. The first was for forgiveness of sins. The blood of Christ is foundational for our deliverance from guilt and discovering our worth, and understanding of how we can access God's presence. Without understanding the efficacy of Christ's blood and learning how to appropriate it, no Christian will overcome (Rev 12:11) because only the blood answers the devil's accusations, only the blood cleanses our of our self (conscience) and only the blood satisfies God. And forever and ever, we will praise Him for His blood. "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. . .to Him be glory and dominion forever and forever. Amen!" Rev 1:5

The second way blood is depicted in Scriptures is as currency—the price paid to ransom us. God set your valuation and it is inestimable because He has established your worth by saying you are equal to the life of His own Son. We are His by creation, but even more so by redemption. Freedom from all sorts of maladies (anxiety, fear, doubt) comes when you realize that you are not your own because you have been bought with a price. You are His property. Freedom to be yourself floods your soul when you realize that you are not *your* problem. He thought you up. He bought you. He cares for what belongs to Him. That is the valuation of Christ's blood.

The third way blood was employed was to initiate covenants. From the covenant which God made with Abraham (Abraham was required to slaughter and separate animals to walk through) to the Mosaic Covenant and to the New Covenant established on the cross, blood was shed.

Moses, for example, sprinkled blood on the children of Israel when they agreed to hold up their end of the bargain. Jesus' blood was sprinkled on us when He agreed to hold up both God's and Man's end of the bargain. So to accomplish cleansing for sin, to declare new ownership and to establish the new covenant, Jesus needed a body in order to shed blood. (Can you begin to see the wisdom of God in the cross where all of this happened with such efficiency?)

The gospels describe in great detail His physical suffering and the shedding of his blood from the scourging and crown of thorns, to the actual crucifixion and the

piercing of His side. Psalm 22 also describes Jesus' suffering on the cross. But while the gospels detail the events of the cross from a third person perspective like a good reporter would, Psalm 22 shares this experience from the victim's point of view. David, in the spirit, somehow looked through Jesus' eyes and felt His emotions.

You will want to read David's account for it is both breath-taking and heart-breaking. It is one of the most obvious forth-tellings of Jesus' time on the cross. And here, David not only clearly describes the intense hatred, disdain and cruelty that mankind had for God in Christ; he also describes a more insidious attack.

Men encircled him while He hung on the cross. They pierced His hands and His feet. They divided His clothes among them. They watched and mocked and taunted. But there, while Jesus hung on the cross, there was some space between them and Christ. They could shout at him and did, but unlike at his trial, could not be in his face. David describes them as dogs encompassing Him.

But David also describes another onslaught that was far more threatening and immediate, and close and cruel. David recognized these as many strong bulls. These mobbed around Jesus and, as David described, assaulted Christ and ripping Him with their teeth.

And I would expect nothing less from the devil who seeks to steal and kill and destroy, to take advantage of the moment. He hates Jesus more than he hates anyone else. This was the opportune time the devil sought after being turned away in the wilderness. When the Father removed His protection from His Son for a time on the cross, the devil sought to press his own advantage.

We don't know how God, in His mercy, protects even the worst among us from the full-throated cruelty of the devil and his demons. As with Job, full permission is NOT granted. But when God left His Son to hang on the cross, exposed, weakened and vulnerable, God did consent, and the devil attacked with full force.

He called on every demon from their stations to descend upon the Christ of God to enact his vengeance upon God. The devil unleashed the full force of darkness upon the Light of the world. And as this Darkness swirled around Jesus, the only light that remained hung on the cross. As devil and every demon crushed

together around the cross, they were so thick and tight even the sun's light could not shine through.

As Jesus suffered physically, the hosts of hell sought to destroy Christ from within. I cannot imagine the voices, the fears, the doubts, the psychological pain, the going out of His mind, the temptation "to curse God and die", that he resisted on the cross. And as Col 3:15 says, "having stripped the rulers and the authorities, He made a show of them in public, triumphing over them in it." Jesus has defeated every demon on the cross, and they know it. And that authority has now been given you.

But at some point, he did breathe his last. The first goat was slaughtered. His physical sufferings were over. "It is finished", Jesus cried. Everything He could have done, He did, and Jesus was now out of the reach of both man and demon.

But the Father was not finished yet. When Jesus committed His spirit to God, God's heavy hand came upon Jesus' soul in hell. The sufferings on the cross paled to what awaited Jesus now for at death He journeyed into a land cut off, to the realm of demons where He, by Himself alone, suffered their fate and ours.

This part of the story is the story of the second goat. It is a very significant part of the deaths of Christ for it was on this goat, all of their sins were transferred. This domesticated goat carried all of Israel's sins into a land far away, never to return again. Would that only the one goat was required on the Day of Atonement to deal with sin! But God demanded two. One to provide forgiveness and one to obliterate the nature that produces sin.

After the first goat was slaughtered, his blood spilt and sprinkled, the high priest put both of his hands upon the head of the second goat and confessed Israel sins. In doing so, every sin Israel committed was transferred from them to the goat and it became the focus of God's wrath.

The completeness of this act is hinted at in God's instructions to Moses. "Then Aaron shall lay his two hands on the head of the living goat, and shall confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and *all* their transgressions, and *all* their sins." Lev 16:21

This goat became both sin-infested and the sin offering. I began this article with Isaiah 53 where God identified Jesus' soul as the sin offering upon which God's

hot wrath fell. Specifically, it was Jesus' soul, not his body or spirit, which was the focus of God's anger and retribution.

And as previously stated, your soul is the gate-keeper, the arbiter, the decision-maker of your life. No attitude is formed, no action taken unless your soul signs off on it. And from the fall, your soul has been in cahoots with the devil, so God needed to destroy this soul in hell so He could make a new Man.

A precise reading of Leviticus bears this out. Remember Jesus began in Moses and all the prophets when He explained His sufferings and rising. When lots were cast, one goat was chosen "for the Lord." This goat was slaughtered and its blood was brought before the Lord.

The other was chosen "for Azazel". Earlier translations have translated this word as "scapegoat" and, in a real sense, it was. But modern translations are taking this word literally. Azazel is the name of a demon. This other goat was going to Azazel's domain to suffer its fate (and ours). This is difficult to think of, but at minimum, it says that Jesus did not go to hell just to proclaim His victory.

In fact, Hosea 6:1-2 prophesied about His time in the grave. "Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After *two days* he will revive us; on *the third day* he will raise us up, that we may live before him."

According to Hosea, after two days, Jesus was made alive again. The implication is that for two days, Jesus' soul experienced death, being torn apart and struck down by God. Hosea also rightly saw that we were included in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection by using the plural. But it was Jesus, as the last Adam, who was cut off from everything alive. For two days, His soul travailed.

Psalm 88 also pulls the curtain back on Jesus' experience during these two days. Like Psalm 22, this is a prophetic psalm as well. It begins where Psalm 22 leaves off and ends with no resolution. It begins in the darkness with Jesus' soul crying out to God in hell.

"For my soul is full with evils, and my life touches Sheol. I am counted with those who go down to the Pit; I have been like a feeble man, free among the dead, as pierced ones lying in the grave, whom You remember no more; yes, by Your hand

they are cut off. You have laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places, in the deeps. Your fury has lain hard upon me, and You afflict me with all Your waves”.

I don't know how this can be read in any other light than through the light of Isaiah 53 where Jesus' soul became the sin offering. And Psalm 88 does not end with deliverance.

“I suffer your terrors; I am helpless. Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me. They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together. You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.”

Like Psalm 22, Psalm 88 is written in the first person and we hear Jesus' torment. It is the most morose psalm in the Bible beginning with hopeless terror and crescendos from there. It ends with Christ alone in hell suffering God's terrors. (But, praise God, Psalm 88 is followed by Ps 89 which is considered to be the resurrection psalm.)

But after two days, something epochal happened. Jesus' spirit reunited with his soul and He was revived. Peter says as much in his first sermon. He quoted Psalm 16 and declared, “For you will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your Holy One see corruption.”

Hosea 6 declared that Christ would also arise the third day. But before His body, soul and spirit were reunited on the third day, His spirit and soul came together again. And in that one day, He enacted vengeance upon His enemy. He broke the devil's jaw and pulled out his fangs. (Ps 3:7, Ps 58:6) The devil never again will be able to do to anyone what he did to Jesus on the cross. And He declared victory.

Light overwhelmed the darkness in Hell as he dealt a death blow to Satan. He took possession of both death and hell, Satan's domain, by taking the keys. He proclaimed to friend and foe alike His Lordship, gathered His saints and cleaned house. Then He was out of there!

To recount, His body was sacrificed for blood--the blood that cleansed, purchased our redemption and sealed the covenant. The first goat took care of the legal obligations God required.

But what happened to Jesus' soul was far more personal. Wrath is not legal. It is emotional. And torrents of wrath looks like Someone was out of control. The anger God had for that instrument (our soul) which chose to deny God access to His prized possession and for that thing (sin) which ensnared it bore the full brunt of God's anger. It was so complete that when His vehemence was spent, the old man was completely obliterated and the new man arose out of its ashes. In large measure, Jesus's soul's suffering was restorative, not punitive.

After the two goats were slaughtered and released into the wilderness, one last sacrifice remained. A ram was sacrificed as a whole burnt offering. The whole burnt offering (Lev 1) pictures onr totally given to God, not out of obligation, but love. This offering had nothing to do with sin. The ram offering depicts Jesus' willing spirit which Jesus committed to His Father.

Jesus' spirit went to Paradise with the thief on the cross while He waited for his soul and spirit to be reunited in hell. I am aware that dissecting this as I have has its problems but, for me, it makes sense. It would have been an interesting conversation listening Jesus discuss all these events on the road to Emmaus.

On ram sacrifice, hands were laid as well. Instead of identifying with sin, the one who brought the sacrifice identified with its perfections and with God's delight. The whole burnt offering released a sweet-smelling aroma that ascended to God. Sin offerings never produced a sweet-smell because sin offerings were obligatory.

This however is the true picture of worship for it was an expression of one's delight with God and everything associated with Him and manifests itself with a willingness to put all on the altar.

And it is also as clear a picture of the heart of God as any in Scripture. God Himself put Himself on that altar. The Father was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. He is the true burnt offering.

This is the grace of our LORD Jesus Christ—that though He was rich, for our sakes, became poor. His response to the love the Father had for Him was the cross-- giving Himself wholly as His Son. And we are the beneficiaries of this great love. Jesus said, "No one takes my life from me. I give my life of my own free will." John 10:18

Ps 40 is also a first-person prophetic psalm and speaks to this. It allows us to listen in on a conversation Jesus had with His Father. "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire; but my ears you have opened. Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.'"

A large aspect of the cross had nothing to do with sin. Though sacrifices were required, God's desire for a willing heart of love which Jesus fully expressed on the cross was all He desired. Jesus, the perfect man, loved His Father unto the end. The cross was the full expression of Jesus' love for His Father. "I will sacrifice myself for no other reason than You ask."

The truth that the cross had larger purposes than dealing with sin is depicted in the first mention of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in Scriptures, and it gives a hint as to the real reason Jesus went to the cross. Dealing with sin was but a means to an end which, as I have said, is at-one-ment.

Right from the garden, God reveals the true purpose of the cross. Before sin occurred, Adam, the first man, was also put to sleep so that Eve, His Bride, could come forth. Adam found His soulmate—bone of his bone, and flesh of His flesh, DNA of DNA. He found someone who was a total fit for him, his complement when He awoke. He found someone He was at one with—in body, soul and spirit.

So Jesus, the second Man, also was put to sleep in order for His bride, the church, to come forth. The large part of Ephesians is given to this exposition. "You in Christ". "Christ in you". "For His great love by which He loved us". "But I speak of Christ and the church". "We truly are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh".

Isaiah said Jesus' soul became the sin offering. Jesus' spirit was not. His spirit was never sin-tainted. When He committed His Spirit to God, it still was whole and perfect and God's delight. His spirit was put to sleep for other purposes. His spirit did not suffer in hell, but rather He went to paradise to be with the thief on the cross and all the other saints. And there, He found His bride.

The Passover also attests to Jesus' suffering beyond physical death as well. That sacrifice gave God permission to pass over judgement on Israel. He said, "*When I see the blood, I will pass over.*" It is important for you and I to realize that as well.

There is no now judgment for those who are in Christ because His blood has fully satisfied God.

But God required more than the blood of this lamb be splashed on the jamb of their family's door. The lamb was to be eaten personally, consumed by each one in the family. Much can be said about this. But as it relates to the fact that Jesus suffered in hell, once the lamb was already dead. its blood applied, its flesh eaten, God then commanded what remained to be burned with fire.

So here are the deaths of Christ--historically detailed in the gospels, and explained by Moses and the prophets. Jesus' body was given for blood to give us once and for all, the legal basis for forgiveness. (A thought: maybe God did not need to do this for Himself because He is always forgiving. He needed to go the cross to prove to us that He has because there all of our hatred for Him was focused on God as a laser.) His soul was obliterated so in our union with him, that part of us which has been opposed to God, was as well. And His Spirit was given out of love and to find love because when Jesus was put to sleep, the Father pulled His bride out from His side.