

# OpenTheo

## What Does the Old Testament Say about the Nature and Role of the Messiah?

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**#STRask** - Stand to Reason

Question about what the Old Testament says about the nature and role of the Messiah and whether it leaves open the option that Jesus is God and a man can die for our sins.

\* In light of hearing a Jewish person say he isn't a Christian because he doesn't believe Jesus is God or that a man can die for our sins, what does the Old Testament say about the nature and role of the Messiah that the Jews are/were waiting for?

### Transcript

[Music] [Bell] Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask with Amy Hall and Greg Koukl. I'm Amy Hall and with me is Greg Koukl. Hello, Amos.

Alright, Greg. Let's start with a question from Jody. I heard Dennis Prager say that he's not a Christian because he doesn't believe that Jesus is God and that a man can die for our sins.

What does the Old Testament say about the nature and role of the Messiah that the Jews are/were waiting for? I know Dennis for many, many years, decades in fact and we've had discussions about this. But actually this point has not come up. This particular point, his objection in the past has been if the Messiah has come then the kingdom would be here.

The kingdom is not here so the Messiah has it come. So understandable concern. But this is an interesting one.

There's two things. One is atonement and the other is the deity of Christ, a man who is God. Now the irony of this is that there are a lot of things in the Hebrew Bible that make these two notions completely coherent.

Let me just put it that way because it may not be that when I cite these passages, someone like Dennis will be convinced. But it isn't as if this is somehow an incoherent

notion. For example, the payment for sins.

Now I'm not sure if he thinks that sins don't need to be paid for and as some progressive Christians might say who deny the blood atonement, and this is broadly in that category but motivated by a different concern, they say why can't God just forgive? Why does he need his pound of flesh? Now whether he needs his pound of flesh or not or why he does, that's an assertion that's a separate question. What seems to be obvious to me is the pound of flesh was required all over the Hebrew law. I mean the amount of blood flow to everywhere in the sacrificial system and not only the standards but when there was a special expression of love for God like David for example, it just seemed like, as I recall thousands, but I don't know if it could have been thousands of bulls and goats were sacrificed on one occasion, but certainly lots and lots and lots.

Why? These were all things done consistently with the law because God required it and it was an atonement. Where was the blood sprinkled? The blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The mercy seat was the top of the Ark of the Covenant, the seraphim where the angel type creature things on either side and in the middle is where the Shekinah glory between them and hovering above the Ark was the Shekinah glory, the presence of God.

In the Ark were the evidences of Israel's rebellion. So you have the Ten Commandments, the Broken Stones, I guess. At least for a season, we don't know what happened to them.

Of course there was a movie about it. I don't know how historically sound that was, but apparently the Americans have it in a warehouse. So anyway, the Ten Commandments, the staff with the serpent on it and the butted rod of Aaron.

All of these are evidences or symbols of Israel's rebellion against God. And so there's a sense in which the Shekinah glory looks down, as it were, at the evidences or the tokens of Israel's sin and rebellion. And when the atonement is made, the blood is placed between them.

So this is a very symbolic kind of thing, but notice what's being communicated by God and what he required. There's a blood that must atone and cover and in some sense play the role that allowed for forgiveness of the people. So in the Jewish system, there was blood atonement.

And it's not just a passing fancy. The law is thick with all of these references and as things they had to do all the time, not just on Yom Kippur. There are all kinds of other times and places where sacrifices were made for different kinds of things, including, by the way, presumptuous sins, which are sins you don't know you're committed, but they're still held against you by God.

So the idea that some thing can function, some living thing that dies, can function as an

important part of the atonement process should not be foreign to the Jewish mind. And so I don't understand that first objection because it strikes me, and this was the argument of Hebrews, that, and I wrote this in the story of reality, that animals can't pay for people. Animals didn't sin.

This is a token. This is a stop. This is something to hold us over humankind over until the time when the perfect sacrifice would come.

Now the nuances of why God needed a sacrifice, why the sacrifices had to be a human being and a perfect human being who himself wasn't guilty. Well, some of these things are captured symbolically in the Old Testament sacrificial system, a lamb without blemish. And that John the Baptist says, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." So notice the expansiveness of that statement.

It's not just the Jews from year to year with concert reminder by the sacrifices, but a sacrifice that will once for all take away sin for everybody. Now that doesn't mean that everybody falls underneath that provision because the element of faith requires benefiting from that provision, but it is the provision for everyone, for the world. That's the point there.

So what John the Baptist is doing is he is reflecting on a system that everyone was familiar with, the lamb, and pointing out that this human is the lamb of God and he can do what the death of bulls and goats could not accomplish. And just to reference Hebrews 10 goes into detail on that particular thing. So my point here for any Jewish person who takes the law seriously and the Hebrew scripture seriously, obviously, Dennis does, that person has in the text there a characterization of substitutionary atonement, where one thing dies for another human being in this case, which death atones for sin, which is why it's called the Day of Atonement.

So the notion of substitute atonement is right there. I guess the concern is how could a man die for other people's sins? And I have two thoughts there and one of them is, well, if animals can do it, I don't know why another human being could do it. Okay.

The second thought is it can't be just an ordinary human being. And I talk about this in the story of reality and this is standard at home and stuff. It's got to be a human being as a representative, a kinship redeemer as a representative of the human race, because the human race is the one who owes the debt.

But it can't be an ordinary human being because all ordinary human beings owe the debt. It has to be somebody who does not owe the debt. So now I'm getting into some of the theology here and someone who is more than a human to be able to take the punishment from God for the sins of the world, to cover, to accomplish an eternal redemption in a temporal period of time.

Okay. So now, I mean, I'd love to have this conversation with him because within us, because I think even if he rejects it as the answer, he's going to say, well, that does make sense. There is a coherence to that.

And I think there is a coherence. So you have the temporary blood atonement in the Old Testament, animals playing for human. Now you have a new human being, a brother, you have a human being now paying for all people.

So there's a kinship with the blood atonement of the Old Testament. However, according to Christian theology, this human being is God come down. He's Emmanuel, God with us.

And therefore, he is able to do the job. As to the substitutionary atonement of Messiah, I can't think of a better passage than Isaiah 53, which I don't know any other way to read this than as the Messiah's substitutionary atonement. This passage is about the suffering servant in an Isaiah, the concept of servant is used in different ways.

And sometimes it appears clearly of Israel, Israel's the servant, not in this section. And the reason it's not in this section is because this servant is dying for the sins of Israel. So it cannot be Israel.

And so let me just read some of this in light of I'm just reading Isaiah. And since this is a familiar Christian passage, I'm going to ask our listeners to do their best to kind of step out of their Christianity and just listen to the words and what our common sense understanding of these words would be if we're reading it for the first time without our Christian theology in mind. Verse four, now they've already introduced the suffering servant.

Now it says what the suffering servant is going to do. Surely, Isaiah writes, our griefs he himself bore, and our sorrows he carried. Could be a metaphor.

Yet we ourselves esteemed him, stricken, spittin of God and afflicted, but he was pierced through for our transgressions. There's no metaphor there. He was crushed for our iniquities and the chastening for our well-being fell upon him and by his scouraging we are healed.

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way sin. But the Lord, Yahweh there, capital L and Lord, has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him. That's verse six.

So four, five, six. Now I'm going to jump seven and go to eight. You can read the whole thing, but these are the ones most relevant to my point.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And as for his generation, in other words, the generation people that he lived in, who considered that he was cut off, killed out of the land of the living for the transgressions of my people to whom the stroke was

due? Verse 10, "But the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief. He would render himself as a guilt offering." As a result, verse 11, of the anguish of his soul, he will see it and be satisfied.

That's called propitiation, by the way. By his knowledge, the righteous one my servant will justify the many as he will bear their iniquities. QED.

And it goes on. I think it also references the resurrection at the end there. Well, let's see what I've got here.

Yeah, I'll read the 12 first. "Therefore, I will allot him a portion with the great, and he will divide the booty with the strong, because he poured out himself to the death and was numbered with the transgressions, yet he himself bore the sins of many and interceded for the transgressors." So that follows it. AIMI.

I'm looking for the part that says he will see his generations or something after his death. Yeah, I don't know. I went to the end of the chapter 53.

But- AIMI. Must be earlier. QED.

I mean, for a Jewish person, I don't know a person could say, "I don't believe what this states in this chapter." Or, "I don't believe that Jesus was that person." But I don't know how anybody could say, "That isn't what these words mean." Okay? These words mean that. And by the way, notice the kinship between what happens here to this individual dying on behalf of the sins of the many, my people, to whom the stroke was due, Isaiah says, the kinship between that and the sacrificial system. It even uses the language guilt offering.

So here you've got a very powerful characterization that what is coming, this is the claim of Isaiah, one human is coming that will do this. Now, of course, how can that happen? Well, this passage doesn't explain that. But when we go to the New Testament and we realize that the one who fulfilled this prophecy was a blameless one who, by all indication of the New Testament record, was God himself coming down.

He wasn't just some guy. God chose to beat up on our behalf. That's the cosmic child abuse charge.

But rather, it was God, Emmanuel, God with us. It was God who took the punishment on himself in human form. Okay? So a person could say, "I don't believe Jesus was God." I'm not exactly sure the reasons Dennis would say that, and I'm sure he has reasons.

He might say a man can't, God can't become a man. Well, and this goes to the second point, the Old Testament has lots of examples of God showing up in person in some form. We have the burning bush.

We have the God showing up the Oaks of Mamrie with the first was Moses, the second one, the Oaks of Mamrie. In this case before, in Genesis 18. And we have a number of cases where it is clear from the text that the person who showed up in a physical form was God.

Now, we make a distinction between a theophany, the appearance of God in a manifestation of God, temporarily in one form or another, and the incarnation God taking on a human nature. We make that distinction. But nevertheless, that God shows up in human form, happens quite a number of times in the Old Testament scripture.

So I don't know why it can't happen in the life of in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. New Testament theology talks about there's a difference between the Old Testament theophanes and New Testament incarnation. I got it, but I'm just thinking about the objection from a Jewish person like Dennis.

Did this kind of thing happen in the Old Testament? Something like this? Why is it so odd? When it would happen in the person of Jesus. So I think both of his complaints are a subject to this observation that both of the things that he thinks can't happen did in fact happen in the Hebrew scriptures. Maney.

The verse I was thinking of was verse 10. But the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief. If he would render himself as a guilt offering, he will see his offspring, he will prolong his days.

And I think there might be something else in there, but that's that's what's coming to mind right now. You said if if an animal can atone for sins, then couldn't a man and it goes the opposite way too. If a man can't, then certainly an animal can't.

And ultimately what you come to if they can't is the idea that justice is never actually done. That there is this is the brilliance of the cross. God forgives, but he never, he never ruins his justice.

He never, uh, he never, thank you. He never compromises his justice. But if you're going to say that our sins can't be covered by a man, then they certainly can't be covered by an animal.

And in that, if that's the case, then the sins are not covered. The sins that there is no ultimate justice for those whom God forgives. And I, you're, you're wondering, you'll how, how do they, are they forgiven? Because obviously we don't have the, the temple now.

They aren't performing these sacrifices at all. So what my Jewish friends have said to me in the past is that it's our, you know, it's the broken heart and contrite spirit. It's, you know, they're a passage where God says, I did not desire to sacrifice his.

I desired your hearts. And they take that to me now that they can have forgiveness by

having a contrite heart. But what they're missing is that God wasn't saying that you shouldn't have the sacrifices.

Obviously he thought they should have the sacrifices because that's what he commanded. Right. But what they were missing was the heart.

What they were missing was the faith. And that made their sacrifices useless. It wasn't either or is both and.

Yes. They needed sacrifices to come from a heart of faith. They didn't only need the heart of faith because they still needed to have that image of the need for justice to be done, the need for them to be forgiven without compromising justice.

The interesting thing is that that they're now, obviously the sacrificial system cannot be performed 78, destruction of the temple that's over with. Okay. Now what? Now, instead of, to me, this is a signal.

There's a, they didn't need, and this is the argument of Hebrews, even though Hebrews is written before the temple was destroyed, obviously, or also it would have mentioned it, that there, since the perfect sacrifice has come, the old system no longer serves a valid function. And so it's not necessary anymore. And this, to me, puts an exclamation point on the work of Jesus on the cross.

Okay. Soon after he did this, the means of the old temporary system is now gone. It's, it's wiped off the face of the earth.

And God did not intend, nor was there revelation to this effect, that they substitute some other things. And then as you pointed out, those verses that talk about the heart are obviously, it seems to me, obviously not a substitution for this, or a replacement. It's not all about that.

It's just about your heart. It's, it's rather, as you said, a, a both and. These things are necessary, but if they're just ritualistically and wouldn't be performed, it doesn't work.

It doesn't work. And this is why you have the first Samuel passage there with Saul. You also got to have the Psalm 51 with David.

You know, this is what God really desires, what he's really after. Of course, this is what he's after, but not to the elimination of this other thing that he himself said accomplishes the covering of the sin. David still participated in that system.

David still did. Okay. So in fact, he was responsible for many, many, many sacrifices.

So if as he says in Psalm 51, it's just a broken and contrite heart, and that's all that's necessary, then why wasn't the, he just bringing into the sacrificial system as king

because he knew that the other was also important. And we've talked in recent episodes about the fact that these sacrifices were pointing to the, the effectual sacrifice that would actually accomplish their forgiveness. Whereas these were reminders that this is what God was going to do and was to help them to understand it, have, have that concept in place for when Jesus would come.

And Hebrews explains that as, as you said. But then I wanted to say one more thing about the deity of Jesus because when you look in the gospels, what you see is that one of the last things that Jesus says to the Pharisees has to do with his deity. And he quotes Psalm 110.

So again, here's an example of something in the Old Testament that points to the deity of Jesus. And here's what he says, what do you think about the Christ? Who's son is he? They said to him, the son of David. He said to them, then how does David in the spirit call him Lord, saying, the Lord said to my Lord, sit up my right hand until I put your enemies beneath your feet.

If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son? So of course he's referencing the fact that that's pointing to the deity of the Messiah. So there's, and there are probably more examples out there. Well, I can think of one possible kind of pushback and that is, well, a number of them, but one that comes to mind just now is the numbers where it says God is not a man that he should lie or son of man that he should repent.

Now, okay, see there, God is not a man. Well, first of all, God wasn't a man when that was stated. All right.

Now that doesn't prove Jesus is the Christ. But it shows it suggests that that can't be a disclaimer of God becoming a man in the future. And secondly, what is being referenced there is his character.

God is not a man that he should lie. In other words, God is not like some human being that just tells fibs. Okay.

All of which are fallen. Every human being was fallen before Jesus. So that's what that's referring to.

Yeah. So he said, I'm not like you guys. I think this is the case where you had a bailum, you know, prophesying against or there was an attempt to get the bail to prophesy against Israel in the wanderings.

In any event, so the point there is God is not like a human being in his character. That's really the point of the passage. Now, I don't know what metaphysical objections there would be to the idea of the incarnation, maybe from Dennis's perspective, because to be very careful how we put it, God doesn't become a man.



He adds to his divine nature, human nature. That's what he does. He adds to his divine nature, a human nature.

So he doesn't diminish his divine nature at all. But rather, there's in the incarnation in this physical body, in this physical Jesus as a full human being that is a single person, but has two natures, a nature of a human being, not fallen, and the nature of God. Now, this is weird admittedly, but I don't see what is impossible about it.

Whether Jesus is a God or not needs to be verified or justified or whatever. And this is why I think the resurrection, for example, and other things bear testimony to that. However, what is the problem? God can't become a man.

Why is the question? What metaphysical barrier is there to this notion that God can take on a human nature without diminishing his divine nature? I don't know what that is. So as to the defeaters that Adenis has suggested, I don't see how any of those as defeaters go through. It may not be enough to persuade anyone else that Jesus was who he claimed to be and he died for sin, separate issue.

But notice these are two defeaters. He couldn't have done that because A and B. And all I'm saying is, well, A and B don't work as defeaters in this case. There might be some other reasons that are, you know, adequate and but not, I don't think these are.

All right. Thank you so much, Greg. And thank you, Jody, for the question.

If you'd like to ask us a question, please send it on Twitter with the hashtag #strask. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

(upbeat music)