

## Yeshua's Death as a Substitutionary Sacrifice

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Modern Christian theology has, by and large, adopted the view that in the death of Yeshua He offered to each and every person the opportunity for salvation. The metaphors are plentiful, but one will demonstrate this line of thinking. It is suggested that Yeshua's death may be compared to a wealthy man who, on behalf of a poor village, deposits a large sum of money into the local bank with these instructions: anyone who wishes to have some of the money for himself must simply come to the bank and withdraw the funds. So, it is said, the salvation won by Yeshua is deposited, as it were, for all into the "bank." Now all anyone must do is come and claim it. By this illustration the heart of the theology is seen, namely, that the salvation-work of Yeshua makes salvation possible but it by no means makes it inevitable. Since each must make his or her own decision to withdraw the deposited goods, it is conceivable that all will decide not to, and all will perish without anyone ever enjoying the benefits of eternal life for which Yeshua gave His life.

But when we look at the Scriptures, both the Tanach and Apostolic, it is clear that the writers of these sacred texts believed that the salvation-work of Yeshua actually saved sinners. The picture of making salvation possible simply is not there. Rather, in every case, the work of Yeshua is described as that which gains an inevitable result, the salvation of His people.

By His own words He declared "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save those who are lost" (Lk 19:10, cf. Mt 1:21), not make salvation possible but to actually seek and save. Paul claims that the goal of Yeshua's coming to earth was "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2Cor 5:21). Furthermore, Yeshua "gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age" (Gal 1:3, 4), not to make a way possible for our deliverance. Peter concurs when he writes (1Pt 3:18) "For Messiah also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." In each of these the question that must be asked is, "did Yeshua reach the goal for which He went to the cross?" If the answer is "yes," then His death makes the salvation of those for whom He died an inevitability. Since He paid for their sins as an actual substitute, God would be unjust to require payment ever again on their behalf.

The language and metaphor of the Scriptures shows as well that the writers took this view of the atonement, i.e., that it actually accomplished the salvation of sinners. Colossians 1:13-14 uses the metaphor of war:

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:13-14)

Even as a conquering warrior actually conquers and redistributes the conquered peoples to lands under his control, so HaShem actually rescued us from the domain of darkness and actually transferred us to the kingdom of His Son. There is nothing potential in this language—it is all actual.

Or consider Colossians 2:13-14 in which Paul describes our transgressions as being paid for by Yeshua.

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col 2:13-14)

Paul speaks here in terms that cannot be denied, namely, that the death of Messiah had an inevitable cause/effect relationship for all of those whom the Father had given Him (cf. Jn 6:48ff; Jn 10:9ff; Jn 17:1-11).

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh. (Jn 6:48-51)

Never once in all of Scripture do the Prophets or the Apostles cast the saving work of Yeshua in potential terms, as though He does some of the work and the sinner must add to it their acceptance. As the author to the Hebrews says,

He entered once for all time into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, there securing eternal redemption. (Heb 9:12)

When Yeshua cried “it is finished,” He had accomplished all of the payment for sin necessary to secure to Himself the people He had purchased. Even as HaShem would never have allowed the plagues against Egypt to have any other result than the full extraction of Israel out from the land of their slavery, so the suffering and death of Yeshua must inevitably secure the eternal freedom of all those for whom He died. To have anything less is to mark His death as less than efficacious.

We may also consider the classic text of the Tanach on this subject, Isaiah 53. Here the Messiah is led to the slaughter as a sheep. Within this sacrificial language, He dies for the sinners as a vicarious sacrifice, the innocent one sacrificed on behalf of the guilty.

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. (Is 53:5)

This is a one-for-one correspondence, and therefore bespeaks actual substitution. But the prophet goes on to say:

If He would render Himself as a guilt offering He will see His offspring. (Is 53:10)

Here the result of His sacrifice is clearly described— “He will see His offspring,” that is to say, He will see those who live because of His death—who reap the benefits of His sacrifice. He does not see the potential but He sees the direct result of His having died for sinners, i.e., they live. In the next verse (v. 11) this is stated directly:

As a result of the anguish of His soul He will see light and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. (Is 53:11)

Once again, the inevitable result of His salvation-work is the salvation of sinners. Note as well these scriptural passages:

...looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:13–14)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (Rom 5:8-9)

Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE.” (Gal 3:13, quoting Deut 21:23)

For to you it has been granted for Messiah’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. (Phil 1:29)

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn 6:37-39)

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. (Jn 10:11–15)