

# **Why Did God Become Flesh?**

Rod Reynolds

**Have you ever stopped to think why God - an eternal Being who existed before time began (as we count time) - would become flesh and blood? Does that not seem a bit peculiar, when you think about it, that the very Creator, the Being whose power sustains the entire vast Universe, would be changed into a mere human, infinitely weaker and limited by comparison?**

Each Spring in the Church of God we begin again the cycle of the festivals of God through which we review and hopefully gain a greater understanding of God's great plan for mankind. The first annual feast of God is the Passover, through which we commemorate the death of Jesus Christ. This same Jesus Christ is the spiritual "Rock" who led Israel out of Egypt (1 Corinthians 10:4). He is the One who - under the divine name "Yahweh," the Eternal or Self-existing One - spoke the ten commandments out of the cloud at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:2; cf. Exodus 3:14; John 1:1, 18; 5:37; 8:58; Revelation 1:8).

Most often when Christ is pictured by the world He is dead, or a babe in a manger, or He is depicted as a powerless, effeminate, long-haired creature who allegedly died of a "broken heart." According to the doctrine of many, Christ's work was finished on the cross. Anything happening after that is seen as anti-climactic. Oh yes, perhaps He was resurrected and ascended to heaven (though many modern theologians have rejected the idea of Christ's resurrection), but if so He's been "retired," since the work of redemption was supposedly finished on the cross. Many professing Christians would consider it heresy - if not blasphemy - to assert that Jesus Christ is not only alive, but that His work is not finished, and that He's going to return to earth in power and glory, punish a wicked world in righteous indignation and wrath, and then rule the world with supreme authority, producing universal peace and joy for mankind. It's interesting that the Jewish Sanhedrin, when Christ told them He would return in power, accused Him then, too, of blasphemy! (Matthew 26: 64-65).

The Passover emphasizes Christ's suffering, humility and death. But to properly understand, we must put the Passover in its proper perspective. The Passover was the culmination of Christ's ministry as a flesh and blood human being, and that's pretty much where the world leaves Him, as it were, hanging on the cross. At least that's how He's generally perceived. But the death commemorated by the Passover wasn't the end of God's work of salvation - it was the beginning. Because God's Church keeps all of his feasts, we understand that. When we link the meaning of the Passover with the rest of God's plan, then it takes on its true significance.

Why did the Eternal become flesh and blood, weak and subject to death? The Bible gives us *at least* seven specific reasons. They are as follows:

**(1) To save the world.** Jesus said that He came "to save the world" (John 12:47). In John 3:17 we are told: "...God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." What is it the world was to be saved from? All humans have sinned (Romans 3:23). The penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The Son wasn't sent to condemn the world. The world, each person in it, was already condemned to death when He came! As John wrote, "...he who does not believe is condemned already..." (John 3:18).

Jesus Christ came to make it possible for human beings to be delivered from the death penalty, so they "should not perish but have eternal life" (verse 15). His death was a necessary step toward the fulfilling of God's plan of salvation. Through the death of Christ repentant humans guilty of sin may be "justified by His blood," opening the way to salvation (Romans 5:9-10).

But if Christ's work of saving the world was **completed** on the cross then He failed, because the world isn't saved yet! While Christ's death opened up to us the possibility of salvation, the completion of the work of saving the billions of Israel and the rest of mankind is yet future. Notice Paul wrote: "...all Israel **will be** saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob...'" (Romans 11:26). As the Holy Days reveal, salvation for most won't be fully accomplished until after Christ returns in power. Even those who through faith have already been qualified to inherit eternal life will not receive it in its fullness until Christ's return. So in that sense salvation for them, too, is yet future.

**(2) To overcome sin in the flesh.** In order for God to fulfill His master plan for mankind the problem of sin had to be dealt with. The penalty of sin for human beings is death, as God warned Adam and Eve while they were yet in the garden (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12; 6:23). Because of his own sin, each human has fallen under the condemnation of the death penalty, as mentioned already. God does not compromise with His perfect, spiritual law. The penalty must be paid!

The solution that would enable us to share eternal life with God, He decided, is for God Himself to pay the penalty for our sins. Thus would God redeem us from death. But God is an eternal Spirit Being incapable of dying. To pay the penalty God had to provide a perfect, sinless sacrifice. Only a human being without any sin could pay the penalty for our sins. Otherwise in dying he would only be paying the penalty for his own sins. But no human, beginning with Adam, had lived without sinning (Romans 3:23). Only God, living in the flesh, having the Holy Spirit without measure from the moment of conception, was found to be capable of living a perfectly sinless life. Thus it had already been determined even before the foundation of the world that the Word - whom we know as Jesus Christ - would become flesh, a human being subject to death (John 1:1-3, 14; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

Jesus lived a perfect life in the flesh without sin (Hebrews 4:15). In so doing Jesus

Christ overcame the world – this world – this present evil age characterized by sin and rebellion against God (John 16:33). Because He lived a perfect life without sin in the flesh He was the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins – “a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). In overcoming sin He also set for us a perfect example (1 Peter 2:21-24; Revelation 3:21).

**(3) To condemn sin in the flesh.** “For what the law [the Old Covenant system] could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh...” (Romans 8:3).

The sins that stand condemned are the sins of mankind – your sins and mine. It is not Christ's sin for He had none, it is our sin that was condemned in the flesh of Jesus at the crucifixion.. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament one of the words for sin is *chata*. It means to miss the mark, to fall short, and hence to sin, to be blameworthy or guilty. The noun of this very same word is also used of the sin offering – because in the sacrifice of the sin offering sin itself was symbolically condemned. When Jesus was dying on the cross as the sin offering He became to God the embodiment of sin – our sins, the sins of the world. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us...” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus, "...Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree..." (1 Peter 2:24). Through Him our sins, if we repent in genuine faith, have been condemned and destroyed, and no longer have any power to destroy us. This brings us to the next reason....

**(4) To put away sin.** “... now, ...He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:26). This purpose is reiterated in Hebrews 1:3.

Those who through faith in Jesus Christ confess their sins and repent, in other words, forsake their sins, are forgiven (Proverbs 28:13; Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:9). “... God set forth [Jesus Christ] to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26).

Putting away sin includes helping us to overcome sin and put it out of our lives. One who is living by genuine faith in Jesus Christ – having the very faith of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20) – is no longer enslaved to his fleshly lusts, but with Christ working in him through the power of God's Spirit, can overcome them and live righteously (Romans 8:1-14; Ephesians 4:17-24). “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not [practice] sin. Whoever [continues practicing] sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:5-7). The present indicative and present participle of the Greek *hamartano* (to sin) used in verse 6 implies one who “lives a life of sin, not mere occasional acts of sin” (*Word Pictures*

*in the New Testament, vol. VI, p. 222, A. T. Robertson).*

Christ through His death, and the life that He lives in us, puts away sin. He will appear a second time apart from sin – having put our sins away – to bring us salvation (Hebrews 9:28).

**(5) To reconcile us to God.** “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard...” (Colossians 1:19-23).

Through Christ Jews and Gentiles may be reconciled to God in one body (Ephesians 2:16-17). We see in the world today so many seemingly insoluble controversies. How can Serbs and Muslims be reconciled. Or Jew and Arab, or white and black, and the list could go on and on with tribal, racial, ethnic, national, regional, religious, and all kinds of other divisions, hatreds and hostilities. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross makes possible not only our reconciliation with God, but it makes possible our reconciliation with one another.

Of course, while the death of Christ makes that reconciliation possible, it will not be accomplished on a universal scale until after Christ's return, as is pictured by the Day of Atonement. Nevertheless, since we are in Christ now, we should be right now – continuously – cultivating that spirit of reconciliation toward God and toward one another.

Reconciliation is not accomplished, however, by compromising the truth, or participating in or approving of sinful behavior in order to “get along.” We are not to be partakers of the sins of others, or have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Psalm 50:18; Ephesians 5:7, 11; 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 John 1:9-11; Revelation 18:4). By its nature rejecting falsehood and lawless conduct will separate you from others. But ultimately, being faithful will produce the fruit of peace and reconciliation.

We must seek reconciliation and fellowship with God first and foremost, by walking in the light of truth (1 John 1:2-7). We must love other people, including even our enemies, and seek to live at peace with others as much as is possible without compromising the faith (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:17-21).

**(6) To destroy Satan and his works.** “Inasmuch then as the children [who will be in God's Kingdom] have partaken of flesh and blood, He [Jesus Christ, the author of their salvation, verse 10] Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the

devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15).

Satan is the ruler of this present evil world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the instigator of sin and death (Ephesians 2:1-3). He is the one responsible for the reign of death spoken of in Romans 5.

Satan is already judged (John 16:11). His judgment is written in God's word (Leviticus 16:21; John 12:31; 2 Peter 3:10; Jude 13; Revelation 18:2; 20:10). Christ's coming in the flesh ensures that the judgment of Satan will ultimately be consummated and his works of sin and death will themselves be destroyed. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

**(7) To confirm the covenant.** "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan. 9:27).

Jesus ministry began in the fall of 27 A.D., at the beginning of the seventieth prophetic "week" [on the principle of a day for a year (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6)]. This was 483 years after the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. to rebuild Jerusalem (verse 25; Ezra 7:6-28; cf. Ezra 4:1, 12-13, 16, 21).

To confirm means to verify, to strengthen, to validate, to assure beyond all doubt. For the three and one-half years of his ministry Jesus confirmed the covenant with His disciples (cf. Luke 1:54-55, 68-75). His very presence was a confirmation of the covenant (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8). In a sermon to a crowd in the temple after Jesus had ascended back into the heavens, Peter explained how Jesus had come to them confirming the covenant made to the patriarchs, blessing them in turning them away from their iniquities (Acts 3:25-26).

After three and one half years – in the middle of the seventieth prophetic week – Jesus was "cut off" (Daniel 9:26-27) through the death of the crucifixion. His death brought to an end the era of the physical temple and its sacrifices (Hebrews 10:5-10). It was destroyed by the Romans along with the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The covenant that Jesus Christ confirmed was the New Covenant, which being prefigured by the Old, was to supersede it as a better covenant with better promises (Hebrews 8:6-13). In reality, the "New Covenant" itself actually preceded the "Old Covenant" (the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai), because its essence – salvation by grace thorough faith in and of the Messiah – was contained in the covenant with Abraham hundreds of years before the time of Moses (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:5-18). Paul, in harmony with common usage of his time, often uses the term "the law" when referring to the Old Covenant, as he does in Galatians 3 (cf. 4:21-24).

The covenant that came with the giving of the law to Israel did not annul the covenant that came before (Galatians 3:17). Israel was not faithful to the Old Covenant and came under its curse as a result (Galatians 3:10; Hebrews 8:9). Yet that did not abrogate the promise of grace through Christ made to Abraham.

Jesus preached a message of repentance and faith (Mark 1:14-15). To those who believe and obey Him He promises not only the forgiveness of sins, but the Holy Spirit, to help them overcome the flesh, engraving His laws in their hearts and minds, as they become more like Him (John 14:15-17; Romans 8:12-14; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Hebrews 8:10-12).

These are some of the reasons God came in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. But we need to keep in mind, as the feasts of God teach us, that the work of salvation was not finished with Christ in human flesh. It was not finished but only begun when they took Christ's body off the cross.

The Bible is full of the message of hope in the salvation which Jesus Christ will bring with Him at His second coming. He will finish the work He's begun (Romans 9:28). That's why He will come again.

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