

Did God Forsake Jesus On The Cross?

The Bible accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, provide heart rending reading. We read of the Son of God willingly giving His life for mankind, even though He was reviled, ridiculed, taunted and spat upon by those present. Death by crucifixion was, even to this day, one of the most cruel and painful methods of execution devised by man.

As we come towards the end of the gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, Matthew and Mark include an incident that is as shocking as it is poignant. The incident is recorded in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34. Both accounts are almost identical, so I'll only note Mark's account. *"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* Jesus died shortly thereafter.

Why did Jesus cry out those words of anguish? Did God actually forsake Jesus while He hung on that cross?

This question is one of debate in the religious world. Many believe that indeed God *did* forsake Jesus on the cross.

I understand that even some gospel preachers apparently hold this view. However they must feel their position somewhat tenuous from the support of scripture, because they quickly add that God turned His face from Jesus for only a second.

God either forsook Jesus, or He did not. Quibbling over the amount of time elapsed is pointless at best, and conscience salve, for a position held in doubt, at worst.

The passages in Matthew and Mark provoke questions but should not cause us to accept any position not supported by the Bible. I firmly believe that God did not forsake Jesus on the cross. I intend to demonstrate this from the Bible, as opposed to the ruminations of various theologians through the centuries.

How did this question arise in the first place? The premise of Jesus being forsaken of God is that Jesus assumed the sins of the world upon Him. Therefore He became sinful. This is known as "Imputed Sin" in Calvinist or Reformed theology. God turned from Jesus because God hates sin and cannot abide it.

Those that hold this position are not devoid of scripture to use in an attempt to back up their view. A common verse used is 2 Corinthians 5:21, "*Him who knew no sin he made (to be) sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him.*" Another verse cited is 1 Peter 2:24, "*who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed.*"

How is one to understand those passages? First, before we can begin a fruitful Bible study, we must understand that the word of God is in harmony with itself. It does not contradict itself. I heard a preacher once say that if you have two people on opposite sides of an issue, both claiming to speak the truth, you have three possibilities. Either, the first one is right and the second one is wrong or the second one is right and the first wrong. The third possibility is that both are wrong. However both cannot be right.

Since God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:13) and does not change (James 1:17; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), any time we find Bible passages that appear to contradict each other, then it is our interpretation that needs rechecking. Thus, our text passage has to agree with the rest of the Bible. We must arrive at an understanding that is in line with the *entire* Bible. Remember, the Bible is in harmony with itself, it being God's word.

Having said that, let us look at Hebrews 4:15 "*For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as (we are, yet) without sin.*" The study of the Atonement and how Jesus "bare" our sins away is beyond the scope of this article. A plethora of books on the subject exist. My point is to note that the Bible says Jesus was sinless, therefore we should tread carefully before assuming the bearing of our sins on the cross included His assuming them, thus becoming sinful, because this view is in contradiction of other scripture.

Next, notice what Jesus said about His relationship with the Father while He was on the earth, "*Jesus therefore said, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am (he), and (that) I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him.*" John 8:28-29. Before Jesus' betrayal, He said, "*Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and (yet) I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*" John 16:32.

Jesus said the Father is with Him and has not left Him, even when Jesus spoke of future events, John 16:32. Some think that that is all well and good, until the crucifixion. Then things changed. Did they? Since our Bibles are translations from the Greek language, we must consider the grammar of Biblical Greek regarding these verses.

In both passages, Jesus' stating that the Father is with Him is in the present tense, which in Greek, conveys the idea of ongoing continuous action. Jesus' assertion that "*I am not alone*" (John 16:32) is also in the present tense. Jesus would remain "not alone."

Noting that the Father has not left Jesus, John 8:29, the aorist tense is used. This is an odd tense for us because English has no equivalent. The aorist often corresponds to our past tense, but is correctly time neutral. Therefore Jesus is stating that God's not leaving Him is irrespective of time.

Clearly, Jesus is telling His disciples that while they and everyone else will forsake Him, the Father will not. So then, what did Jesus mean when He uttered that phrase on the cross?

We have to go to the Old Testament. In Psalm 22, verse one begins "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Please read the entire Psalm as space does not permit an exposition of the Psalm, in this article.

That the crucifixion of Christ is foretold is obvious. After reading this Psalm, read the gospel accounts of Jesus' betrayal, sham trials, Pilate's questioning, the scourging, Jews' screaming for His crucifixion, and Pilate relenting. Note the events on Golgotha, and the taunting of Jesus, with cries of "*If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross.*" and "*He saved others; himself he cannot save.*" and "*He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him; for he said I am the Son of God.*"

The Jews did not believe Jesus to be the Son of God. Indeed, they accused Him of blasphemy for claiming deity. Jesus' crucifixion was to be a crowning moment of proof that He was the Son of God. He *was* the Messiah promised so many centuries ago.

The Jews who prided themselves on knowing the scriptures should have recognized Jesus' statement as being from the Psalms. By reflecting on the words of this Psalm and seeing the ready likeness to their current events, they should have recognized Jesus' crucifixion as a fulfillment of prophecy. He was indeed the Messiah! Jesus was asserting His divinity by showing that He was the fulfillment of God's prophecy.

One final note, notice verse 24 of the Psalm. "*For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*" The Psalm itself tells us God would not forsake Jesus. Let us let the Bible speak for itself and leave musing for the philosophers.