

The Slain Lamb in Three Religions **Abraham's Sacrifice Fulfilled**

Every year there are two prominent feasts or holidays in two of the major religions that feature a lamb sacrifice. The first one is the Passover in Judaism which commemorates the night of the death angel's visit in Egypt to slay the first born of man and beast. However, the Hebrew people were instructed to take **a lamb** and **sacrifice it**; then smear **the blood** on the door posts of their homes. Inside their homes they ate the lamb, safe from the death angel as he went through the land. Exodus 12 relates the story and establishes a yearly commemorative celebration. Since the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 AD the slaying of the lamb ceased, although the feast day continues.

A second religious ceremony involving the killing and eating of a lamb or other substitute animal is the Sacrifice of the Feast (the Greater Eid) each year by Muslims. It is to commemorate Abraham's **killing of a lamb** in place of his son on the mountain. According to the Quran Surah 37: 100 My Lord! Bless me with righteous offspring."

101 So We gave him good news of a forbearing son.

102 Then when the boy reached the age to work with him, Abraham said, "O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I 'must' sacrifice you. So tell me what you think." He replied, "O my dear father! Do as you are commanded. Allah willing, you will find me steadfast."

103 Then when they submitted 'to Allah's Will', and Abraham laid him on the side of his forehead 'for sacrifice',

104 We called out to him, "O Abraham!

105 You have already fulfilled the vision." Indeed, this is how We reward the good-doers.

106 That was truly a revealing test.

107 And **We ransomed his son with a great sacrifice,**

108 and blessed Abraham 'with honorable mention' among later generations:

109 "Peace be upon Abraham."

110 This is how We reward the good-doers.

111 He was truly one of Our faithful servants.

112 We 'later' gave him good news of Isaac—a prophet, and one of the righteous.

The Hebrew Scriptures known as the Torah relates the story as narrated by Moses in Genesis 22. The Torah was written around 1445 BC and the Quran began to be compiled in 609 AD. So the Genesis story is 2054 years older than the Quran.

Listen to the full story of Abraham and the command to offer the Promised Son as is related in Genesis 22.

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." ⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. ⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² 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." ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the LORD will provide"). And to this day it is said, "on the mountain of Yahweh *it shall be provided.*" ¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called to

Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Each of these three stories feature a lamb substitute as directed and provided by God in place of a son. At Passover the sacrificial lamb substituted for the death of the first born of all Israelites both man and animal. Why the death penalty by God? It is because of sin. The Law states *the soul that sins shall die* (Ezekiel 18:4). Furthermore, *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*.

For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life.

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.

Leviticus 17:14, 11

Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Hebrews 9:22

In Islam the whole holiday, the Feast of the Sacrifice, is a re-enactment of Ibrahim's sacrifice of the lamb instead of his son. Muslims commemorate the obedience of Abraham by killing an unblemished animal, typically a goat, lamb, or cow. The meat from the animal is then divided into three parts and given to family, friends, and the poor, respectively.

Although Muslims do not believe God requires a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin, consider the offering the Lord commanded Abraham to make. The Quran does not state the reason God gave the command to Ibrahim to sacrifice his son; it concludes with some very revealing words that should produce a serious question in the mind. The words are, **We ransomed his son with a great sacrifice**. What is the meaning of ransom and what is the great sacrifice? Surely it is not a mere animal which is an ordinary offering. It is pointing to something beyond.

Consider the story in **Genesis**. God commanded Abraham to take his son, Isaac to the mountain where he would show him and there also be a burnt offering. In fact, the

burnt offering is referenced five times in this brief passage. (Genesis 22:3,6,7,8,13) Leviticus 1v 4, "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and his shall be forgiven (Lev. 4:26b). In a burnt offering all the animal was consumed by fire while other offerings such as sin or peace offering involved sharing of food. The ceremonies involved the laying on of hands to transfer sin to the animal whose blood is then shed in its slaughter.

In the story of Abraham as well as the story of the Passover we come to understand that not only does God require a blood sacrifice for the atonement of sin, but he also provides the required sacrifice himself. Abraham's story reflects this. As he lifted up the knife to slay Isaac the Angel of the Lord stopped him. *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.* Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the LORD will provide")

This account of God's provision of a lamb to substitute for the required death of transgressors points back to Eden. After Adam and Eve had disobeyed Yahweh, they were judged and the penalty of death passed upon them. Although they spiritually died, God delayed their physical death and clothed them with the garments of skin. *Yahweh God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and he clothed them.*

This required the shedding of the blood of a killed animal. The fact that God undertook this provision after he had cursed the serpent in their presence helped them see how the promise of redemption by the Seed of the woman would be completed. *I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.* Genesis 3:15

To what and to whom does the sacrificed Lamb point in all these narratives? Who is the Seed of the Woman who would come and crush the serpents head? Who is the Lamb of God's provision that saves his people? The New Testament and Christian gospel proclaim in the words of John the Baptist as he pointed to Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and unique Son of God- "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* John 1:29,36.

The story of Abraham and Isaac and the story of the Passover foreshadows the person and work of Christ. Just as the Lord required a blood sacrifice in place of Abraham's son so he requires and provides the blood sacrifice of the appointed Mediator, Messiah Jesus, and his resurrection from the dead. Jesus is the greater Isaac; he is the fulfillment of all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. What did his shedding of blood in his death on the cross mean and what did it accomplish for who trust in him?

Here the Word of God- We plead with you on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." ²¹ He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

Romans 5:8-9

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Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—Galatians 3:13

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed 1 Peter 2:24. Jesus himself said, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18a). Jesus is the great and better sacrifice who willingly offers himself as the propitiatory sacrifice in the place of his people. As Jesus passed the cup at the institution of New Covenant meal just before he went forth to die for us he said: *this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* Matthew 26:28

Jesus is the promised and provided Lamb of sacrifice. All who put their faith in him as risen Lord and God will be rescued from eternal death and given new life in him.

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