

Portrait of Christ as the Passover Lamb

MI6 is the UK's equivalent of our CIA. Their headquarters, which was featured in the James Bond film, *Skyfall*, has recently been under renovation. This past December however, more than 100 pages detailing the layout and security system of the building went missing. That's not supposed to happen in a nation's spy headquarters! One source said, "To lose such sensitive documents was grossly irresponsible ... They showed the layout of the building and specifically where alarms and other security measures were. The documents would be gold ... to any enemy agents or terrorists." The company in charge of the renovations has been terminated.¹

One way of thinking about the Old Testament is to think of it as architectural drawings of God's plan for the world. These portraits of Christ, like all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, aren't isolated and unrelated. No, they're like the blueprints of a building under construction. They each show interconnected rooms which are all part of one building, one story. Dr. Walt Kaiser, distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary explains it this way:

... it is amazing how the depictions concerning the coming Messiah and his work comprised one continuous plan of God ... The promise was a single one; yet it was cumulative in its net results. Indeed, its constituent parts were not a collection of assorted promises about a Messiah who was to come: instead, they formed one continuous pattern and purpose placed in the stream of history.²

And this plan of God is the opposite of the blueprints for the MI6 headquarters. Far from being top secret, they are open to public examination! So, let's "steal" a look at the next page of these incredible plans. Today, we examine the centerpiece portrait of the Exodus from Egypt, which is the Passover Lamb. First, we must notice ...

I. The Necessity of the Lamb

If you ask a devout Jew who they think is the greatest prophet, and what was the greatest event in their history, they will say "Moses" and "the Exodus." What triggered Pharaoh to allow the Exodus was the Passover event, and central to the Passover event is the Passover Lamb. God considered this event to be so important that He had the people re-set their calendar to begin with this event. So, let's be reminded of the key components of the Passover.

1. The people were to take a male, one-year-old lamb that was "without blemish" and on the 14th of the month, slaughter it at sunset, roast it, and eat it with unleavened bread.
2. The people were to eat the meal inside their homes, having smeared some of the lamb's blood on the doorpost of their house. They were to be dressed, ready to go on a long trip. They were not to leave their homes until morning.
3. Result: Any first-born person or animal would die, whether Jew or Gentile, if their family wasn't in a home with blood smeared on the doorpost; but, if they were in a home with the blood on the door post, the angel of death would "pass over."
4. Because of this tenth plague, the Pharaoh of Egypt begged the people to leave, so they left with animals and clothing and silver and gold from the grieving Egyptians.

Now, what's interesting is the reason God gave for bringing this judgment on the Egyptians. Way back before God even appeared to Moses in the burning bush, it says in Exodus 2:

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel – and God knew (meaning, “He knew their need for rescue.”) (Ex. 2:23-25)

Now, let's remember something. Up to this point in Jewish history, there was no practice of animal sacrifice. So for these Jews in Egypt to sacrifice a lamb as a spiritual offering was not normal. So, why is God introducing this into their lives and then telling them to keep this practice yearly? Well, God said ...

“... for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. ...” “You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever.” (Ex. 12:17, 24)

So, the Passover Lamb commemorated freedom from slavery? Is that all? Not by a long shot.

II. Why is Jesus Called “The Lamb of God”?

No one disputes that “Lamb of God” was used as a title for Jesus. John the Baptist used it for Him at least twice. In John 1:29, which we read earlier, says,

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

Then John, Paul, and Ringo – I mean Peter – all refer to Jesus by this title in their writings.

But there are even closer identifiers for Jesus as a Lamb. If we compare the qualifications of the animal Passover lamb of the Old Testament with Jesus' qualifications as the spiritual Passover Lamb, the similarities are amazing. Let me show you.

1. Both are examined on the month Nisan, between the 10th and 14th.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the 10th, taught publicly in the Temple and was examined by the priests who also inspected the sheep lambs.

2. Both were free of defects, a qualification for sacrifice. Matt. 26:59-60:

Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none...

3. Both Jesus and the sheep lamb had to endure the fire (wrath) of God.

The sheep lamb could only be roasted by fire, not boiled or eaten raw. Fire in Scripture is the most common metaphor for the judgment of God. Jesus endured God's wrath so that we wouldn't have to. Rom. 5:9:

Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

4. Both were killed at twilight. Ex. 12:6:

... and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

Luke 23:44-46:

... and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.

5. The blood of both is applied to wooden beams. The sheep lamb's blood was applied to the wooden beams of the door post. Jesus' blood was spilled on the crossbeams of the cross.
6. The body of both lambs are to be ritualistically eaten. Ex. 12:8:
They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.
 Jesus had said just hours before ... (Lk. 22:19)
And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
7. The blood of both is effective ONLY for those who have faith.
 Ex. 12:13: **The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you...**
 Jn. 1:11-12: **He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God ...**

So, why is Jesus called the Lamb of God? It's because of His own rules by which He and the Father created this Universe. You see, God decided that a life friendship with Him was to be the entity of highest value. Do you see that? Only people who are made in the image of God can have that. So the greatest value in this world is having a healthy, growing friendship with God.

Conversely then, this means that which does the ultimate damage is anything that hinders or breaks a person's friendship with God. A broken friendship with God then is the most expensive problem that anyone could have. Debt-ridden sin breaks your friendship with God.

But God also knew that we would break this most valuable of all our possessions; kind of like a young dad or mom knows that giving a three-year-old a Waterford crystal ball to play with outside is not going to last long. So then, what will it cost to repair or redeem this broken relationship with our God of ultimate worth? Well, it would cost us more than we could ever pay. In fact, no human being could ever even conceive of the cost. It's equivalent to the cost or better said, the work of bringing a person back to life after they've been dead for two weeks. No one has ever been able to do anything like that. No one but Jesus.

And this is now where we can begin to understand why Jesus is called "The Lamb of God." It's literally a life-and-death title. The term "lamb" in Jesus' day meant sacrifice: something born to die because of their use in the Temple sacrifices. But to say that Jesus was born to die is not nearly the full story. No, He was born to die so that we might live. **Only Jesus' life was worth the price of what we broke.**

Which brings us to another set of "portraits" of Christ in the Old Testament of which only a few people are aware. Let me quote once again, Dr. Kaiser. He writes about the phrase, "Angel of the LORD," which we see quite often in the Old Testament. He says this:

The Hebrew word for "angel" (*mal'ak*) had the basic idea of one who was "sent," a "messenger." Of the 214 usages of the Hebrew term for "angel," about one-third of them refer to what is labeled by theologians as a "Christophany," a temporary appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. It is certain, however, that this special angel of the Lord is divine, [in the passage of Gen. 16 where an angel speaks to Hagar, the maid of Sarah who had the son Ishmael with Abraham. She spoke to that angel and said] "You are the God who sees me ... I have now seen the One who sees me." (Gen. 16:13)³

These appearances of Jesus in the Old Testament are not in the flesh. He only was in the flesh after His birth. No, in the Old Testament Jesus appears in the form of an angel. And interestingly, another such appearance has a direct connection to Jesus as the Lamb of God. It happened when Abraham and Isaac were up on the mountain to offer a sacrifice which God the Father had prescribed. Remember, Abraham had Isaac carry the wood and when Isaac asked, "...where is the lamb?" Abraham demonstrated remarkable faith by saying, "*God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.*" (Gen. 22:8) Then, Abraham tied Isaac, placed him on the altar, raised his hand with the knife to sacrifice his son, and what happened?

But the angel of the LORD (Dr. Kaiser says that this is Jesus!) called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, (Jehovah Jireh) "The LORD will provide"... (Gen. 22:11-14)

Why did God the Father, 600 years after Abraham, direct Moses to include animal sacrifice as part of the worship services? These are not separate, disconnected stories. This is all one story. God was not lowering the value of sheep. He was raising their value to demonstrate the enormous cost of sin. In explaining this to Moses, God said ... (Lev. 17:11)

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

The cost of forgiveness for a human soul is not the life of an animal. That's why animal sacrifices were no longer needed after Jesus' resurrection. No, the cost of forgiveness for one human soul is the most expensive life-blood on this planet, the life-blood of the God who created us. Jesus gave up His life on the hill that Abraham had named, Jehovah Jireh, "The LORD will provide." That's why Jesus is the Lamb of God; not just a title, but a reality. Finally...

III. What Then Does This Mean For Me?

Our Revelation passage takes us to the throne room of heaven, a real place in existence today. The apostle John sees the resurrected Christ. Listen to the titles he uses to describe Him:

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain ... And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne (God the Father). And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb ... and they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:6-12)

Do you see what this means? It means that our sin is very costly, but Jesus' life is worth far more. He came and spent His greatest value, Himself, so that you could be debt-free. There is nothing and no one else who could ever give you this freedom from guilt. Only Jesus, He alone, could pay your debt because He alone is the sinless Lamb of God. How will you respond?

Will you do what is being done in heaven right now? Will you worship Him with that which is of greatest value to you? Will you worship Him with your life? Let's pray...

¹ The Sun Newspaper, "*Blueprints of Spy HQ Vanished...*" Mike Sullivan, 26 Dec 2019

² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 29

³ www.gordonconwell.edu/blog/jesus-in-the-old-testament/aug.9,2011