

For this week's readers' mailbag I give a very interesting and important question.

QUESTION:

Where did the idea of a Jewish messiah dying for the sins of mankind originate from? OT? Did Jews prior to Jesus' existence believe this notion of the messiah dying for other's sins?

RESPONSE:

I deal with this issue in a couple of my books. Here is one of my fuller discussion from Did Jesus Exist?, where I talk about the issue in connection with the question of why Paul originally opposed Christians before converting to the faith.

Why, as a highly religious Jew, did Paul originally persecute the Christians before he himself joined their ranks? It appears to have been for one reason only: the Christians were saying that Jesus was God's special chosen one, his beloved son, the messiah. But for the pre-Christian Paul it was quite clear. Jesus was not anything like God's chosen one, the one selected to do his will on earth. He did not enjoy God's blessing. Just the opposite. He was under God's curse. Evidence? He was hung on a tree.

But why would that be a problem? Wasn't the messiah supposed to suffer horribly for the sins of others and be raised from the dead? Not according to ancient Jews. On the contrary, the messiah was not supposed to be killed at all. It is at this point that we need to consider what ancient Jews, including the pre-Christian Paul, thought about the messiah.

Ancient Views of the Messiah

The word "messiah" is Hebrew, and literally means "anointed one." The Greek translation of the term is "christos," so that "Jesus Christ" literally means "Jesus the Messiah." The origin of the term goes back into the ancient history of Israel, to the time when the nation was ruled by kings, who were said to have been specially favored, "anointed," by God. In fact, the king was literally anointed during his inauguration ceremonies, when oil was poured on his head as a way of showing that he was specially favored by God, as seen in such passages as 1 Samuel 10:1 and 2 Samuel 23:1.

Other persons thought ...

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