

Did Jesus die on a Cross?

What does the New Testament say?

Matthew 27:35 'And when they had crucified him...'

Mark 15:24 'And they crucified him...'

Luke 23:33 'And there they crucified him'

John 19:18 'There they crucified him...'

Romans 6:6 'For we know that our old self was crucified with him.'

Galatians 6:14 'May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ

Philippians 2:8b 'He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!'

1 Peter 2:24a 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.'

Hebrews 12:2 'For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame.'

What do the early Church leaders say?

Clement of Rome (c. 35-99 AD) "Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ and see how precious that blood is to God, which, having been shed for our salvation, has set the grace of repentance before the whole world" (1 Clement 7:4).

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-108 CE) "He was truly born, truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, truly

crucified and died, in the sight of beings in heaven and on earth and under the earth"

Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69-155 AD) "But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also, ...'

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202 AD) "He took up humanity into Himself, He offered Himself to the Father on behalf of all men, thus fulfilling the will of the Father in all things"

Tertullian (c. 160-225 AD) "The fame of Jesus had spread abroad; they were not ignorant that He was the Christ, who was expected, who was crucified, who died, who rose again"

What do early non-Christian historians say?

Flavius Josephus (Jewish Historian AD 37-100) 'He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, ...' (Antiquities)

Tacitus (Roman Historian AD 56-120) 'Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, ...'

What do early Jewish writers say?

A number of works of classical Jewish rabbinic writing (the Babylonian Talmud in particular)

contain references to Jesus. Historian Joseph Klausner, summarizes these in his book 'Jesus of Nazareth':

'There are some reliable theories regarding the fact that his name was Yeshua (Yeshu) of Nazareth; that he practiced sorcery (that is to say that he performed miracles, as was common in those days) and seduction and led Israel astray; that he mocked the words of the wise and discussed Scripture in the same way as the Pharisees; that he had five disciples; that he said he had not come to revoke the Law, nor to add anything to it; that he was hung upon a piece of wood (crucified) as a false authority and seducer on the eve of the Passover (which fell on a Saturday); and that his disciples cured diseases in his name.'

What do the Gnostics say?

The Gnostic belief system arose alongside the Christian belief system and spoke against orthodox Christian belief. Whereas Christianity presented Jesus Christ as one person (the Son of God) who had 2 natures (human and divine) Gnostics split Jesus Christ apart, a human bodily Jesus (who suffered the evils of physical existence), and a spirit Christ who clothed himself with Jesus while on earth (but was impervious to human suffering).

In 'The Second Treatise to the Great Seth' the gnostic Christ says: "As for me, they saw me and punished me, but someone else... drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I. They were striking me with a scourge, but someone else... bore the cross on his shoulder. Someone else wore the crown of thorns.

And I was on high, poking fun at all the excesses of the rulers [archons, demonic beings who rule the world] and the fruit of their error and conceit. I was laughing at their ignorance.” Even though he is still within Jesus while these many tortures are being inflicted upon him, the gnostic Christ recounts what happened as if he were watching it from afar as a spectator.

Another gnostic writing said Jesus on the cross was a ‘phantom’, ie not a flesh and blood person (Acts of John). Other gnostic writings of the early church era said God carried out a deception and that it wasn’t Jesus who was put on the cross, but Satan, or Simon of Cyrene, or some other person / figure.

What does the Old Testament say?

The Jews of Jesus time were not expecting a Messiah who would die on a cross, but their Scripture (the Old Testament – Isaiah 52 & 53) did put before them a messianic figure who would suffer in place of them:

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, ...”

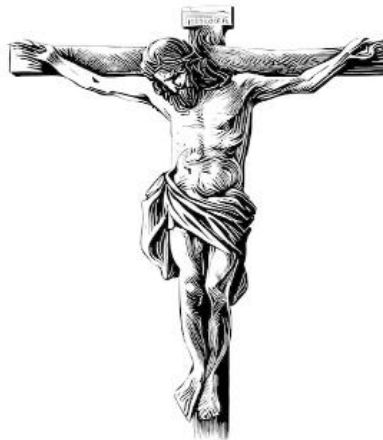
“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; ...”

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...”

“And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

That the ‘Suffering Servant’ put forward in Isaiah 52 & 53, would die for our sins, is hardly an outrageous idea for the Old Testament to put forward, given that God had set up a system with his Old Testament people, the Jews, in which unblemished animals were sacrificed to God as ‘sin offerings’. The animals died instead of them, to pay for their sin. This showed how serious sin was, how Holy God was, but also how loving God was. Instead of destroying the people because of their sin, he established an animal sacrifice system, so that he, the Holy God, could be among his (sinful) chosen people.

Animal offerings for sin needed to be made again and again by the Jewish people. When the time was right God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to offer his life, as a once for all sacrifice for sin. As a human being he could represent all humanity. As the ‘unblemished’ Son of God, he was the only one who could pay for sin.



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