


FINDING OUT ABOUT CHRIST · STUDY NOTES

# Study 4: Why did Jesus die?

For personal study or groups

Your name

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**How to use these notes.** Watch each part's video on biblehelp.net, or read the text below. Look up each passage in your own Bible and write the answer on the lines. The verses are printed at the back if you need them. At the end there are questions to think about on your own or to discuss in a group.

PART 1

# No accident

## Working to a plan

The New Testament writers tell us that the death of Jesus was not a terrible mistake, but part of God's plan and purpose. God was using the wickedness of people to provide a way of forgiveness for everyone who would turn from their sin. Amazingly, even those who crucified Jesus would find that forgiveness was open to them too! Their dreadful crime made a way for even their sin to be forgiven. Later in this study we shall see how the death of Jesus makes forgiveness possible.

## God planned that Jesus should die

God had decided beforehand that Jesus would die.

**1** **Look up Acts 2:23**

**Who delivered Jesus up, and who put Him to death?**

**God is in control**

Nothing happened to Jesus by chance. God was working out His plan, even through the evil things people did.

## God used human hatred in His plan

God never made people hate Jesus, but He used the hatred that was already in their hearts to bring about His purposes. The perfect life of Jesus made the faults of others more obvious. So they hated Jesus, and would rather kill Him than have their own sinful ways exposed by His light. Jesus was a light in a dark world. People tried to put out the light, because they preferred the darkness of their sin.

**2** **Look up John 3:19**

**Why did people love the darkness rather than the Light?**

### God used human envy in His plan

Although many people hated Jesus, many others were drawn to Him. The rulers were jealous of His popularity, and that was another reason they hated Him. The Roman governor, Pilate, knew they had handed Jesus over out of envy and self-interest, and so he wanted to release Him.

**3** **Read Matthew 27:17–18**

**Why had they handed Jesus over to Pilate (verse 18)?**

*See also: other reasons Jesus was hated: John 5:18; Luke 19:47–48.*

**Historic note**

Crucifixion was a slow and painful death. The victim's hands and feet were nailed to a wooden cross. Jesus was badly whipped before He was crucified.

The death of Jesus was no accident, and it was not the end. God allowed people to do evil in order to bring about the greatest possible good, as the New Testament writers explain in the rest of this study.

PART 2

## In our place

### Sin must be punished

God is just. Just as a good judge cannot ignore a crime, God cannot ignore the wrong things we do. Sin must be punished, and God's punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23).

But the perfection of Jesus doesn't only make Him the perfect Judge (studies 2 and 3). It also makes Him the perfect substitute. Because He had no sin of His own, He was able to take the sin and punishment of others on Himself.

## Jesus suffered in the believer's place

The righteous and holy Jesus suffered for the unrighteous, to bring them back to God.

**4** **Look up 1 Peter 3:18**

**Who suffered, and for whom? Why did He suffer?**

Breaking God's law brings God's curse. Jesus took that curse in the place of every believer.

**5** **Look up Galatians 3:13**

**How did Christ redeem us from the curse of the law?**

## Jesus was God's Lamb

Before Jesus came, lambs and other animals were sacrificed. Sin was symbolically placed on them, and they were killed. They died in place of others – the innocent in place of the guilty. This was a picture of what Jesus would do. Jesus is called the Lamb of God because He died, like a lamb, in the place of others. Animals can never take away sin, but the death of Jesus takes away sin once and for all (Hebrews 10:11–12).

**6** **Look up John 1:29**

**What did John call Jesus, and what does the Lamb do?**

Lambs were also sacrificed at the Jewish Passover. That feast remembered the night when God spared ("passed over") the eldest son in every home whose doorframe was painted with lamb's blood. The lamb died in place of the son. Jesus is the Passover Lamb who died in the place of every believer (1 Corinthians 5:7).

PART 3

# Friends with God

## Hostility towards God

The teaching of the New Testament is clear: sin angers a holy God, so that people are now God's enemies. But Jesus died in the place of believers in order to bring them back to God, to reconcile them (Colossians 1:20). They are no longer God's enemies, because their sin has been punished in Christ and taken away.

## Jesus' death reconciles

Now that believers have been put right with God, they can rejoice.

**7** **Read Romans 5:10–11**

**What does verse 11 say believers have received?**

## No condemnation remains

There is no more condemnation for believers. God is now their friend. They have nothing to fear from the Day of Judgement.

**8** **Look up Romans 8:1**

**For whom is there now no condemnation?**

Only true believers are reconciled to God. We shall understand more clearly what it means to believe when we come to study 6.

## Reconciliation at a price

It cost Jesus a great deal to reconcile believers to God. Jesus said His death was "a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). A ransom is the price paid to buy someone back; kidnappers often demand one. Jesus gave His life in the place of sinners, as a ransom to buy believers back for God. Believers no longer belong to themselves, because Jesus has bought them, and they now live for Him.

**9** **Look up 1 Peter 1:18–19**

**With what were believers redeemed?**

PART 4

# A place prepared

## Heaven is for people from every nation

Believers from every land will be in heaven. The New Testament describes heaven as a holy place where God and His angels live. Nothing impure or sinful can ever enter it (Revelation 22:15). Believers are reconciled to God through Christ's death, and their sin has been taken away. Now nothing can stop them entering heaven when they die.

## A reserved place

Jesus often spoke of heaven, and told His disciples that He was going ahead to prepare a place for them, and for all believers.

**10** **Look up John 14:2**

**What did Jesus say He was going to do?**

## A lasting possession

Everything in this world rusts or fades, but heaven lasts for ever. Christ's death and resurrection have won this imperishable inheritance for every believer.

**11** **Read 1 Peter 1:3–4**

**What does verse 4 say about this inheritance?**

**Why cling to what we cannot keep?**
Everything we own will one day be left behind. Heaven is the inheritance that never fades.

## Love, not nails

If Jesus really is God's Son (see the earlier studies), then His dying such a cruel death is remarkable, and needs an explanation. We should expect God to give us one. The New Testament writers claim to give us God's explanation, and this study has been their account of why Jesus died. If we accept that they have given us a faithful record of His life, we will be open to what they say about the purpose of His death.

There is something awe-inspiring about the death of Jesus. While He hung on the cross, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). The most obvious explanation of this cry is that God was punishing Jesus for the sin of others. Compare His death with that of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who died calmly, seeing heaven open (Acts 7:55–60). What can explain the difference?

Jesus willingly suffered for rebels like us. No one took His life from Him (John 10:18). It was love, not nails, that held Jesus to the cross. Such amazing love is very compelling. It demands our life, our soul, our all!

THINK IT THROUGH

## Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Why do you think it mattered that Jesus had no sin of His own?

2. Jesus is called "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". What does that mean to you?

3. "Love, not nails, held Jesus to the cross." How do you respond to love like that?

HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

# Memory verse for study 4

Learn this verse by heart this week. Cut out the card and keep it where you will see it.

FINDING OUT ABOUT CHRIST · STUDY 4 · MEMORY VERSE

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

**Romans 6:23**

Berean Standard Bible · biblehelp.net

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11, BSB)

AT THE BACK

# The Bible passages (BSB)

1 **Acts 2:23** *He was delivered up by God's set plan and foreknowledge, and you, by the hands of the lawless, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross.*

2 **John 3:19** *And this is the verdict: The Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil.*

3 **Matthew 27:17–18** *17So when the crowd had assembled, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.*

4 **1 Peter 3:18** *For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit,*

5 **Galatians 3:13** *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

6 **John 1:29** *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*

7 **Romans 5:10–11** *10For if, when we were enemies of God, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! 11Not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

8 **Romans 8:1** *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

9 **1 Peter 1:18–19** *18For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life you inherited from your forefathers, 19but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or spot.*

10 **John 14:2** *In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?*

11 **1 Peter 1:3–4** *3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven for you,*

Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain. Quotations keep its American spelling. Like many English Bibles, it often says 'man', 'he' or 'brothers' where it means people in general, men and women alike.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

# Study 4: Why did Jesus die?

> **Memory verse:** “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23). Say it together at the end, and ask who can say it without looking.

## Aims

- See that Jesus' death was no accident but God's plan, worked out even through human sin.
- Understand that Jesus died in our place: the righteous for the unrighteous, the Lamb of God.
- Grasp what His death achieves for believers: reconciliation, no condemnation, redemption and a place in heaven.
- Be moved by the love behind the cross.

## Suggested timing (about 85 minutes)

- **5 min** Welcome and short prayer.
- **20 min** Part 1 video (5 min); Acts 2:23, John 3:19 and Matthew 27:17–18.
- **20 min** Part 2 video (4 min); 1 Peter 3:18, Galatians 3:13 and John 1:29.
- **20 min** Part 3 video (4 min); Romans 5:10–11, 8:1 and 1 Peter 1:18–19.
- **15 min** Part 4 video (4 min); John 14:2, 1 Peter 1:3–4 and the discussion questions.
- **5 min** Summary and closing prayer.

This is the heart of the course; consider two meetings (Parts 1–2, then Parts 3–4).

## Tips

- Part 2 is the centre of the gospel. Allow time for questions; don't rush it.
- Some find substitution hard ("Why would God punish an innocent person?"). Stress that Jesus gave Himself willingly (John 10:18), and that the Father and the Son acted together in love.
- The illustration of a debt paid by someone else helps many people.
- "No condemnation" is for "those who are in Christ Jesus". Point forward to study 6 on what it means to believe.

## Answers to watch for

- **Acts 2:23:** delivered up by God's set plan and foreknowledge, yet those who killed Him were responsible.
- **John 3:19:** men loved the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil.
- **Matthew 27:18:** Pilate knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over.
- **1 Peter 3:18:** Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.
- **Galatians 3:13:** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.
- **John 1:29:** the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
- **Romans 5:11:** through Christ we have received reconciliation.
- **Romans 8:1:** no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- **1 Peter 1:18–19:** redeemed not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.
- **John 14:2:** Jesus has gone to prepare a place for His people.
- **1 Peter 1:4:** an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven.