Why did Jesus have to die?

Jesus himself was convinced that his death was necessary (Luke 9:22; 13:33), and after his resurrection it was made clear to his followers that his crucifixion had always been part of God’s plan (24:7, 26). Jesus explains to them that his suffering and resurrection had to fulfil everything written about him in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms (24:44-47). I’ve always found it frustrating that Luke does not give us an account of which texts Jesus was referring to and how they should be interpreted, but actually I suspect that much of what Jesus said then found its way into what the apostles say in the Book of Acts.

So, in Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost, he cites Psalm 16:8-11 and applies it to Jesus (Acts 2:22-32). It doesn’t look as though this psalm was originally written as a prophecy about Jesus at all: how does Peter seek to persuade his hearers that the psalm is a prophecy about Jesus? He clearly convinced some of them (Acts 2:37): does he convince you? Why, or why not?

Peter also quotes from Deuteronomy 18:15-19 in his address to the people after the lame man is healed (Acts 3:22-26). The relevance of the text from Deuteronomy to Jesus is caused here by a characteristically Jewish play on words: as Moses promised that God would *raise up* a prophet, so God has *raised up* his servant Jesus (Acts 3:22, 26), and the same word *raised up* is also used with reference to the resurrection of Jesus after his death in Luke 13:33; 24:7, 46: Jesus, risen from the dead, is therefore the prophet of whom Moses spoke. With this in mind, what can we learn about Jesus from Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 18:18-19?

Acts 8:26-40 records Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, who is reading from Isaiah 53:1-12. In Acts 8:35, we read that Philip used this Scripture to explain the good news about Jesus to the eunuch. Putting yourself in Philip’s shoes, how would you use Isaiah 53 to share the good news about Jesus with someone else?

So, in Acts, Luke gives us examples of how Jesus’ death and resurrection fulfilled scriptures from Moses, the prophets and the psalms and shows from this that Jesus’ death was always part of the divine plan.

Jesus cites Isaiah 53:12 with reference to himself in Luke 22:37. At the Last Supper he also says that the wine the disciples are drinking is the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah (Luke 22:20; Jeremiah 31:31-34): it is as if the blood of Jesus seals that covenant and we affirm our own participation in this covenant relationship with God when we drink the wine. According to Mark 14:22-24, Jesus says, ‘This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many,’ over the cup, and simply, ‘This is my body,’ over the bread. In what sense, do you think, are the bread and the wine the body and blood of Jesus? What does eating the bread and drinking the wine at Communion mean to you?

Matthew’s version of what Jesus says over the cup is different again: he draws attention to a sacrificial understanding of Jesus death as Jesus says, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Matthew 26:28). The procedure for making sacrificial atonement is set out in Leviticus 4:27-35. What do you make of these regulations? Do they help you understand the significance of Jesus’ death, or do they leave you cold? Would we lose something important if we avoided thinking of Jesus’ death as a sacrifice? When it comes to understanding how Jesus’ death deals with our sin, are there pictures, images, symbols and illustrations that you have found helpful? How has Jesus’ death dealt with your sin? How do you feel about Jesus dying for you?

‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who for our redemption willedst to be born, and on the cross to die the most shameful of deaths, do thou by thy death and passion deliver us from all sins and penalties, and by thy holy cross bring us, miserable sinners, to that place where thou livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end,’ (Pope Innocent III).