

Good Friday for Muslims

Muslims and Christians share many important beliefs, such as the existence of an all-powerful single God who is the Creator and sustainer of all life, his revelation through prophets, and final judgment. One aspect of on-going discussion, however, is what happened on the day known as “Good Friday”. Who were the three men who hung on crosses in Jerusalem that day? Two of them were clearly criminals. And the third? Was he really Isa el Masih, also known as Jesus, or was it someone else? If it were Jesus, did he truly die, or did it just appear that way?

Both the Injil and the Qur’an comment on this event. Some find these accounts to be contradictory. Let’s review a few passages. The Qur’an tells us, *“They did not kill him, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them.” Sura 4:157*

If we consider these words of the Qur’an in light of what el Masih said, we find a surprising connection. He claimed that no one could kill him, but that he was in control of his time of death. He said, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.” Injil, John 10:11,17,18*

Reading this we understand that el Masih, was not overpowered by the evil forces of this world, nor was his death the disgrace of someone who did evil, or even of a righteous man that Allah was powerless to protect. El Masih was cooperating with those who had in their hearts to kill him: he was laying down his life for a higher purpose. This purpose was beyond anything the unbelievers, and even el Masih’s disciples knew.

Some have said a substitute that looked like el Masih was on his cross. But why would Allah trick el Masih’s followers? How could a perfect God perpetrate such a monumental lie on the world? This would not be in his character! (The Koran does not claim that Judas or anyone else died in el Masih’s place. Such a theory was proposed hundreds of years later as an explanation by some who interpreted the Koran that way.)

If then it was Allah’s will to allow el Masih to die, he must have had a reason. About 600 years before el Masih’s birth, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah spoke about el Masih. (The Dead Sea Scrolls include copies of Isaiah made 100 years before el Masih was born.) Using the past tense common for prophecy, Isaiah said,

“It was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.” Old Testament, Isaiah 53:10

Many Muslims have asked, “Why would Allah ask a sinless prophet to suffer? This would be unjust. It would make no sense!” The same passage gives us the answer:

“the Lord makes his life a guilt offering... he will bear their iniquities...because he poured out his life unto death. He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Old Testament, Isaiah 53:10-12,5

So, this passage shows that it was Allah’s will to make el Masih an offering for sin. Perhaps some will still object that this is unfair, that we must all pay for our own sins. But we do not decide what Allah’s way is. If there is one God, he must have one way. It is up to us to be sure we are on his way!

Let’s review what the prophets before el Masih showed us of Allah’s way:

- 1) **Prophet Adam** – was punished for disobeying Allah. All the good work he did in the garden did not prevent his being punished and cast out. If Allah judged and punished his first creation, he will surely judge and punish us.
- 2) **Prophet Noah** – was saved when Allah destroyed the sinful world by a flood. Because he chose to follow Allah’s way of salvation by building an ark, Noah did not drown. If he had not gone Allah’s way, he would have drowned.
- 3) **Prophet Abraham** was the friend of Allah – he was so submitted that he was willing to sacrifice even his son. Yet, at the last minute Allah provided a substitute, a perfect sheep, for the sacrifice.

By choosing to take this way of escape, Prophet Abraham and his son were saved. (Muslims remember this event every year by sacrificing a “korbany” at Eid el Adha. During that celebration have you ever wondered why Allah asked for a sacrifice?)

- 4) **Prophet Moses** brought the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt. Allah told him blood on the doorposts would protect the people from the death of their firstborn – the plague that convinced pharaoh to release the Israelites from Egypt. (*Old Testament, Exodus 12:13*). Later Moses received Allah’s law for the people of Israel. They did not obey this law, and were exiled into other nations as punishment. Allah also told Moses to teach the people sacrifices of animals for sins. Allah said to Moses, *“The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar: it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” Old Testament, Bible/Injil Leviticus 17:11*. These sacrifices continued for over a thousand years until after the time of el Masih.

Allah’s way requires a blood sacrifice as payment for sins; even Noah made a blood sacrifice when he left the ark (*Old Testament, Genesis 8:20*). Four reasons may be given to explain the need for sacrifice: first, blood, being bright and red, is a graphic lesson in the serious, death-producing nature of sin. Second, it showed that people could not atone for sins on their own. Third, it demonstrated the faith and submission of those obeying the law, and fourth it served as a symbol of the final sacrifice made by el Masih in fulfillment of the prophecies.

Why did the Christians stop the system of animal sacrifice? Because the night before he died, el Masih announced *“The New Covenant in my blood which is shed for you,” Injil, Luke 22:19*. To us this may seem strange. Most of us try very hard to be good in this difficult world, and believe that our good deeds should be enough to make up for any wrong we have done. This is the way makes sense to us. But we must not assume this is Allah’s way. Allah says, *“There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death... My ways are not your ways says the Lord, neither are my thoughts your thoughts.” Old Testament, Proverbs 14:12 & Isaiah 55:8*

In Allah’s way, good deeds and sins are two entirely different things, like apples and oranges. He is pleased with our good deeds, and these can lead to rewards from him on earth and in heaven: but in his way our sins are not covered by them. Consider the analogy of someone who does a very good deed, like building a clinic for a poor village. The village would be better off, but if it were built with millions of stolen dollars, he would still owe the robbery victim, no matter how grand the clinic.

We are all sinners because we have all done wrong things. God’s Word tells us that even a small sin makes us guilty. *“Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” Injil, James 2:10*. Squirrels are cuter than rats, but both are rodents. Similarly, your sins may be less than someone else’s but you are still a sinner.

In the character of Allah, his justice is equal to his mercy. Both his justice and his mercy must be satisfied. He can’t ignore our sins. But if he punished us eternally for our sins – where is his mercy? Yet if he released us without penalty – where is his justice? His way is and has been blood sacrifice. The final, eternally perfect sacrifice was made by Allah himself when he came to earth as Isa el Masih to die once for all sins. Only in el Masih is Allah’s justice equal to his mercy. Allah’s Word tells us, *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice.” Injil, Romans 3:23-25*

The story does not end at the cross on Good Friday. On Easter morning el Masih arose from the dead! Imagine the excitement and joy that el Masih’s disciples felt. In the resurrection he proved his power over death, over sin, and that he is God.

The Injil tells us, *“Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Injil, Hebrews 7:24,25, Acts 4:12, Romans 6:23*

What is our response to this? We must accept Allah’s way, just as the prophets of old did. If Abraham and his son did not accept Allah’s substitution of a lamb, the son would have died. Why not pray right now and accept the offer of the “Lamb of God” who died in your place.

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