



Tract Series: Insights that Inspire Hope

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Eid ul Adha:


The Christmas Connection

by

Roland Clarke



Insights that Inspire Hope



God's hand. Incidentally, this interpretation harmonizes with his confession to the sailors. He told them he had disobeyed God and the storm was his fault.

Another well known prophet who was saved by God from catastrophic judgement was Noah. As in the story of Jonah, so also with Noah – it was fitting for him to make a sacrifice in acknowledgement of God rescuing him and his family. The psalmist David similarly praised God, saying,


Praise the LORD; praise God our savior! For each day he carries us in his arms. Our God is a God who saves! The Sovereign LORD rescues us from death. (Psalm 68:19–20, NLT)

The epic story of the Exodus provides another awesome example of God's mighty power to save. According to the Bible and the Qur'an God "saved" the Israelites from Pharaoh's murderous tyranny. Surah 2:50 says, "*And remember, we divided the Sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh's people within your very sight.*"


The prophet Hosea reminded the Israelites of this foundational event in Jewish history, saying,

I am the Lord your God who brought you [out of Egypt]. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me. (Hosea 13:4)

How then did God save the Israelites? Was it purely a military feat? A careful look at the story shows there was more to this event than an outpouring of



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God's judgement against Pharaoh's armies at the Red Sea. Earlier God also broke Pharaoh's stubborn will through a series of disasters that climaxed with the death plague – the worst disaster in Egypt's history. As it is written, "*there has never been such wailing before, and there never will be again.*" (Exodus 11:6, NLT) This plague killed Pharaoh's firstborn son and also wiped out the firstborn sons of all Egyptians. (as well as the firstborn of their cattle)


Moses' father in law, Jethro, who was a priest of Midian heard this amazing rescue story and said,

Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians... Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods. (Exodus 18:10–11)

I trust you agree that the LORD is indeed the one and only God. Not only so, his power to save is his unique credential proving he is who he claims to be.

The Exodus story contains a clue that also helps us to answer the objection my penpal raised against sacrifice as a way of receiving forgiveness and salvation.

The tenth plague marked the turning point in Pharaoh's intensifying resistance against God and his messenger, Moses. God declared a death penalty against all firstborn sons in the entire land of Egypt – all people, regardless of race or ethnic background. The Israelites were also under this death threat. The only way their firstborn sons could be spared from execution by the



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They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd. (John 10:7-16, NLT)

This vision of a multicultural, unified community of God's people is wonderful. But the way to achieve it is not by focusing on superficial religious symbols like Christmas trees or a moon and star. Lets get to the heart of the matter as seen in the name, Jesus.

In conclusion let us take a look at the vision of a multicultural people of God as recorded by the apostle John in Revelation 7:9-17, (NLT):

I saw a vast crowd, too great to count from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a mighty shout, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb." ... They will never again be hungry or thirsty ... for the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Note: All biblical quotations (unless specified otherwise) are taken from the New International Version. All Qur'anic quotations are from Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'an.

If you have questions or you want to personally accept God's gift of salvation that comes through the Lamb please contact me at starsign77@hotmail.com

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angel of death was if they obeyed God's command to sacrifice a Passover lamb.

The fact that God put the Israelites under the same death threat as the Egyptians has important implications. It shows that in God's eyes the Israelites were also sinners. This is confirmed by the apostle Paul who asked rhetorically,

Well then, are we Jews better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. No one is good – not even one. (Romans 3:9-10, NLT)

It was only by God's mercy that the firstborn Israelites were saved. God's provision of a sacrificial lamb has unmistakable parallels to Abraham's sacrifice, in terms of slaughtering a sheep as a ransom, in place of the son. Another similarity between these two epic rescue stories focuses on the specific word "lamb."

Abraham foresaw the provision of a lamb. Moses instituted a yearly Passover celebration involving the slaughter of a lamb. This festival served to remind the Jews how indebted they were to God for redeeming them from slavery. Discerning readers will see how the annual Passover celebration reinforced Abraham's prophecy of a Lamb which God himself would one day provide.

After the Ten Commandments were revealed, God instructed Moses to establish ways and means of performing animal sacrifices centred around the Tabernacle. These sacrifices continued to play an

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As for Jonah, the Lord heard his prayer of repentance. Jonah realized the severity of God's wrath, saying,

I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O LORD my God, snatched me from the jaws of death! As my life was slipping away, I remembered the LORD. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple. Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies but I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the LORD alone. (Jonah 2:6-9, NLT)

The question arises, "Did Jonah invent the notion of God being Savior out of desperation or because he was despondent?" Certainly not! Jonah knew from reading the prophets that God was Savior. Jonah did not innovate or devise something new.

My penpal sees despondency as a problem among Christians as it causes them to call for a savior to "come on board". The cynical implication behind his statement is: Christians need a savior to 'bail them out.'

Let us consider this apparent problem of despondency from Jonah's perspective. If Jonah was truly despondent don't you think he would commit 'suicide' by jumping overboard? But the Bible does not say he did this (nor does the Qur'an). Instead of committing suicide, he instructed the sailors to throw him overboard. This showed he accepted this peril as punishment from

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obviously trying to undermine the biblical principle, mentioned in Hebrews 9:22, *“Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.”*

Before answering these two objections, there are some foundational issues we need to clarify. Consider, for example, the divine name Savior. If God is Savior – as Moses and the prophets repeatedly affirmed – how can we trust religious teachers who have consistently omitted this title?

Consider how often the ancient prophets honored and thanked God for saving people from death and destruction. Throughout the Old Testament the prophets highlighted this attribute as a crucial credential that proved he is the true God. Idols, on the other hand, cannot hear the prayers of their followers. They are unable to save them, thus proving they are powerless and worthless.

The story of the prophet Jonah demonstrates this. The sailors earnestly prayed to their gods to save them from the deadly storm but to no avail. They even threw their cargo overboard in a desperate bid to save themselves but the storm became even more tempestuous. Finally they did as Jonah asked them, and throw him overboard. He predicted that if they did this *“the sea will become calm again.”* The raging storm miraculously subsided and the sailors were saved.

Scripture tells us, *“The sailors were awestruck by the Lord’s great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.”* (Jonah 2:16, NLT)

important role in the worship of the Jews when the ark of the covenant was transferred to the Temple of Solomon. Bloodshed was not an incidental or peripheral aspect of these rituals. It was crucial. A proper appreciation of this can only be grasped by reading the prophets.

We see the importance of sacrificial blood in Leviticus 17 and Numbers 19. (It is interesting to see that the Qur'an alludes to these scriptures.) In Leviticus 17:10–11 the Lord says,

And if any native Israelite or foreigner living among you eats or drinks blood in any form, I will turn against that person and cut him off from the community of your people, for the life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the LORD. It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible. (NLT)

Numbers chapter 19 gives instruction regarding sacrificing a red heifer (Surah 2:67). This provided for cleansing from ritual defilement caused by having contact with a dead body or even from being in the home where a body is awaiting burial. Anyone doubting the importance of these rituals ought to ponder the following statement, *“This is a permanent law for the people of Israel and any foreigners who live among them.”* (Numbers 19:10)

From these examples, we see that shedding the blood of an animal pervaded all aspects of life. It affected not only their worship rituals in the Tabernacle, but

undermine this important truth. In fact Deedat’s last public speech before he was stricken was a bitter attack against Christ’s death and resurrection. The peculiar stroke which he suffered not long afterwards, abruptly ended his notorious debating career. This should give readers reason to ponder. You may want to check an article explaining his downfall:

www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Deedat/downfall.htm

Jesus Name: Key that unlocks the door of salvation

We began this article by noting how certain communities have shown respect for different cultures by publicly displaying the menorah and the Christmas tree as well as the crescent moon and star. This inclusive approach fits the multicultural mindset of our age but it overlooks the single most important symbol of Christmas, that is, the name that God/Allah gave to Mary’s virgin born son through the angel.

This name, meaning ‘God is salvation’, implies there is only one door of salvation. As it is written, *“There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12, NLT)

This is confirmed by Christ, when he said,

I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep... Those who come in through me will be saved. ... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep... I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold [Gentiles]. I must bring them also.

Eid ul Adha:

The Christmas Connection

The two largest religions have a happy celebration which involves sharing gifts. Muslims commemorate Abraham’s sacrifice during the festival of Eid ul Adha. Christians commemorate Jesus’ birth at Christmas. It so happens that in 2007, 2008, 2009 these events were celebrated in the same month. In an effort to encourage mutual respect between different faiths, certain communities publicly displayed the menorah, the Christmas tree and the crescent moon and star.

It is so easy to be distracted by shallow symbols, instead of focusing on the heart of each story, i.e. Abraham’s sacrifice and Messiah’s birth. As we seek to discern the heartbeat of the two festivals that honor these events we face two challenges. First of all, we need to go beyond superficial symbols that can distract us from seeing the underlying meaning. Secondly, as important as these two events are, nowhere does God give instructions in the Bible to commemorate either of them with a festive celebration.

Nevertheless, Christians and Muslims can show mutual respect by reflecting on each other’s views of these two events. In this way we hope that these two stories can serve as a bridge for encouraging better understanding between us.

also their dietary practices and funeral rites, i.e. obtaining cleansing from ritual defilement caused by death.

You will remember that Jonah disobeyed God and spent three days inside the giant fish. While pondering life and death issues, he came to the conclusion,

Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies. But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfil all my vows. (Jonah 2:8-9, NLT)

What sacrifices do you think Jonah offered? There can be no doubt that he offered an animal as a sin offering. Probably he also offered a votive offering, associated with making a vow to God.

Lets summarize what we've said so far. We have seen that God is Savior, especially in the sense of rescuing people from death. However, we have also noted another aspect of God's salvation – he forgives sinners. Sacrifice was a provision God made so that sinners could be forgiven and saved. (see also Leviticus chapters 4,5,16 and Isaiah 53, Psalms 51:19; 66:13-20)

We have refuted the objections of my penpal friend by quoting from the prophets Moses, Hosea, David and Jonah. In conclusion let me quote the words of Isaiah the prophet saying,

There was no other God – there never has been, and there never will be. I, yes I, am the LORD and there is no other Savior. First I predicted your

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago) (Luke 1:68-70)

In light of the foregoing statements linking Messiah with "redemption", it is interesting that Jesus said he "*did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45)

Peter, a disciple of Jesus, also emphasized that Jesus came to 'redeem' people. He wrote,

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 forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Does salvation have to be bloody?

Several Muslims have raised objections to Christian beliefs about salvation, especially in regard to atonement through the blood of sacrifices. One writer, for example, wrote in a letter to me, "Christians, after sinning, become despondent [lose hope] of the true mercy of God hence a savior comes on board". He also cited Surah 22:37 which reads, "*It is not their meat nor their blood, that reaches God: it is your piety that reaches him.*" On the surface, this statement seems to deny that the blood of sacrifices has any inherent value in God's eyes. By quoting this verse from the Qur'an, my penpal friend was

The Messiah's birth

The Bible and the Qur'an affirm that God gave Mary's baby a special name – Jesus Christ (Al Masihi Isa in Arabic). Two respected Muslim scholars acknowledge, explicitly or implicitly, that this name means "God is salvation" in keeping with Isaiah's prophecy. As it is written, God's servant the Messiah will "*bring my salvation to the ends of the earth*" (Isaiah 49:6).

Mufti Muhammad Imraan Ashraf Usmani acknowledged that 'Jesus' corresponds to the Hebrew, 'Yeshua' which means "God is salvation." (*Islamic Names*, revised and enlarged edition, page 77) Yusuf Ali, in his popular translation of the Qur'an seems to agree with Usmani as seen in his footnote to Surah 19:21, "The mission of Jesus is ... to turn an ungodly world back to God; and ... to bring solace and salvation to the repentant."

Isaiah's prophecy about Messiah bringing salvation is reaffirmed many years later when a godly old man, Simeon, took baby Jesus in his arms and prayed,

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people... (Luke 2:29-32)

It is one thing to see the way others defined Jesus' mission, but how did Jesus himself describe the main task which God sent him to accomplish? The Injil

salvation. You may want to read about it at: www.answering-islam.org/Gilchrist/jonah.html

Does the Qur'an emphatically deny ransom sacrifice?

At the beginning of this article we quoted Surah 22:37 but we did not try to explain it within the framework of the Qur'an. A careful analysis of this ransom theme is worth reading at www.answering-islam.org/Shamoun/ransom.htm It shows Surah 22:37 in a different light. Another helpful article focusing more on sacrificial sin offerings is available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/yjnbfpq>

Do Muslim scholars agree what Jesus' name means?

Earlier quotations from Yusuf Ali and Mufti Muhammad I. A. Usmani show how Muslim scholars have (unwittingly?) endorsed a crucial cornerstone of the Bible, i.e. the meaning of Jesus' name. However, Usmani's interpretation of Jesus' name is contradicted by Ahmed Deedat – a world renowned debater. Deedat claimed that the name Isa is basically the same as Esau. He did not try to explain how this view harmonizes with Messiah's mission of bringing salvation as foretold by the prophets. The fact is: the meaning of Esau's name has no connection to Messiah's mission. See www.injil.org/clarke/signposts.pdf

Mr. Deedat never grew tired of devising far fetched theories for undermining the Messiah's death as a sacrifice for sin. He went to extraordinary lengths to



however, clarifies that this ‘ram’ foreshadowed a ‘lamb’ which God himself would provide. I recommend you examine in more detail how Abraham’s prophecy was fulfilled at: www.injil.org/clarke/sacrifice.pdf

Connecting Eid and Christmas

We are now in a better position to consider the connection between Abraham’s sacrifice and the birth of Messiah. The sacrifice of Abraham describes how God provided a ransom, in anticipation of a lamb from God. The Bible repeatedly describes Messiah’s role in terms of ransom or redemption.

Earlier we read in Luke chapter two how Simeon recognized baby Jesus as the Messiah who was expected to bring God’s salvation. The next person who saw the baby was a prophetess named Anna. She was a widow for most of her life and she

never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:37–38)

It is not coincidental that Simeon and Anna spoke of the Messiah as one who would bring ‘salvation’ and ‘redemption’. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, also spoke of ‘salvation’ and ‘redemption’ when he prophesied and praised God for sending the Messiah. He said,



rescue then I saved you and proclaimed it to the world. No foreign God has ever done this ... What fools they are who carry around their wooden idols and pray to gods that cannot save! Consult together, argue your case. Get together and decide what to say. Who made these things known so long ago? What idol ever told you they would happen? Was it not I the LORD? For there is no other God but me - a righteous God and Savior. There is none but me. Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God; there is no other. (Isaiah 43:10–12; 45:20–22, NLT)

Conclusion

Since God is One, we expect his revelation to be unified. The messages as revealed through different prophets must show consistency and harmony. We have seen remarkable harmony between the Old and New Testament teaching about God as Savior. There is no doubt in the minds of Jews and Christians that God Almighty is Savior. Muslims, however, are not comfortable with this title. Their scholars have omitted the name Savior from the 99 beautiful names of Allah, thus showing they don’t really confirm the prophets.

This Old Testament theme of God as Savior reveals an underlying fault line between Islam and Christianity which later becomes a more obvious rift as seen in the New Testament.

We have noted how Savior and Redeemer have complementary meanings. This further confirms the



Why does the Qur’an not mention the lamb?

One does not need to be a rocket scientist to discern that Abraham’s prophecy of a lamb is an important piece of the puzzle in terms of understanding God’s plan of salvation.

If one examines the Qur’an in the hope of shedding some light on this intriguing prophecy of a lamb, one will be disappointed. The qur’anic account of Abraham’s story does not specifically mention the lamb, much less does it acknowledge any future expectation of a lamb. The Bible, on the other hand, specifies that Abraham sacrificed a ram. Not only so, the Bible underscores Abraham’s prophecy that God would provide a lamb. For a more detailed study read this article www.injil.org/clarke/sacrifice.pdf

Moreover, Moses instituted an annual sacrificial ceremony that commemorates God’s provision of the Passover Lamb. Once again, the qur’anic account of this story makes no mention of a lamb. Thoughtful readers may want to read this relevant article: www.injil.org/clarke/cornerstone.pdf

Was Jonah’s ordeal three days?

Jesus Christ compared his 3 days in the grave with Jonah’s ‘three days and three nights’ in the belly of the giant fish.

This unique sign to the Jewish nation provides another clue to understanding how Christ brought God’s



(Gospel) records two dramatic encounters between Jesus Christ and two different sinners. Both of them repented and in each case Jesus made a remark that rang true to his name.

After Zacchaeus repented, Jesus said, “*I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those ... who are lost*”. (Luke 19:10, NLT) He spoke similar words to a woman of ill repute, after forgiving her sins, “*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*” (Luke 7:50) In both situations Jesus used the word “save” which corresponds with his name. The word “save” is simply a different form of the term “salvation.” Bear in mind, Yusuf Ali’s statement about Jesus bringing “salvation to the repentant.”

We gain another glimpse of the meaning of Jesus name in an encounter with a woman at the well of Sychar. A Samaritan woman was touched by the neighborly kindness Jesus showed towards her and she was impressed by his powers of discernment. She enthusiastically went to her village and told them about him. They in turn asked Jesus to stay for two days. At the end of his visit they concluded, “*Now we believe because we have heard him ourselves ... He is indeed the Savior of the world*” (John 4:42).

These encounters show that the name God chose for the son of Mary was indeed meaningful. And this is exactly what we would expect – Jesus’ name would be reflected in his character and accomplishments. As M.A. Siddiqui observed in his book *Names for Muslim*





thematic unity of the Bible. As God’s purposes unfold in the New Testament we see these twin titles converging on one person – the Messiah – through whom God planned to bring his salvation to the world. As it is written, in Colossians 1:14 and 1 Timothy 2:5–6,

For God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ... For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time.

Do you believe the Lord Jesus died on the cross in fulfilment of what the prophets foretold? Do you believe that the Messiah, God’s Lamb, is the culmination of sin offerings as required under the Law of Moses? The choice is yours: you may reject the Bible which portrays the cross as the pivotal event by which God reconciled a lost world. On the other hand, you may choose to believe Muslim tradition, which emphatically states Jesus will break the cross when he returns in the last days. These are the stark alternatives.

I appeal to you, therefore, in the words of scripture, ...we beg you not to accept this marvellous gift of God’s kindness and then ignore it. For God says, ‘At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you.’ Indeed, the “right time” is now. Today is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:1–2; NLT)



The Bible mentions two other details which shed light on the ransom that God provided. It is interesting to see what Abraham named the place where this momentous experience happened. The name may seem long but it was chosen deliberately, “*The LORD Will Provide.*” However, Abraham did not focus attention on the ram. He didn’t say, “*The LORD Has Provided*” but rather, “*The LORD Will Provide.*”

This expectation of a future provision is confirmed when we look carefully at the conversation Abraham had with his son earlier in the story. The Bible tells us that as Abraham and his son were approaching the place of sacrifice Isaac asked his father,

“The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” (Genesis 22:7–8)

The end of the story further clarifies the meaning of Abraham’s sacrifice. We read in Genesis 22:14 that Abraham named the place, “*The LORD Will Provide.*” And the verse continues, “*and to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.’*” The place where this future provision would happen is precisely at this place – Mount Moriah. Later prophets tell us this is the very place where Solomon built the Temple (compare Genesis 22:2 with 2 Chronicles 3:1).

Muslims believe that the “momentous ransom” God provided for Abraham was a sheep. The Bible,



Children, “The name is the real introduction of a man’s personality and the real representation of a man’s activities.”

We’ve seen that Christians joyously celebrate the birth of the servant of the Lord who brought God’s salvation into the world. Now we will look at the Muslim celebration of Abraham’s sacrifice to see if there is a connection between Abraham’s sacrifice and the birth of Messiah.

Abraham’s sacrifice

According to the Qur’an, God provided a momentous ransom at the critical moment when Abraham was about to slay his son. (Surah 37:107, Genesis 22:13) Each new generation of Muslims re-enacts their appreciation of God for his provision. One way they do this is to imagine what it would be like if they had to sacrifice their own firstborn son. Like Abraham, Muslims submit themselves in apparent devotion to God. They try to experience essentially what Abraham felt, loving God more than any earthly thing which they might be tempted to cherish.

Muslims not only try to emulate Abraham’s submissive obedience to God; they also seek to show gratitude for the provision God made, i.e. the ransom. Christians also encourage showing gratitude for the provision of a ransom. So let us take a closer look at this provision. The Qur’an does not mention what kind of animal Abraham slaughtered but the Bible says it was a ram.



Points to Ponder

Criteria for choosing the most beautiful names of Allah

Muslim scholars tell us that any divine trait that is mentioned in the Qur’an can qualify as a valid name of Allah. However, there are some names – not explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an – which were included in the 99 names of God. One wonders, “Was it really necessary to draw on these ‘extra’ names when there were valid traits mentioned in the Qur’an?” (e.g. the power to save lives.)

Furthermore, the prophets placed great importance on God’s saving power. It was in effect a signature attribute. Again and again we see how instrumental it was in proving the LORD’s surpassing greatness above all other gods. The fact that God can save (but idols can’t) distinguishes the true God from useless and false idols. This self evident truth begs the question, “Why have Muslim scholars omitted the name Savior from the list of God’s 99 beautiful names?” You can read more at www.injil.org/clarke/savior.pdf

The same question is asked with regard to the title ‘Redeemer’, “Why is the divine name (*Al Faadi*), which was frequently acknowledged by the prophets, not mentioned among the 99 beautiful names of Allah?” You can read more about this at <http://tinyurl.com/yg26tgz>

