

One Man's Life—and Death

How God Himself became a man in order to die for His creation.

Sometimes the truth is stranger than even the best fiction. Imagine the all-powerful Creator God—inhabiting eternity, knowing no limits, possessing eternal life—laying aside His glory, power and immortality to become a mere human, subjecting Himself to temptation and the pulls of the flesh. Only to then suffer and die at the hands of murders. Why? So that He might redeem mankind by paying the death penalty in our stead.

What kind of God would do this? What kind of nature must He possess?

The nature of God is revealed in the many names of God that are found in Scripture. The book *The Names of God* by Andrew Jukes offers an excellent study of the scriptural names of God and their meanings. A brief overview of the characteristics and nature of God is presented below. The scriptural references that are provided may be used as a basis for pursuing an in-depth study of the nature of God. Any reliable concordance would be helpful.

- God is spirit (John 4:24)
- God is eternal, ever-living and self-existent (Deut. 33:27; Isa. 40:28)
- God is light (I John 1:5)
- God is holy (Isa. 57:15)
- God is Creator (Gen. 1; John 1:1-4)
- God is Lawgiver and Judge (Jas. 4:12; Isa. 33:22)
- God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29)
- God is Savior of all (Psa. 106:21; Isa. 43:3; 45:21-22; 60:16; Hosea 13:4; John 4:42; I Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6; I John 4:14)
- God is our Redeemer from sin (Psa. 19:14; Isa. 41:14; 49:26; I Pet. 1:18; Rev. 5:9)

God is both Lawgiver and the Judge of all who break His laws. He is also the Savior and Redeemer of those who repent of their sins and transgressions of His laws. These two aspects of God's nature are clearly revealed in the words that He spoke when Moses was allowed to see His glory: “ ‘You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live.... Behold, *there is* a place by Me, and you shall stand upon a rock. And it will be, while My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. And I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back parts. But My face shall not be seen.’... And the LORD [Jehovah, the covenant name] came down in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God [*Elohim*, the Creator], merciful [Psa. 103:8-18; 119:64] and gracious [Psa. 86:15; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; I Pet. 2:3], longsuffering [Rom. 2:4; I Tim. 1:16], and abundant in goodness [Psa. 31:19; 33:5; 107:8, 15, 21, 31; Rom. 2:4] and truth [Deut. 32:4; Psa. 31:5; 33:4; Jer. 4:2; John 14:6], keeping mercy to the thousandth *generation*, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin [Psa. 103:1-4; Acts 2:38; 3:19; Rom. 3:23-25], but Who will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and to the fourth generation’ ” (Ex. 33:20-23; 34:5-7).

Because God is merciful and gracious, He is ready to forgive the sins of the repentant sinner (Psa. 86:5). But because He is holy and righteous, He does not allow the unrepentant to escape judgment. As the righteous Judge of all, God punishes those who do evil and destroys the unrepentant wicked. In warning the wicked of his ultimate judgment, God shows that He takes no pleasure in executing it: “ ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no delight in the death of the wicked, except that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Turn you, turn you from your evil

ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?’ ” (Ezek. 33:11).

It is God’s desire that every sinner repent and be saved: “[God] is long-suffering toward us, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9). However, the gift of eternal life is granted only to those who repent of their sins and accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish [die forever], but may have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

So great was the love of God the Father that He gave His own Son to redeem mankind from sin. So strong was the love of God in the Son that He gave Himself willingly, taking upon His own body the punishment that man’s sins had incurred. The love of God is His greatest attribute and characteristic: “GOD IS LOVE” (I John 4:8, 16). Everything that God does flows from His love.

The magnitude of God’s love is revealed in the creation of man. All human beings bear the image and likeness of God: “ ‘Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of heaven and over the livestock and over all the earth....’ And God created man in His *own* image, in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female” (Gen. 1:26-27).

These verses give us more understanding about the nature of God. The word “God” is translated from the Hebrew *elohim*, which is a plural noun. Like English plural nouns, Hebrew plural nouns refer to more than one person or thing. Just as the plural noun “men” inherently means more than one man, *elohim* means more than a single God. A number of passages in the Old Testament confirm the existence of more than one Divine Being (Gen. 1:26; 11:7; Psa. 110:1; 45:7-8; Dan. 7:13).

The Scriptures reveal that there are two who are *Elohim*. One *Elohim* is the God Who is called the Father in the New Testament. The other *Elohim* is the God Who became Jesus Christ. This truth is verified by the apostle John: “In *the* beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in *the* beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and not even one *thing* that was created came into being without Him. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.... And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled [temporarily dwelt] among us (and we ourselves beheld His glory, *the* glory as of *the* only begotten with *the* Father), full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-4, 14).

Christ was God in the flesh: The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus Christ was with God and was God before He became flesh. The words of John leave no doubt whatsoever that Jesus Christ existed from the beginning. Jesus was the *Elohim* of the Old Testament Who became God in the flesh. He was sent to earth by the Father, the other *Elohim* of the Old Testament.

The Scriptures reveal that the God Who appeared to the patriarchs and Who led the children of Israel out of Egypt was the one who became Jesus Christ (Ex. 3:6-8; I Cor. 10:4). The God Who became the Father never revealed Himself to man in Old Testament times. God the Father was not revealed until the coming of Jesus Christ. “At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for it was well pleasing in Your sight *to do* this. All things were delivered to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son personally chooses to reveal *Him*’ ” (Matt. 11:25-27). Also, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*” (John 1:18).

A major purpose of the ministry of Jesus Christ was to reveal the Father (Matt. 11:27). Before New Testament times, not even the Jews knew the Father: “And you have not known

Him [God the Father], but I know Him” (John 8:55). These plain statements show that the God Who manifested Himself to men and women in Old Testament times was not God the Father. John adds to the evidence by recording these words of Jesus: “And the Father Himself, Who sent Me, has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice nor seen His form at any time.” (John 5:37). The words of Jesus Himself reveal that He pre-existed as God before He became human. In His prayer to the Father after His last Passover, Jesus said: “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work that You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me with Your own self, with **the glory that I had with You before the world existed**” (John 17:4-5).

It is vital to understand that the Lord God of the Old Testament was made flesh and became Jesus Christ. To become God manifested in the flesh, He emptied Himself of His power and glory. Why did the God of the Old Testament, Jehovah Elohim, become flesh? The apostle Paul reveals the answer: “Let this mind be in you, which *was* also in Christ Jesus; Who, although He existed [or pre-existed] in *the* form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself [of His power and glory], *and* was made in *the* likeness [Greek *homoioima*, the same existence] of men, *and* took the form of a servant; and being found in *the* manner of man, He humbled Himself, *and* became obedient unto death, even *the* death of *the* cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

These inspired words of Paul confirm that before Jesus Christ became human He was, in fact, *Jehovah Elohim*, the Lord God of the Old Testament. Existing as God, He was composed of ever-living Spirit. It was impossible for Him to die. However, to redeem man from Satan the devil and the law of sin and death, it was necessary for God to die. The only way for God to die was to become human—to be “manifested in the flesh.” The God Who had created man in His image and likeness took on the same substance as man. “And undeniably, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in *the* flesh...” (I Tim. 3:16).

Paul also shows that Jesus gave His body as the one perfect sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:10). Jesus said of Himself: “I am the living bread, which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is even My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51). Indeed, the suffering and death of Jesus Christ were essential to the fulfillment of God’s purpose for man: “But in a certain place one fully testified, saying, ‘What is man, that You [Yourself] are mindful of him, or *the* son of man, that You [Yourself] visit him? You did make him a little lower than *the* angels; You did crown him with glory and honor, and You did set him over the works of Your hands; You did put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing *that was* not subjected to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

“But we see Jesus, Who *was* made a little lower than *the* angels, crowned with glory and honor on account of suffering the death, in order that by *the* grace of God He Himself might taste death for everyone; because it was fitting for Him, for Whom all things *were created*, and by Whom all things *exist*, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:6-10).

What a magnificent expression of God’s love! The Creator of all mankind temporarily gave up His eternal existence as God and lowered Himself to the level of mortal man, so that He could suffer and die for every human being. Think of it! By the grace and love of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, He willingly took upon Himself the death penalty that had come upon all mankind through sin.

Jesus fully shared the human experience: In order to give His flesh for the life of the world, Jesus had to be fully human, sharing the same mortal existence that every human being experiences. Yet, some claim that Christ was not a mortal human being, but possessed an angelic or spirit body that gave the appearance of being flesh and blood. The apostle Paul clearly contradicts this teaching: “Therefore, since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, in like manner

He also took part in the same [flesh and blood], in order that through death He might annul him who has the power of death—that is, the devil; and *that* He might deliver those who were subject to bondage all through their lives by *their* fear of death.

“For surely, He is not taking upon Himself to help *the* angels; but He is taking upon Himself to help *the* seed of Abraham. For this reason, it was obligatory for *Him* to be made like *His* brethren in everything [sharing the same flesh and nature] that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest *in* things pertaining to God, in order to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered, having been tempted *in like manner*, He is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb. 2:14-18).

Because Jesus had the same flesh as all human beings, and the same nature as all human beings, it was entirely possible for Him to be tempted. Since it was possible for Him to be tempted, He was also capable of sinning. And if He had sinned, He would have incurred the penalty of death. Paul states plainly that Jesus was made subject to the Law (Gal. 4:4-5), thus subject to the penalty of death.

In his epistle to the Hebrews, Paul reveals that Jesus experienced the same temptations that beset all human beings: “For we do not have a high priest who cannot empathize with our weaknesses, but *one Who* was tempted in all things [in every way] according to *the* likeness of *our own temptations*; yet *He was* without sin. Therefore, we should come with boldness to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16). In other words, Jesus experienced exactly the same temptations that we do because He was made “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” Yet He never sinned because He never yielded to a single temptation of the flesh or of Satan the devil.

If it was impossible for Jesus to have sinned, His temptation by Satan the devil would have had no purpose whatsoever. Yet, during His forty days of temptation by Satan, Jesus chose to humble Himself by fasting rather than to nourish His flesh, so that He would rely on the Word of God and be led by the Holy Spirit of God. He did not rely on His own strength and His own mind. Jesus overcame every temptation to sin because He was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus overcame sin in the flesh: In Romans 7:5-8:2, Paul describes in great detail how “the law of sin and death” works in every human being to bring death. Only through Jesus Christ, Who overcame “the law of sin and death” through the power of the Holy Spirit, can human beings be delivered from this sinful nature that leads to death: “Because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has delivered me from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).

Jesus was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, with the law of sin and death within His members, just as it is within us, so that as our High Priest He could empathize with our weaknesses. Jesus fully understands our struggle against the pulls of the flesh, having experienced the same battle in His own human flesh. Because he has shared the same sinful nature, He can have compassion when we weaken and commit sins. He mercifully intercedes for us with the Father, obtaining His forgiveness for our sins. Through Jesus’ ongoing intercession in our behalf, God the Father’s mercy and grace can continually be imparted to each one of us.

When Christ was nailed to the cross, He paid the penalty for the sins of the whole world. Although He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and had the law of sin and death within His flesh, He never sinned. Because He was sinless, He was therefore able to offer His own life for the sins of others. As Paul wrote, “For He [the Father] made Him [Christ] Who knew no sin [by experience] *to be* sin for us...” (II Cor. 5:21). As the Lord God of the Old Testament, Jesus had created mankind. Because His life was of greater value than the lives of all other human beings, His death was able to atone for the sins of the entire world.

Christ gave up His power and immortality as one of the *Elohim* of the Godhead and took upon Himself the weak, sinful nature of human flesh. He willingly left His eternal glory with the Father and came to this earth to offer His body as a perfect and complete sacrifice for sin.

According to God's plan, in His time, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be applied to the entire world, redeeming all mankind from the sentence of death. What an awesome sacrifice—the Creator of the world died to save mankind from death!