

## **Jesus Christ our Passover Lamb (fourth in a five part series)** by David Foster

We began our series of studies on the Lamb by looking at the epic sacrificial story in Abraham's life where he confidently declared that God himself would provide the lamb. Next we looked at the story of the Passover lamb and then examined how the Israelites and god-fearing resident foreigners could find atonement for their sins by sacrificing a lamb. We concluded that study by looking at Isaiah's prophecy which likens the servant of the LORD to a **lamb** slain as a **sin offering**. He predicted that this humble servant would endure the agonizing punishment that we deserve but finally he will receive the “honors of a victorious soldier.” Fittingly, we then sang a magnificent worship hymn, “Thine be the glory” which highlights Christ's triumphant resurrection and exaltation.

Today we will begin by reporting on how we did with our home work assignment. “Did the LORD answer our prayers, giving us opportunities to tell neighbors of the great things he has done? ... I thank God for opening a door to share albeit briefly, with four Muslim friends about Moses (Moosa) and the Passover story. I hinted that the Jewish Passover festival (which coincided this year with Easter) has close links with our Christian celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

Today, we will examine OT teachings including how prophecies involving a sacrificial lamb were fulfilled in Jesus, the Lamb of God. However, before we open the pages of the New Testament we need to understand why salvation requires a sacrificial lamb. In order to understand this connection we need to look carefully at the relationship between salvation and sacrificial lambs.

The term “salvation” is mentioned twice in the paragraph which serves as the preamble to Isaiah 53. This underscores that God's salvation is an integral part of the story of the lamb. We already glimpsed this, however briefly, in the words of Jethro, Moses' father in law. Upon hearing the miraculous way God had delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh, this priest of Midian, declared, “Praise be to the Lord, for he has rescued you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh ... I know now that God is greater than all other gods.” (Exodus 18:8-11) Likewise, this exceptional deliverance, involving a catastrophic plague and a **sacrificial lamb**, was the basis for the first and foremost of the ten commandments. “I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. “You must not have any other god but me. “You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea.” (Exodus 20:2-4)

This truth was repeatedly underscored by other prophets who called on the Israelites to remember how the LORD (Yahweh) became their **Saviour** displaying his mighty arm of **salvation** under Moses' leadership. (Hosea 13:4; Psalm 78, 106)

The prophet Isaiah continues this theme by the foretelling of a remarkable “servant of the Lord” in chapter 49 who would bring God's “**salvation** to the ends of the earth”—the very same phrase we saw in the introduction to Isaiah 53!

Seven hundred years later an angel announced the birth of a special son. He was to be named Jesus, which means “God is salvation.” Through his entire ministry Jesus was a beacon of light for those who had been ruined by having lived a shameful life of sin. On many occasions, he comforted such people,

saying, “Your sins are forgiven.” (Luke 7 & 19)

But these words were more than a platitude, they were undergirded and reinforced by what John the Baptist declared. As he saw Jesus coming, John said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) Jesus could say with authority to the thief beside him, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

How could Jesus say this? What legal basis allowed him to give this criminal a sense of assurance that he was fully forgiven and ready to enter Paradise? The law of Moses required that a spotless, blameless lamb be sacrificed, dying in the place of guilty sinners. This is precisely what Jesus was and precisely what he did! He was God's Lamb, the final and all-sufficient provision for taking away sin. Whereas animals in the Mosaic law provided a suitable yet temporary blood covering for sin, only Jesus could fully please God, having lived a sinless life in complete obedience to God. (Hebrews 10:1-10)

Notice how the criminal confessed his sin in words reminiscent of Isaiah 53, “We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:41-43)

Reflecting on Christ's death, the apostles wrote, “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. ... For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

What does Scripture mean by describing God's Lamb as “without blemish or defect”?

In the Jewish OT Scripture it was prohibited to bring a blemished or imperfect animal as a sacrifice to God. Similarly it is unthinkable for devout Muslims to dishonor Allah by sacrificing a defective lamb at their special festival in commemoration of Abraham (Eid ul-Adha) or the *'aqiqa* sacrifice at the birth of a child. Samuel Zwemer who devoted his life to reaching Muslims has noted that when sacrificing a sheep or goat, ***no bone may be broken***, and the worshipper should say this prayer: “O God, here is the *'aqiqa* for my son [giving the name], its blood for his blood, its flesh for his flesh, its hair for his hair and save my son from the fire, etc.” (“Atonement by blood sacrifice,” *The Moslem World*, Volume 36, 1946, pp. 187-192)

We should not fail to note that both Islamic sacrifices (Eid & *'aqiqa*) involve a lamb dying in place of the child. As such, this atonement is consistent with the great “ransom” in Surah 101:37 where Allah rescues Abraham's son. However, Muslims do not fully realise what ransom implies.

Let us pause now and consider if the Messiah's sinlessness, as taught in the Bible and the Qur'an, sheds helpful light on the requirement whereby animals had to be “without blemish.” Of course, Islamically Jesus (Isa) was without sin, as indeed the Bible makes clear. (2 Corinthians 5:21; Surah 19:19) On the other hand, “every son of Adam is a sinner,” according to authoritative Ahadith writings. This echoes what Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, “Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.”

Furthermore, there is no doubt about mankind's moral ruin as mentioned in Surah 16:61, “If God were to punish men for their wrong-doing, He would not leave, on the (earth), a single living creature: but

He gives them respite for a stated Term ...”

Consider these two scenarios and ask, “Which pleases God most?” On the one hand, we have someone who sins, but then humbly confesses and makes sacrifice. On the other hand, is a totally sinless person who never commits sin even once.

Make no mistake, there would ever only be one “servant” of the LORD who would fully obey God and please him. This qualified him to be the perfect ransom and substitute. As such, he can truly “take away the sin of the world” as we read in John 1:29. He taught his disciples what greatness really is, saying being the servant of all. Then he added, “even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.”

### **Who needs to hear Good News about the Lamb of God?**

Muslims, who comprise 10% of our city and 23% of our world, need to learn the truth that will set them free, namely that Jesus is the Lamb of God. While claiming to follow Abraham and believing that they are spiritually blessed, they are actually misinformed and tragically missing the blessing.

These last few weeks we've glimpsed a few similarities that can serve as meaningful conversation bridges between Christians and Muslims. We've traced the story line through Scripture which unfolds God's promise to Abraham regarding a lamb that would one day be provided by God himself. We looked first at the “great” ransom as seen in Abraham's experience. Then we looked at Moses and the great rescue from Egypt. Though Muslims acknowledge that these stories show God is mighty to rescue and redeem, tragically their preachers do not include “Savior” and “Redeemer” among the 99 beautiful names of Allah. Islamic scholars have marginalized these twin Divine attributes even though the early prophets acknowledged them as a reason to exalt and glorify God.

Is it coincidental that the Qur'an omits mentioning the plague which God unleashed against first born sons while he simultaneously provided a Passover Lamb? Perhaps this omission was intentional, considering that the Qur'an emphatically denies Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. In fact, the authoritative ahadith underscore this denial saying Jesus will break the cross when he returns to earth in the last days.

The task of bringing the truth to Muslims is, indeed, a daunting challenge. But we are convinced that God is working in people's hearts. His Spirit can penetrate the veil of deception and darkness that renders Muslims spiritually blind. So let us keep praying that God will open doors for us to befriend Muslims and have meaningful conversations enabling us to sow the seed of God's Word. Let us also encourage ourselves, knowing that God's Word is living, active and sharper than any two edged sword.

### **Conclusion: Glorifying God**

Muslims often quote Surah 22:36-37 as grounds for denying Jesus' death on the cross. Speaking of sacrificial animals this passage teaches, “Their meat will not reach Allah , nor will their blood, but what reaches Him is piety from you. Thus have We subjected them to you that you may glorify Allah.” This emphasis on **honoring** God is also evident in Psalm 69:30-31, “I will praise God's name ... [and] **honor him with thanksgiving**. For this will please the Lord more than sacrificing an ox ...”

We already began looking at ways that God is glorified in the Biblical account of Abraham's sacrifice. We saw how Abraham predicted that God would provide the lamb and even named the place “The Lord will provide.” When we consider that Jesus, as God's Son died at this very same place, Mt Moriah (2

Chronicles 3:1) we begin to grasp the deeper significance of Abraham's prophecy.

Recall that God instructed Abraham to sacrifice, “your son, your **only son** Isaac, whom you **love**, ...” (Genesis 22:1-2, bold font added) Keeping in mind the phrase “**only son**,” we read John 3:16, “For God **so loved** the world that he gave his one and **only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John Gilchrist explores these similarities;

Abraham’s love for God in being willing to sacrifice his son for him is the perfect type of God’s love for us in giving his Son, Jesus Christ, for the redemption of our souls. Many times I have asked Muslims whether Allah really loves them and, if he does, what he has done to prove it? The answers usually follow the same pattern. They point to the very blessing of their lives, or to times when he has answered their prayers by healing them of diseases or saving them from financial crises. Others have mentioned children they did not think they could have or all their material benefits and possessions. I have always responded by saying that, without doubting that these are all expressions of his kindness and love, they all cost God nothing and do not affect him at all. What, I have concluded, has God ever done for them that compares with what Abraham was called on to do for him? Has God matched this supreme example of love – a father tearing at the depths of his heart and being willing to give his only son for him? This cost Abraham, indeed it cost him the expression of his very own being – has Allah ever done anything like this in return? (Isaac: The reflection of the Father's love)

For Muslims the festival of Eid ul Fitr commemorates Abraham's remarkable obedience to Allah and shows how much he loved the Lord. Certainly Abraham did pass the test, but is that all there is? What about his prophecy highlighting the lamb which God himself would provide? Are we to believe this prediction was fulfilled by the **ram** providentially snared by its horns in a nearby thicket?

Let us ask some questions to help us think deeper.

How does the provision at Mount Moriah **exalt and honor** God as greater? If the ram was, indeed, the full extent of God's provision, one might be inclined to view Abraham as the hero of the story which, in effect diminishes the Lord. But what if Abraham really did expect a lamb? Does this provision not harmonize better with subsequent events, including many instances where other prophets mentioned sacrificial lambs?

Surely it was no coincidence that the Israelites escaped from Egypt specifically because of the 10<sup>th</sup> plague and the remarkable provision of a Passover lamb? Why then does the Qur'an omit mentioning this critical turning point – the final and most crushing blow out of the 10 plagues? Not only so, the liberated slaves were told to solemnly “keep vigil to **honor** the LORD for the generations to come” by means of the yearly Passover celebration.

The last book of the Bible recounts a magnificent heavenly vision where the apostle John, “heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be **praise and honor and glory** and power, for ever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13, bold font added)

You may like to read John Gilchrist's fuller discussion online: <https://answering-islam.net/Gilchrist/Sharing/05isaac.html>

Another relevant article titled “God our Saviour and Redeemer” is available here: [https://answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/god\\_savior\\_redeemer.html](https://answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/god_savior_redeemer.html)

Earlier messages in this series are available here: <https://sim.ca/david-foster/>

## **Appendix: Isaac or Ishmael?**

John Gilchrist makes several perceptive comments as he concludes his discussion of the story of Abraham's sacrifice,

“it is useful to point out to Muslims that as it was Isaac and not Ishmael who was expressly promised, and that the covenant of God was made through his line, including the Prophethood and Scripture, [Surah 29:27] and that he was born in a unique manner as opposed to Ishmael who was born by a simple illegitimate union, Isaac is obviously the more prominent of the two men. Once it is accepted that he was the son to be sacrificed, the whole purpose of his life comes into focus. He was a type and a symbol of the Messiah to come after the line of Prophethood and the prophecies of the Scriptures would have their fulfilment. You can freely challenge Muslims to become followers of the ultimate Son of Abraham, Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth as the one and only true Saviour of the whole human race, and whom Isaac prefigured. The Apostle Paul brings out the ultimate distinction between Isaac and Ishmael very concisely in these words:

Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise ... we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. *Galatians 4:28,31*

Why does the Qur'an not name the son to be offered as a sacrifice and, immediately thereafter, name Isaac twice as the promised son of Abraham? Perhaps Muhammad was uncertain about the identity of the son and, though he might have wished it was Ishmael, he may have been aware that he is an insignificant and irrelevant figure in the Bible in comparison with Isaac. Hence he left the identity an open question. If, however, Isaac is overlooked as the intended victim, the whole character of the event as a type and symbol of God's coming salvation in his Son Jesus is missed completely and, with it for the Muslim world, the hope of eternal life.”