

# How Would God Allow a Great Prophet Like Jesus to Die?

By Abu Atallah

Dear Friend:

How would God allow a great prophet like Jesus to die?

I am sure you know the story of Abraham and his son. God replaced the son with a lamb so the lamb was sacrificed on behalf of Abraham's son. That is where *the Aid al Adha* in Islam came from. *Adha* comes from the verb "to sacrifice." We use that in the Arabic language when someone sacrifices himself for the sake of others or country. In the same way, Jesus died on our behalf. Many people answer: everyone should pay for his or her own sin.

Let me share with you this true story.

The other day, I was with a group of people who were talking about the relationship between parents and children. They spoke of their own children, and of their own parents, and then one of us mentioned something his mother always used to say to him when he was young. "My son," she would say, "If anything bad is to happen to us, I would rather it happened to me than to you." And she used to add: "I never want to have to bury you—I want to die first."

That made me think about the love parents have for their children, a love which prefers to suffer itself so that the children may not suffer, and which sacrifices itself for others. That in turn made me think of the One who created the heart of parents—and of children—God Himself, the Merciful and Compassionate one. He, who is the source of all that is good, is He not also the source of this love? Could the love of a mother who wants to bear everything in the place of her children be less strong, less pure than the love of God for the beings He created? That made me remember a verse which God gave to the Prophet Isaiah: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"

Should we not expect to see this kind of love in the lives of those whom God has sent? I've noticed it in the life of *El-Masih* (Christ) as it is told us in the *Injil* (the Bible). Many times it is written that he was moved with compassion in the face of human suffering.

When crowds came to hear him, we read that he had compassion on them, because they were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." He showed his love in the miracles he performed. One day he met people taking a young man to his burial. The mother was weeping: she was a widow, and this was her only son. Moved with compassion, *El-Masih* said to her: "Do not weep." Then he spoke to the dead man, and raised him to life again. Many times, too, in the presence of people possessed by evil spirits—who can cause anguish even greater than that caused by physical suffering—*El-Masih* drove out the demons with a word, and delivered the poor people they had been tormenting. Isaiah, a prophet sent by God seven centuries earlier, had predicted the coming of *El-Masih* and said of him that "He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows."

But what about those whom everyone despises because of their bad conduct? Once some people who thought they were really good reproached *El-Masih* for receiving bad people and even sharing a meal with them. He answered by asking them what they would do if they had a hundred sheep and one wandered off. Wouldn't anyone, he said, leave the

ninety-nine other sheep in the fold and go after the missing one until he found it?

His mission, he said, was to “seek and save what was lost.” The greatest evil that can happen to anyone is to be “lost” in the sense of being separated from God forever in the fire of Hell. When I look hard at myself, I realize that I’m a child of our father Adam and our mother Eve, the first people to disobey God and be driven out of Paradise. I know that however hard I try I can never make up for the times I too have disobeyed God.

But now comes the most wonderful thing of all that I wanted to share with you, because this is where the love that is ready to suffer for others is really seen, like the love of a parent who would rather die than see his or her child perish. *El-Masih* said that he had not come to be served,” but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Can you think of a greater love? We might think: “God would not let him die like this.” But what if this was just the way for God’s love to triumph? It is written: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us.” He took the punishment we deserved.

But it is well known that he is not dead now—he is alive, because God accepted his sacrifice, and through him we can be forgiven. Do you not think this is worth sharing, worth pondering? For me, it is the only thing that gives me assurance and hope as I think of the day when I will face God.

I wish for you this same blessing from the Almighty and Compassionate God