

Why He is Called The Lamb of God



The Story Behind the Story of Easter

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The blood [of the lamb] will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

EXODUS 12:13

The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

JOHN 1:29

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

The Most Important Event in History

Deeper into the Meaning of Easter

This is a booklet about the meaning of Easter. Pretty simple, right? As every good Sunday School student knows, Easter is about Jesus dying on the cross and rising again. And why did he die? For our sins, of course.

But what does that mean, *really*?

I started seriously asking myself that question a few years ago. I was one of those Sunday School kids who could recite the basic meaning of Easter from a very young age. However it was not until much later in life that I really began to ponder its significance more deeply. I realized that, according to the Bible, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the most important event in the history of the world, but I didn't really know why. I started asking questions like: "What was it about Jesus' death and resurrection that affected the universe and dealt with my sin?" "What happened on a cosmic level that was so important?" "How did the world change during those 3 days in Jerusalem 2000 years ago?"

I didn't (and haven't) found complete answers to these questions, nor do I expect to in this lifetime. However, my search did bear some fruit, and I would like to share some of the answers I found with you briefly here. I pray that you will find them as helpful as I have in understanding God and the world more clearly and in appreciating more fully all that he has done for you.

The Jewish Background

We will try to gain that understanding and appreciation primarily by discussing the context in which the first Easter occurred. Jesus was a Jew, and claimed to be the Jewish Messiah, or Savior. All of the New Testament writers were Jewish. In order to understand Jesus and the New Testament, then, we should have some understanding of the Jewish Scriptures (what Christians now call the Old Testament) and the Jewish culture in which Jesus and his followers lived. This is especially helpful when it comes to understanding events like Jesus' birth, death and resurrection,

which were direct fulfillments of events in the Old Testament. When we view the Easter story in light of its Jewish background, a whole new dimension of meaning is illuminated.

Along the way, I will point out the places where we fit into the story. The Old Testament is very symbolic, and is meant to teach us not just about ancient Jews, but also ourselves.

Let's start, then, at the very beginning, and find out what the Old Testament teaches about life's most basic questions: why are we here and what is wrong with this place?

Our Purpose and our Problems

God's Plan

Why are we here? The Bible tells us that we were created for relationship and meaningful work. Put another way, we were created for love. Love is what life is all about. We were made to love God, love each other and love the rest of creation by working for the good of them all. God created us to walk in close living relationship with him and everything else and live perfectly happy and fulfilling lives.

God explained to the first people how they were to do that and warned them not to try to deviate from his plan. He placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden and lived there with them.

For awhile our ancestors did just fine. They lived in peace and contentment, fulfilling their purpose by loving God, loving each other, and loving the home he had created for them. It was a beautiful, pain-free existence.

Unfortunately, they gave that up. They decided that, rather than obey God and live in submission to the nature of reality (live out the purpose for which God had created them), they would take charge of their own lives. They disobeyed God and veered from the grand design. Rather than love God, others and the creation, they chose to love only themselves. In doing so, they attempted to live contrary to the nature of reality by ascribing ultimate value to God's greatest creation (themselves) rather than the creator. They put themselves in the place of God.

This, of course, brought consequences. Trying to operate contrary to purpose and design always causes problems. Try driving your car with water in the fuel tank. It doesn't work very well. That is because motor vehicles are designed to operate a certain way and attempts to operate them contrary to their design are doomed to fail. This is what happened to humanity. They tried to live contrary to their maker's plan and brought disaster upon themselves.

Now, people are not machines, so the car analogy isn't perfect. Perhaps a better illustration of failing to operate according to humanity's intended design would be a man who values alcohol more than his wife and kids. Alcohol is not objectively more valuable than family, and any attempt to live as if it is will simply not work well. In fact, the natural consequences of this life will be pain and suffering.

Because the nature of reality is such that husbands are intended to love their wife and kids more than alcohol (owing to the fact that spouses and children are much more objectively valuable than alcohol), living as if alcohol is more valuable than family is a recipe for pain and torment. You might say the wages of ascribing too much worth to (worshiping) alcohol is suffering.

Humans decided to live as if they were more important than God and others and their efforts saw the same fate.

Humanity's refusal to be faithful to God caused a break in our relationship with him. The result of this separation was, of course, pain and suffering. Broken relationships hurt. They hurt even more when the person we have broken faith with is the creator and sustainer of the universe. God is the source of life and all that is good. When God is taken away, what remains is death and evil. By separating themselves from God, mankind brought into the world all that is wrong with it. The Bible calls humanity's rebellion sin, and says that the wages of sin is death. Of course it is. If sin separates us from the source of life, it can do nothing else but result in death. The two necessarily go together. We brought suffering and death upon ourselves and corrupted the whole planet with our selfishness.

The Bible tells us that in the beginning Adam and Eve walked side by side with God in the garden. Then they rebelled, and such

intimacy was no longer possible. Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden. They had gone their own way and now had to live with the consequences of their actions.

Adam and Eve ended up with three problems:

1. They were expelled from the presence of God in the garden. They became separated from their true home and their ultimate purpose (living in intimate relationship with God).
2. They were under penalty of death. Before the fall Adam and Eve would have enjoyed eternal life. This was what they were created for. Their disobedience brought death into the world.
3. They were unable to fix the first two problems. The Bible explains that sin had the effect of making humans slaves, both to sin itself and to an evil being called Satan. Satan tempted the humans to sin and when they succumbed to him it gave him power over them. They followed his direction rather than God's. Satan is called the ruler of this now-dark world because of the power that humans gave him. Adam and Eve could no longer live the perfect life they were meant to, even if they had wanted to, because they were slaves to sin and Satan.

All in the Same Boat

As descendants of Adam and Eve we all live in the same messed up world, and have the same three problems that they did.

1. We are separated from our true purpose and our true home. We were meant to live with God, in intimate relationship with him but are separated from him.
2. We are under penalty of death. We all sin in the same way Adam and Eve did by valuing the creation over the creator and we all find ourselves facing the same consequence. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death – it is an unalterable rule of the universe. As sinners, we all live under that curse.

3. We cannot fix our first two problems. We are slaves to sin and to Satan.

Knowing our Problems Makes Sense of Certain Aspects of Our Existence

I think you will find that the three problems we face help to explain three aspects of our lives that sometimes are difficult to understand: longing, guilt and powerlessness.

Have you noticed that even when things are going well that you aren't satisfied? The fact is that nothing on earth completely satisfies us – not money, not relationships, not power, not anything. That is because we were not made for anything on earth. We were made to be with God and we will never be satisfied apart from Him. Until we are living the life we are designed to live, we will not be fully content, and that will not happen until we are back with God. The earth in its current state has nothing we ultimately desire, so nothing on earth will truly and deeply satisfy. We are never content because of our first problem.

Also, have you noticed that you always carry around a certain amount of guilt (at least if you are self-aware enough to realize it and honest enough to admit it)? We all believe that we have done some things that were morally wrong in our lives, and we all feel at least a bit guilty about it. That is because we are guilty. We have rebelled against God and are justly under his condemnation for it. We feel guilty because of our second problem.

Finally, have you noticed that you can't fix those things? No matter what we try, contentment never comes. No matter what technique we attempt, the guilt never completely vanishes and we never live the morally perfect lives we know we should. That is because we are slaves to sin and Satan. It is impossible for us to fix our first two problems because we don't have the power to do so. That is our third problem.

Needed: Freedom, Forgiveness, Guidance

We have three problems, so we need a three-fold solution. Here is what must happen to fix our dilemma:

1. We need to be set free from the powers that enslave us. Sin and Satan must be defeated; they must be made powerless over us.
2. Our sin must be paid for. As we have already talked about, the consequence of sin is pain, suffering and death. This is the nature of reality; it is unalterable. Therefore, any solution to our problem must deal with the consequences of sin.
3. We need to return to the place we were created to live in. We need to get back to living with God, in intimate relationship with him.

Put another way, we need freedom, forgiveness, and guidance. Thankfully, that is just what God offers us.

The Israelites and Us

To begin the explanation of how God does that, I am going to return to the Old Testament. The Bible gives us a great illustration of our situation in the story of the ancient Israelites.

The account of the Israelites starts with God calling a man named Abraham into a very special relationship. God tells Abraham that he wants to make him into a great family and give him a beautiful land to live in. There Abraham's descendents will be able to enjoy fulfilling work and walk closely with God. Life will be good.

In that sense, the children of Abraham (later known as the Israelites) had the same purpose in life as we do. They were called to live in relationship with God, doing meaningful work in a beautiful place as they loved God and each other.

Many years later, the fulfillment of that purpose seemed in jeopardy when, after a series of events that I won't go into now but you can read about in the book of Genesis, the Israelites found themselves stuck in Egypt. In fact, they found themselves with the very same three problems that we have:

1. The Israelites were separated from their true home with God in the Promised Land.
2. They had rebelled against God and were under his judgment for doing so.
3. They were slaves to an evil tyrant with a strong army and did not have the power to free themselves.

The Israelites needed the same three things we do: freedom, forgiveness and guidance home.

Finally, they cried out to God for help and he gave it to them. In fact, he provided just what they needed to fix their problems: he defeated the power of the Pharaoh, he provided a way for their sins to be forgiven and he guided those that would accept his direction home to the Promised Land.

It is very important to understand that this was all done to teach us about what God has done and wants to do for us. The story of the Israelite's exodus from Egypt is an (historically factual) allegory that explains to us our situation and how God wants to fix it. In the allegory, the Israelites are us, Egypt is Earth and the Pharaoh is Satan. By understanding how God rescued the Israelites, we can gain much insight into how he wants to rescue us.

God's Rescue Plan

Here is brief look at how God worked to take care of the Israelites' problems and how he later worked (and is working) through Jesus to take care of ours. We will concentrate especially on the Easter part of the story. (For a full discussion of the Israelite's journey home and the lessons we can learn from it, please see my book *The Road to Heaven: a Traveler's Guide to Life's Narrow Way*.)

One Man with All Authority

The first thing God did was send one man, Moses, to lead the people out of Egypt. Moses told the Pharaoh that the God of the Israelites wanted him to let the slaves go. Pharaoh refused,

explaining to Moses that he did not believe that the Israelite god had any power or authority over Egypt's gods and mighty army. The ten plagues that followed were the God of Israel's answer to Pharaoh. In turning the Nile River to blood, destroying crops and cattle and even blocking out the sun, among other things, the LORD, God of Israel, demonstrated that he had power and authority over everything on earth, from earthly military forces to the spiritual power of the many other gods that the Egyptians worshiped. The LORD gave evidence that he alone was God over all. By the ninth plague, almost everyone in Egypt knew that the LORD, god of the Israelites had the power and authority to set the slaves free. Setting them free is just what God did with the tenth plague.

Before getting to that part of the story, though, let's pause and see how Jesus fulfills the story so far and what that means for us.

First, Jesus is like Moses in that he is the only one who can lead us home.

Just as God sent one man to lead the Israelites, he sent one man to lead us: Jesus is our Moses. There are not many paths to the Promised Land. You can't get there by following just anyone. Ultimately, just as the Israelites had to follow only Moses, we have to follow only Jesus. Jesus proclaimed to all who would listen that following him was the only way to get freedom, forgiveness and back home to God: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Second, Jesus gave evidence to support his claim the same way that Moses did: through a display of signs and wonders. Jesus showed his power and authority over every aspect of our existence. He calmed the wind and waves, cured the sick, raised the dead, and cast out evil spirits, among other things. Just as the plagues showed that the LORD, god of the Israelites had authority over nature, spiritual forces and our physical well-being, Jesus showed that he had authority over all these aspects of reality as well. Jesus' miracles were a re-enactment of the plagues, intended to show that he was who he said he was: the savior of the world. Jesus did not show up on earth and ask us to believe him without giving us good reasons to do so. He presented many reasons, the ultimate of which is his own resurrection from the dead, which we will discuss later.

Under the Blood of the Lamb

Through the first nine plagues, the LORD, god of Israel had clearly established his identity as god of gods and possessor of all authority. However, the Children of Israel were still not released. Even after all the suffering his kingdom had faced, Pharaoh still would not let the Hebrews go (Exodus 10:27). However, God promised Moses that the tenth plague would result in their freedom (Exodus 11:1), so Moses explained the situation to Pharaoh.

Moses said, “This is what the LORD says: ‘About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt – worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.’ Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, ‘Go, you and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will leave.” Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh. (Exodus 11:4-8)

You might wonder why God had to go to such lengths. After all, isn't killing all the firstborn in the land a little harsh, even for someone as stubborn as the Pharaoh? Here it is important to understand that the plagues were not just signs of God's authority. The plagues were also acts of justice. God used the plagues to punish Egypt for its rebellion against him and worship of other gods. God had explained this to Moses before the plagues started: “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.’” (Exodus 6:6). God then reiterated this theme before the final plague. “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both

men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD” (Exodus 12:12).

As the Psalmist explains, God is just in dealing with nations. Rebellious people reap what they sow.

The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden.

The LORD is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands.

The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God.

But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish.

Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence.

Strike them with terror, O LORD; let the nations know they are but men. (Psalm 9:15-20)

As we mentioned already, the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Through the death of the firstborn, God was bringing justice on Egypt for their sins. But, you might ask, what about the sins of the rest of the people? Why just the firstborn? And what about the sins of Israel? Were they any different in their rejection of God? No. This is where the symbolic and allegorical nature of the Exodus story really comes into play.

Two aspects of the final plague are very interesting. First, God limited the punishment to the firstborn. Though they are not the only ones that are guilty, the firstborn of every family pays the penalty for everyone else. God could have simply wiped out the entire population and been justified. However, he limited the punishment to a symbolic group. Second, God gave a way for even that group to escape his wrath. He gave the people the option of having their punishment paid by a lamb. Rather than the firstborn of a family paying the price for everyone, a young sheep would die in their place. God explained to Moses how it would work.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire – head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover.

“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn – both men and animals – and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.” (Exodus 12:1-13)

By placing the blood on the doorframe, those that followed God’s plan escaped judgment. Sin still resulted in death, but rather than everyone’s death, or even the death of the firstborn, the penalty for this group’s sin was paid by the death of a lamb.

God then gave Moses instructions for the continual remembrance of this event. I think it is important to read this part

in its entirety so that we may later see how clearly Jesus fits into the story.

“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD – a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat – that is all you may do.

“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.”

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your

children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron. (Exodus 12:14-28)

Then the final plague and the Passover occurred, just as God said it would, and the people left Egypt.

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.”

The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die!” So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. (Exodus 12:29-38)

Jesus the Lamb

So the way out of Egypt went directly under the blood of the lamb. Freedom and forgiveness was provided to those who trusted God and placed the blood over their doors. In exactly the same fashion, the way to our Promised Land goes directly under the blood of the lamb. Of course for us the lamb is Jesus. He is the one who takes our punishment upon himself. He is the firstborn of God, the pure and spotless one who took the wrath of God on himself when he died on the cross. Because of Jesus we are able to escape Satan's clutches. Freedom and forgiveness comes through Jesus.

The connection between Jesus and the Passover lamb is abundantly clear in scripture. For example, John the Baptist's first words when he saw Jesus were, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), a reference he used the next day as well (John 1:36). Paul explicitly calls Christ "our Passover lamb" (1 Corinthians 5:7), and Peter explains why we should live holy lives: "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). In addition, the book of Revelation has several references to Jesus being the lamb, including 7:9, 12:11, 13:8, 14:1, 15:3, 17:14, 19:9 and 21:22.

Jesus' connection with the Passover lamb becomes even clearer when we examine the story of his passion. As we read above, God commanded the Israelites to commemorate the Passover with a week-long festival every year. It is no coincidence that Jesus' death occurred exactly during this Passover celebration. As the people commemorated the lamb that was slain for the slaves in Egypt, the fulfillment of that lamb was slain for us. Here are some of the interesting scriptural parallels that make this connection clear.

The fifth day before Passover was lamb selection day, when the families would go and choose a lamb to sacrifice on Passover (the 10th of the month in Exodus 12:3, Passover occurred on the 14th). This is the exact day that Jesus entered Jerusalem during Passion

Week (the week leading up to Christ's death and resurrection), the Lamb of God chosen before the foundation of the world (John 12:12-13, Revelation 13:8).

The Passover lamb had to be without defect, pure and spotless (Exodus 12:5). Jesus lived a perfect life; he was sinless and pure (see 1 Peter 1:19 above). "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). According to Paul, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

During the first Passover, the blood was applied to the doorposts using hyssop, a Mediterranean plant. Hyssop is never mentioned in the Bible outside of the context of purification and forgiveness of sins, and the image of a man lifting a hyssop plant into the air towards a bloody piece of wood would certainly remind a Jew of the Passover. That is exactly what happened in the moment before Jesus' death. A sponge was attached to a hyssop plant, dipped in wine-vinegar, and offered to Jesus (John 19:29).

On the day of the Passover celebration a priest would blow his horn at 3:00 p.m., the moment the Passover lamb was sacrificed. At the sounding of the horn, all the people would pause and contemplate the death of the lamb for their sins. It was at this very moment on Good Friday that Jesus cried out, "It is finished" and gave up his spirit. (Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; John 19:30).

The Passover lamb was to have none of its bones broken (Exodus 12:46). It was common during crucifixions to break the legs of the victim in order to hasten death. The only way for a person to breathe while hanging on a cross is to push up with their legs, so if the legs are broken, death by asphyxiation comes quickly. During Jesus' crucifixion, soldiers broke the legs of the two men next to Jesus but did not need to do the same to Jesus, as he was already dead (John 19:31-34). John makes the connection between Jesus and the Old Testament clear by pointing out that this was a fulfillment of prophecy (John 19:35).

All of these "coincidences" are meant to show us that Jesus was our Passover lamb. We deserve to die for our sin, but instead of making us take the punishment ourselves or place it on our firstborn, Jesus took it all. His death allowed us to be set free.

Because of the cross we can be forgiven and walk away from slavery.

Before concluding this booklet, I want to briefly touch on a couple of other stories that illustrate the meaning of Passover.

Isaac and the Lamb

So far we have seen Jesus represented in Moses, the firstborn of Egypt and the Passover lamb. However, these are not the only types of Christ in the Bible. In the following story, we see Jesus represented by both Isaac and another sacrificial lamb.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” (Genesis 22:1-14)

Let’s start by examining the ways in which Isaac is a type of Jesus. Notice the way Isaac is described. God calls him the son Abraham loves. As strange as it may seem, this is the first mention of love in the Bible. The passage speaks of Abraham’s love for Isaac, but it also represents God’s love for his son, Jesus. Look at how God refers to this story when he offered his son to the world as a sacrifice: “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’” (Mark 1:9-11).

The sacrifice of Isaac was to take place in the region of Moriah. This is commonly referred to as Mount Moriah and is actually a

mountain range rather than a single peak. As you may have guessed by now, it was on a hill in this very range that Jesus died on a cross some four thousand years later.

In another interesting and illuminating picture, Isaac actually carried the wood for the sacrifice up the hill on his back. This looks ahead to Jesus' walk to Golgotha, the place of his crucifixion, when he was forced to carry his own cross (John 19:17).

So Isaac, the beloved son, was presented as a sacrifice, but at just the right time, God provided a substitute. That substitute was Jesus. God provided his beloved son to actually take the place of the lamb, which no longer needs to be killed. Jesus has accomplished once and for all what the blood of endless lambs could only ever symbolize (Hebrews 10:4, 11): he paid the penalty for our sin.

In the story of Abraham and Isaac, then, Jesus is represented by Isaac and the lamb caught in the thicket. He is the son that is presented for sacrifice, and also the lamb who was actually sacrificed so Isaac could go free. This is another example of a Passover fulfillment. Just as the Passover lamb's blood was spilled so the Hebrews could go free, Jesus' blood was spilled so that we could go free. Praise God!

Peter Set Free from Prison on Passover

It is amazing to consider how many times God has tried to make clear what happened on Passover. Even after Jesus had risen from the dead, God gave us an object lesson in the life of Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, to help us understand it.

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.”

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”

“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought

him out of prison. “Tell James and the brothers about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed. (Acts 12:1-19)

In commenting on this episode, I can do no better than Patrick Henry Reardon, who wrote the following on his “Daily Reflections” website.

For a proper understanding of this story of Peter’s imprisonment, it is important to make note of the time when the event happens. Peter is delivered from prison at the Passover, the very night commemorating Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt. As the angel of the Lord came through the land that night to remove Israel’s chains by slaying the first-born of Israel’s oppressors, so the delivering angel returns to strike the fetters from Peter’s hands and lead him forth from the dungeon. And as Israel’s earlier liberation foreshadowed that Paschal Mystery whereby Jesus our Lord led all of us from our servitude to the satanic Pharaoh by rising from the dead, so we observe aspects of the Resurrection in Peter’s deliverance from prison. Like the tomb of Jesus, Peter’s cell is guarded by soldiers (verses 4,6). That cell, again like the tomb of Jesus, is invaded by a radiant angelic presence, and the very command to Peter is to “arise” (*anasta* – verse 7). It is no wonder that in regarding Rafael’s famous chiaroscuro depiction of this scene in the apartments in the Vatican (over the window in the Stanza of Heliodorus), the viewer must look very closely, for his first impression is that he is looking at a traditional portrayal of the Lord’s Resurrection. And what is the Church doing during all that night of the Passover? Praying (verses 5,12); indeed, it is our first record of a Paschal Vigil Service. Peter’s guards, alas, must share the fate of Egypt’s first-born sons (verse 19).

Provided: Freedom, Forgiveness, Guidance

For the Israelites, the journey to the Promised Land began with simply getting out of Egypt. To do that they had to follow Moses as he followed God, who exercised his power and authority over the gods of Egypt and forgave the sins of the people by placing their punishment on the lamb. They had to fall in line behind Moses and under the blood of the lamb in order to have a shot at making it to the Promised Land.

For us, the way out of slavery on this planet is to follow Jesus, who *is* God. Jesus said that he came “to set the captives free” and that is exactly what he did. He exercised his power and authority over Satan and took the punishment for our sins on himself. We have to fall in line behind Jesus and under his blood in order to have our shot at the Promised Land. While we do not physically have to put his blood on the doorposts of our house, by acknowledging our need for a savior and repenting of our rebellion against God, we spiritually place his blood on the doorposts of our heart and walk under the blood of the lamb. Of course, this step is just the beginning of a long a sometimes difficult journey.

At the Passover, two of the Israelites’ problems were taken care of: the powers that enslaved them had been defeated and their sins had been forgiven. Only one problem remained: they still were not home.

Thankfully, God had a plan for that, too. In order to guide, protect and provide for the Israelites as they traveled across a harsh wilderness, he actually came down and lived with them. I won’t go into great detail about that here (the Christmas booklet *Why He is Called Immanuel* concentrates on that aspect of God’s rescue plan) but that is exactly what Jesus did 2000 years ago and what the Holy Spirit does now. In Jesus, God came down and lived with us. In the Holy Spirit, God comes down and lives *in* us. We can take confidence in the fact that we will indeed make it to Heaven because God will be with us.

Conclusion

My study of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt has greatly helped me understand our dire situation in the world and God's plan to rescue us from it. It also helped me answer more clearly the question of what happened on the first Easter. I trust that it will do the same for you. The Passover greatly illuminates the meaning of Easter by showing us how Jesus is the Lamb of God. His death and resurrection provided for our freedom and forgiveness. I pray that as we meditate on that wonderful truth we will be moved to appropriate that work in our own lives and follow Jesus home.

Don Johnson is founder and president of Don Johnson Evangelistic Ministries, a non-profit organization dedicated to boldly and creatively proclaiming the Kingdom of God through various means of mass communication. To fulfill this mission, Don preaches around the world, hosts a radio talk show, holds open forum events, and writes for web and print publication. Find out more at **donjohnsonministries.org**.