

Tract Series: Insights that Inspire Hope

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The Mystery of Abraham's Sacrifice

by

Roland Clarke

Insights that Inspire Hope

Asaph explains his intention to teach by means of a 'parable', implying there is a hidden moral or lesson in this story. "So what is the kernel of truth 'hidden' in this parable?" I suggest you read the entire Psalm and look at the turning point – the moment when God intervenes and redeems the Israelites (v. 35-51). Notice also, how the psalm ends by mentioning a special mountain where God's sanctuary is located. This mountain introduces another vital theme which is repeatedly mentioned in the writings of the prophets.

Do you recall how Abraham's story ends? "*And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'*" (Genesis 22:14) This scripture specifies where the provision of a lamb will take place – on the mountain of the LORD. Earlier God instructed Abraham where he must go to sacrifice his son – Mount Moriah (verse 2). It is interesting to see how this mountain is mentioned again over a thousand years later in reference to Solomon's temple. But first, let us see what Moses (and the Psalmist) said about this mountain.

Moses predicted that God will "*plant them (Israel) on the mountain of your inheritance – the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O LORD, your hands established.*" (Exodus 15:17) Similarly, Asaph speaks of Mount Zion as a special place on which the Lord "*built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever.*" (Psalm 78:68,69)

Naturally we are curious to know more about this special mountain of the LORD that Abraham,

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Moses and the Psalmist esteemed so highly. Second Chronicles 3:1 says, "*Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where the Lord had appeared to his father David.*" It is remarkable to see how these prophets, who spanned more than a millennium, provided clues that connect like pieces of a puzzle.

Not only so, this worship centre in Jerusalem was the very place where Israelites brought their sacrifice of a Passover Lamb each year. Is it coincidental that these lambs were sacrificed at the very place where Abraham promised God would provide a lamb? Obviously God knows the future and makes things work out according to his purpose so we should not be surprised to see these details fitting together.

Let us review what we've learned so far: The prophets consistently teach the principle of ransom, the sacrifice of a lamb and they point to a particular place where God will provide the promised lamb. There is, however, something that is still unclear. At Solomon's temple, many thousands of lambs were sacrificed but Abraham's prophecy implies he was expecting one particular lamb (not many). Perhaps other prophets will clarify this point.

The Prophet Isaiah Glimpsed the Lamb

The prophet Isaiah sheds light on this by focusing people's hope on the coming of God's Messiah. Notice how he describes the Messiah.

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prophets. Now we see it reaching a fitting climax in John's vision of the end of time. Indeed, it is significant that Revelation mentions the Lamb 19 times!

If you want to learn more about salvation perhaps the simplest place to begin is by reading, *A Dialog about the One True God*.⁴ This article highlights mighty acts of rescue whereby the Almighty showed himself to be greater than idols who were powerless and unable to save. You might also like to read *Eid ul Adha: The Christmas Connection*.⁵

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

¹ Concerns have been raised as to why the Divine name *Al Faadi* was not included in the 99 beautiful names of Allah. You can read more about this at <http://tinyurl.com/yg26tgz>

² A fuller discussion of what the scriptures say about sacrificial sin offerings is available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/yjnbfpq>

³ This chapter from John Gilchrist's book, *Sharing the Gospel with Muslims*, where this quote is found can be seen online at: <http://tinyurl.com/yf7ktmq>

⁴ This article is available at: www.injil.org/clarke/savior.pdf

⁵ Article is available at www.injil.org/clarke/eid_christmas.pdf

He was pierced for our transgressions ... crushed for our iniquities ... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter ... the Lord makes his life a guilt offering. (Isaiah 53, emphasis added)

No doubt you noticed that Messiah is likened to 'a lamb.' Also, he is described in terms of a 'guilt offering' whose life is given as a sacrifice.² Furthermore, Isaiah describes the Messiah's punishment and death in terms of a ransom – i.e. he will die in the place of others. Isaiah's prophecy harmonizes with the key themes that we have been explaining, beginning with Abraham. Notice also that Isaiah focuses on a single person. This gives us a clearer picture of what Abraham meant when he promised God would one day provide 'a lamb.'

The Prophet John Glimpsed the Lamb

Hundreds of years after Isaiah, another prophet also spoke about the **Messiah as a Lamb**. His name was John (Yahya in the Qur'an). The Injil records that John the Baptist said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) If we look carefully at Christ's life we see that he fulfilled Abraham's prophecy in three ways.

- 1) Jesus predicted he would die as a ransom, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) These words are consistent with the ransom principle which we've seen throughout the writings of the prophets.

Muslim scholars have not included the name *Al Faadi* among the 99 beautiful names of Allah.¹

This clue from the life of Moses throws light on a question that has been in the back of our minds, "What is the lamb that Abraham foretold would be provided by God?" However, this clue does not fulfil all aspects of Abraham's prophecy. For example, although the Passover Lamb was provided by God, it did not take place on Mount Moriah, the special place where God had directed Abraham to sacrifice. Let us consider another clue from one of the other prophets.

The Prophet Asaph Glimpsed the Lamb

Abraham's prophecy comes into clearer focus in the writing of Asaph (Psalm 78). Writing hundreds of years after Moses, Asaph reminded his generation about Israel's rescue from Egypt. This story should have been ingrained in the minds of each new generation by celebrating the yearly Passover festival. But sadly they had not observed this festival faithfully. In fact, they had neglected it so much that the memory of this story had faded. The lessons their forefathers had learned during the Exodus had been forgotten or 'hidden'.

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old – what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders he has done. (Psalm 78:1-4)



During Eid-ul-Adha Muslims thank Allah that Abraham didn't have to slaughter his son. Some Muslims are also thankful that they don't have to sacrifice their first born sons. No doubt they are also thankful for sacrificial meat as a provision from God. But surely there is more to be thankful for, is there not?

If one wants to be a true son or daughter of Abraham we ought to appreciate the Lamb as promised by God himself. The last book of the Bible records a heavenly vision in which throngs of people express their gratitude to God. Notice how John the apostle saw,

a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)

In addition to this multitude of people, John also saw countless angels worshipping God. They said, *"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor ... be to our God for ever and ever Amen!"* (Revelation 7:12)

What are these people thankful for? Salvation! To whom do they give *"thanks and honor"*? The answer is clear; *"To God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."*

If thankfulness is a unifying theme of scripture so also is the Lamb. We have traced the story of the lamb from the first book to the last book of the Bible. We have unwrapped this story one step at a time through the



The Mystery of Abraham's Sacrifice

During Eid ul-Adha, an imam instructed Muslims to sacrifice with the right intention. He emphasized heart issues, rather than focusing merely on external things such as blood and meat. I listened with interest to the Muslim preacher as he urged his audience to perform their Qurban sacrifice with sincere god-consciousness (taqwa).

The verse from the Qur'an on which the sermon was based, says that Allah has made sacrificial animals *"subject to you, that ye may be grateful... that ye glorify God."* (Surah 22:36,37) His words reminded me of two quotations from the Bible,

I don't need the bulls you sacrifice; I don't need the blood of goats. What I want instead is your true thanks to God; I want you to fulfil your vows to the Most High. ... I will praise God's name with singing, and I will honor him with thanksgiving. For this will please the Lord more than sacrificing an ox ... (Psalm 50:13,14; 69:30,31)

God-fearing people should ask themselves, "How do sacrifices in the Bible and the Qur'an enable us to glorify God and express gratitude?" I have thought much about this and trust you enjoy reading some of the insights I've discovered.

All of us who believe in the God of Abraham agree that sacrifices ought to express our gratitude and should inspire us to glorify God. So we will look at



plague that broke Pharaoh's resistance and forced him to let the Israelites go free.

Notice, however, that the angel of death which God sent posed a threat to every family in the land of Egypt – not only Egyptians but also the Israelites! God commanded the angel of death to kill every first born son, including Pharaoh's son (and Moses' son Gershom). Mercifully, however, God provided a way of ransom. He commanded each family to slaughter a Passover Lamb so that their first-born sons would be spared. The way to prevent the death angel from entering was to put markings from the blood of the lamb on the door-posts of each home.

Thoughtful readers will recognize that the ransom of Moses' son by sacrificing a lamb is similar to Abraham's experience. In fact, it is remarkable that the particular animal Moses was instructed to sacrifice seems to fulfil what Abraham prophesied!

From that time on, Israelites were commanded to remember this event by celebrating the Passover festival. Like Eid, which commemorates the ransom of a son by slaughtering a sheep, Passover was celebrated by slaughtering a lamb in place of a son. It is true that Eid ul-Adha does not strictly require Muslims to sacrifice a lamb, however, the ransom principle is clearly in view. Theoretically speaking, a Muslim could understand Allah as the great Provider and Redeemer (*Al-Faadi* – the One who ransoms, compare Surah 37:107). No God-fearing person would want to deny this attribute and rob God of the glory he deserves. Unfortunately, however,



- 2) Jesus predicted that he would be put to death in Jerusalem, i.e. Mount Moriah (see 2 Chronicles 3:2). *"Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.' The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them and they did not know what he was talking about."* (Luke 18:31-34 Notice the word 'hidden')
- 3) We find further confirmation that Jesus is God's Lamb in Luke 22. This scripture says he was put to death at the same time when Israelites were sacrificing Passover Lambs (compare 1 Corinthians 5:7)

If we look carefully at these above three points we will see that they form a series of interlocking puzzle pieces which confirm that the Messiah died to take away the sins of the world. I realize that some readers may disagree, indeed, some may resist this conclusion so strongly that they may suspect Abraham's prophesy of the lamb is merely a fabrication.

Zealous Muslims have sometimes argued that the Bible is riddled with corruptions. They have devised a method of explaining away the amazing unity of the Bible, as seen in the way prophecies are fulfilled. They allege that this appearance of thematic unity merely confirms how cunningly Satan has deceived and misled the people of the book.



Abraham's sacrificial test through the lense of these twin themes (so to speak).

Jewish people, Muslims and Christians agree that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son showed he was whole-heartedly devoted and submissive to God. The ordeal climaxed with God rescuing his son at the last moment. Abraham glorified God for this awesome deliverance by naming the place, "*The Lord will provide.*" This name focuses our attention on God as the one who deserves credit for intervening at the critical moment and providing a ransom. Not only so, by choosing this name, Abraham intended that future generations would not forget this momentous event.

A Lasting Memorial

The Scripture says Abraham called the place, "*The Lord Will Provide*", but then it continues, "*And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'*" (Genesis 22:14) The chosen name focuses on the Lord, showing that Abraham was deeply God-conscious. Not only so, he was confident God would provide in the future. Notice he did not call the place, "*The Lord **Has** Provided*" as though the ram was in focus. Rather he said, "*The Lord **Will** Provide*". Let us also remember that Abraham had earlier said to his son, "*God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.*" (Genesis 22:8)

This suggests that the name points to something else besides the ram, which Abraham anticipated would be provided. Coming to the end of the story one notices

But for us every day of the year we commemorate God's love for us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins so that we may be totally forgiven.³

Christians recognize the cross for what it really is – the ultimate expression of God's love, where he gave his only Son as a sacrifice for us. The cross shows what a 'momentous ransom' the lamb was – a sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. The provision of a ram in Abraham's experience was significant but it was not the 'momentous ransom' as the Qur'an says. It is clear, therefore, that Eid ul Adha puts the emphasis in the wrong place. The ram was not significant in and of itself. It merely foreshadowed a greater ransom – a lamb from God himself.

It is good to admire Abraham since he **did** pass an extremely difficult test but this should not diminish our appreciation of the love God showed towards mankind. When we magnify God's role we glorify and give him thanks as he deserves. The Bible (properly understood) acknowledges the incomparably great love that God showed toward mankind. It glorifies God and his Messiah, saying, "*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:13) The cross, on which the Lamb of God died, is a fitting demonstration of God's love.

In Conclusion, Let Us Give Thanks To God

You recall that at the beginning we saw how the Qur'an and the Bible link thankfulness and sacrifice. Now as we conclude, it is fitting that we should ask, "What am I grateful to God for?"

One wonders, "How can Muslims devise such farfetched accusations?" They find support for these accusations in their scripture which denies Christ died on the cross. Also they cite the ahadith which teaches that in the last days Isa (Jesus) will destroy the satanically empowered antichrist and **break the cross**.

Bearing this in mind, let us imagine, for the sake of discussion, that we could remove the alleged 'fabrication' pertaining to Abraham predicting God would provide a lamb. Let's suppose we 'revise' the story so that Abraham did not name the place of sacrifice, "*The Lord **Will** Provide.*" Instead he named it, "*The Lord **Has** Provided.*" Making this revision would certainly make the biblical account appear to be more in tune with the qur'anic story.

However, by interpreting the story through qur'anic glasses our attention shifts from God to Abraham. God's role is diminished and our attention focuses on Abraham. Muslims end up admiring Abraham for the exceptional love and obedience he showed to God.

On the other hand, if we allow the Bible story to stand as it is, we see that Abraham points to (or prefigures) an outpouring of Divine love that surpasses Abraham's noble example, "*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 3:16) God showed how much he loved us by giving his '*one and only Son.*' John Gilchrist observed that:

Muslims once a year remember a man's love for God by being willing to sacrifice his son for him.

a peculiar turn of events – Abraham sees an animal caught by its horns in the thicket and sacrifices it instead of his son. But what animal was it? A ram or a lamb? Scripture states it was a ram. This makes sense because a lamb doesn't have horns, and therefore, can't be "*caught in a thicket*" (like a ram can).

This distinction between lamb and ram confirms our understanding that Abraham expected a future provision. There is no doubt, of course, that God provided the ram and Abraham was thankful for it. But it is also clear that Abraham believed God was going to provide a lamb. Therefore Abraham chose a name that would inspire future generations to anticipate this provision.

Not only so, when God's promise is eventually fulfilled, we can expect much thanksgiving and praise will be given to God. Let us keep this in the back of our minds as we trace the theme of a sacrificial lamb through the writings of the prophets. We will see how God kept alive his promise to provide a lamb. We will see this promise gradually unfolding in a series of glimpses.

The Prophet Moses Glimpsed the Lamb

Abraham sacrificed a sheep in place of his son, so also did Moses. I am referring, of course, to the titanic conflict between Moses and Pharaoh – a story which is familiar to readers of the Bible and the Qur'an. A series of confrontations happened in which Pharaoh hardened his heart more and more. The mounting tension reached a climax. The LORD unleashed a punishing killer