

ONE GOD
ONE MESSAGE

Part 6



Seeing
The Symbols

by P. D. Bramsen



- ☞ The Law of the Sacrifice
- ☞ A Momentous Sacrifice
- ☞ More Shed Blood
- ☞ The Lamb

ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE - PART 6
SEEING THE SYMBOLS

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ISBN 978-9966-895-45-5

Part 6 of an 8-Part Series/Correspondence Course

Taken from chapters 19 to 22 of the 30-chapter book
ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE by P. D. Bramsen.

This 8-Part Series is distributed by:

Life Challenge Africa
P.O. Box 50770
Nairobi 00200 KENYA



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Illustrations by Dave Bramsen / Formatting by Zariief Mina

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Printed in Kenya

Seeing The Symbols

Dear friend,

Imagine driving in a city with no traffic laws, lights, or signs. Everyone would be driving in any direction and at any speed! Confusion, danger, and death would reign! Or picture yourself traveling in a foreign land on a road void of any reassuring signs to indicate the direction and distance to the next city. Travelers would become disoriented and lost.

What if God had not provided mankind with clear signs to point to His truth? In a world with 10,000 religions, confusion would be the only option. Thankfully, our Creator has included in His Book hundreds of signs, symbols, and shadows that point truth seekers in the right direction.

We have now come to the sixth stage, in which we will see:

- the law that overcomes the law of sin and death.
- the classic story about Abraham and his son.
- the signs, symbols, and shadows established by God.
- the One to whom those signs, symbols, and shadows point.

This sixth part of our eight-part journey is designed to establish in your mind a firm foundation for the rest of God's story and message. After each chapter, take ample time to think through the questions. Then write out your answers and mail them to us, either by regular mail or by e-mail.

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THE LAW OF THE SACRIFICE

*“It is the blood that makes **atonement** for the soul.”*

— The LORD (Leviticus 17:11)

The first family’s history is recorded in Genesis, chapter four. It is here we first learn that when Adam and Eve were put out of the idyllic Garden of Eden, the entire human race was put out. All their descendants would be born and raised in a cursed world under enemy control.

FIRSTBORN SINNER

*“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore **Cain**, and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the LORD.’” (Genesis 4:1)*

Cain means *acquire*. In the midst of the pain and wonder of the first childbirth, Eve exclaimed, “*I have acquired a man from the LORD!*” Perhaps she thought Cain was the promised Deliverer sent by God to rescue them from sin’s deadly consequences.

Eve was right in believing that the promised Savior would come “*from the LORD*.” She was also right in believing that the Messiah would be *born of a woman*, but if she thought her husband’s offspring was the promised Deliverer, she was wrong.

Any such misconceptions were cleared up all too quickly.

Adam and Eve soon discovered that their darling little firstborn son had an inbred sin nature. Cain sinned *naturally*. He exhibited pride and self-will—like his parents and like Satan. Cain was not the promised Redeemer. He was just another helpless sinner in need of redemption.

By the time Adam and Eve's second son came along, they had a more realistic perspective of man's condition.

"Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel."

(Genesis 4:2)

Adam and Eve named their second son *Abel*, meaning *vanity* or *nothing*. There was no way they could produce a righteous child. The promised Savior of sinners could not come from Adam's sinful line. Together, Adam and Eve could only procreate another sinner like themselves. If there was to be a righteous Man to save them from sin's penalty, He must come from the LORD.

As we learned in Genesis chapter one, the first man and woman were created *in the image and likeness of God*. This amazing privilege included the solemn responsibility of making right choices. God's will for Adam and Eve and their descendants was that they reflect their Creator's holy and loving nature. However, when Adam and Eve chose to disobey their Creator-Owner, they ceased reflecting His image. Instantly, they fell from being *God-centered* to being *self-centered*. And they gave birth to children like themselves.

"Adam...had sons and daughters...in his own likeness, after his image." (Genesis 5:3-4)

As goes the Wolof proverb: "*Bounding gazelles do not beget burrowing offspring.*" Neither do sinful parents beget righteous offspring. The Scripture says,

"Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Romans 5:12)

SINNERS WORSHIP

*“Now **Abel** was a keeper of sheep, but **Cain** was a tiller of the ground. In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat.” (Genesis 4:2-4)*

Cain became a farmer and Abel a shepherd. Although sin’s effects were around them and in them, they were still surrounded by the glory of God’s creation and sustained by His loving care. Though Cain and Abel were both sinners, God loved them and wanted them to know Him and approach Him in worship. However, for this to happen, they needed a remedy for their sin-problem. God is holy and *“those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:24)

Clearly, these boys were well taught by their parents who had once enjoyed close friendship with their Creator. Both Cain and Abel understood that sin was an offense to God. Like their parents, they were shut out from God’s presence. If they were to have a relationship with Him, it must be on His terms.

The good news was that God had opened a way by which Cain and Abel could have their sins covered if they would trust Him and approach Him in the way He had established.

Let’s listen again to the narrative:

*“In the process of time it came to pass that **Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.**” (Genesis 4:3-5)*

As with any well-told story, not all the details are immediately given. The narrative simply tells *what* Cain and Abel did. *Why* they did what they did is explained elsewhere in Scripture. Both young men wanted to worship the one true God. Each *“brought an offering...to the LORD.”*

Cain came with an impressive selection of fruits and vegetables which he had diligently cultivated.

Abel brought an innocent, unblemished lamb, killed it and burned its body on a simple altar made of stone or earth.¹⁷⁸

By outward appearances, Abel's bloody offering was brutal and appalling, while Cain's agricultural offering was beautiful and appealing. Yet the Scripture says:

“The LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” (Genesis 4:4-5)

Why did God accept Abel's offering and reject Cain's?
Abel trusted God's plan.
Cain did not.

ABEL'S FAITH AND LAMB

The Scriptures tell us Abel came to God *“by faith,”* indicating that God had revealed to Cain and Abel what He required.

“By faith Abel [who believed God's plan] offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain [who did not believe God's plan], through which [Abel] obtained witness that he was **righteous**... But without faith it is impossible to please Him.” (Hebrews 11:4,6)

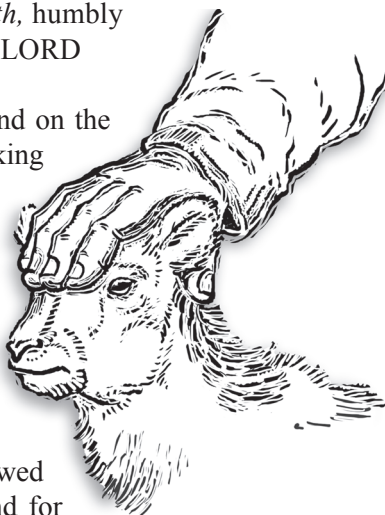
The faith that pleases God is faith that believes and submits to His plan.

When Adam and Eve first sinned, God rejected their self-efforts to fix their sin-problem. Instead, God performed the first animal sacrifice and provided Adam and Eve with a covering for their sin and shame. By putting to death some innocent animals, God was teaching them that *“the wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is eternal life....”* (Romans 6:23)

Later, Cain and Abel were taught the same lesson, but only one believed it.

Abel approached God *by faith*, humbly and obediently presenting to the LORD a healthy firstborn lamb.

Visualize Abel laying his hand on the lamb's head and quietly thanking the LORD that though he, Abel, deserved the death penalty, God would accept the lamb's blood as a temporary payment for sin. Next, Abel takes the knife and slits the gentle creature's throat and watches as its life-blood pulsates out.



By killing the lamb, Abel showed respect for God's holy nature and for the law of sin and death. It was because Abel trusted God's plan that God forgave Abel of his sins and declared him righteous. Abel was set free from the penalty of sin because that penalty had been carried out against the lamb. Abel's sacrifice symbolized and pointed to the perfect Sacrifice God promised to provide one day to take away the sin of the world.

That is why *“the LORD respected Abel and his offering.”*

CAIN'S WORKS AND RELIGION

Then there was Cain. What a religious young man he was! He set before God an admirable array of fruits and vegetables he had worked hard to produce. But God rejected Cain and his offering.

Cain's error was not the worship of a false god, but false worship of the one true God.

Instead of approaching his Creator by faith, Cain came with *his own ideas and efforts*. God had not accepted his parents' self-conceived covering of fig leaves and neither would He accept Cain's self-conceived offering of vegetables.

Some argue, “But Cain brought what he had!”

God didn't want what Cain had. He wanted Cain to trust Him and worship Him on the basis of a death payment—the blood of a lamb. If Cain didn't have a lamb, he could have traded some

vegetables for one of Abel's lambs, or he could have humbly approached the LORD at Abel's altar where the blood of the lamb had been shed. But Cain was too proud for that. He chose to "worship" God with the works of his own hands.

That is why God "*did not respect Cain and his offering.*"

THE SIN-DEBT

Why was the LORD so categorical? Why did He accept Abel's slain lamb, but not Cain's fresh vegetables?

God refused Cain's offering for the simple reason that the penalty for sin is *death*, not self-effort. *The law of sin and death*, which God first made known to Adam, had not changed. All who break God's laws owe a debt that can only be paid with *DEATH*. The Righteous Judge of the universe will not permit an infraction of His laws to be penalized with anything less.

No amount of sincerity, self-effort, or good works can cancel the debt of sin.

To illustrate, imagine a major bank lends me several million dollars. Instead of investing this enormous sum of money wisely, I squander it and default on the loan. The police come to my house and arrest me. In court, I tell the judge, "Never in my lifetime will I be able to pay back the millions of dollars I owe, but I have a plan to erase my financial debt. Here is what I will do: Instead of paying back the debt with money, I will pay it back with good works! Every day I will bring to the president of the bank a bowl of cooked rice. One day each week I will skip a meal and give that food to feed the poor. I will also take a ceremonial bath several times a day to wash away the shame of my debt. This I will do until my debt is paid off."

Would the judge accept such an irrational arrangement as payment for a financial debt? Never! Neither will the Judge of all the earth accept praying, fasting, and good works as payment for a sin-debt. There is only one way to pay for sin. It must be paid for with *DEATH—eternal separation from God*.

Is there a way for helpless sinners to be delivered from this unbending *law of sin and death*?

Thank God, there is.

THE LAW OF THE SACRIFICE

I don't play cards, but I do know some cards "trump" others. Due to a card's assigned value, it wins over cards of lesser value.

The Old Testament books of Daniel and Esther tell of ancient kings making laws that could "*not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which [do] not alter.*" (Daniel 6:8) If a king wanted to overcome a certain law, instead of abolishing it, he established a stronger law that would "trump" the previous one.¹⁷⁹

Similarly, from the beginning, God's righteous way of overcoming "*the law of sin and death,*" was to bring in a stronger law, namely, "***The law of the sin offering,***" (Leviticus 6:25) or, as it is also called: "***The law of the sacrifice.***" (Leviticus 7:11)

God, who upholds all His laws, established the *law of the sacrifice* to trump the still legally binding *law of sin and death*.

The law of the sacrifice offered *mercy* to guilty sinners while, at the same time, carrying out *justice* against sin. (To review why God must maintain *mercy and justice* in perfect balance, see chapter 13.) The law of the blood sacrifice provided a way for God to punish sin without punishing the sinner. Here is God's explanation of how that could happen:

*"The life of the flesh is in the **blood**, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes **atonement** for the soul."*
(Leviticus 17:11)

This law contained two basic principles:

1. BLOOD PROVIDES LIFE — God said: "***The life of the flesh is in the blood.***" Modern science affirms what the Scriptures have declared for thousands of years: a creature's life is in its blood. Healthy blood transports all the elements necessary to sustain life and to cleanse away impurities. The blood is precious; without it, humans and animals alike die.

2. SIN REQUIRES DEATH — God also said: "***It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.***" The word *atonement* comes from the Hebrew word *kaphar*, which means to "*cover, cancel, cleanse, forgive, and reconcile.*"¹⁸⁰ It was only through the

poured-out blood that sinners could be cleansed and reconciled to their righteous Creator. Since the penalty for sin is death, God was saying He would accept the blood (forfeited life) of an acceptable sacrifice as a payment and covering for man's sin.

A SUBSTITUTE

The underlying principle of *the law of the sacrifice* can be summed up in a word: **substitution**. An innocent animal would die as the condemned sinner's substitute.

In the generations prior to the coming of the Messiah, the LORD made it known to Adam's descendants that He would temporarily accept the shed blood of a suitable animal, such as a lamb, sheep, goat, or bull. Even pigeons and doves could be offered.¹⁸¹ No matter how rich or poor, good or bad a person was, all were to approach God, recognizing their sinfulness and believing that God would grant them forgiveness based on the shed blood.

The condemned creature had to be "*without blemish.*"¹⁸² It could not have any sickness, broken bones, cuts, or scratches. It had to be symbolically perfect. The sinner offering the sacrifice was to "*lay his hand on the head of the [animal], and kill it... It is a sin offering.*" The fat of the animal would then be burned on the altar.

And what did God say such an offering would accomplish?

"His sin... shall be forgiven him." (Leviticus 4:23-26)

The person placing his or her hand on the head of a sacrifice symbolized the transfer of sin to the flawless creature. The sin-bearer then perished *in the place of* the sinner.

On the basis of this principle of *substitution*, sin was punished and the sinner was pardoned. The death penalty for sin fell on the "perfect," innocent animal instead of on the guilty man or woman.

The law of the sin offering taught sinners that God is holy and that "*without the shedding of blood* [a death payment] *there is no forgiveness* [removal of sin's penalty]." (Hebrews 9:22 NIV)

By means of the animal sacrifice, God was carrying out His justice against sin and showing His mercy to sinners who trusted in Him. God promised to bless all who came to Him in this way. On the same day God gave His ancient people the Ten Commandments, He reminded them that the only way they could be accepted by Him was to approach Him on the basis of a blood sacrifice presented on an altar.

*“An altar of earth you shall make **for Me**, and **you shall sacrifice on it** your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. **In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.**”* (Exodus 20:24)

The main intent of this blood-for-sin provision was to demonstrate God’s righteous wrath against sin until such time as the promised Savior arrived.

The Messiah’s purpose would be to fulfill *the true meaning* of the law of the sacrifice.

In God’s estimation, the life of one human is worth more than all the animals in the entire world. Animals were not created in the image of God. Animals do not have eternal souls. Consequently, animal blood could *only symbolize* what was necessary to cancel man’s debt of sin.

Abel’s slain lamb is only the first recorded story among scores of Old Testament narratives in which we see believers coming to God in worship with the poured-out blood of innocent, flawless animals. Among these numerous animal-sacrifice stories, one stands above the rest.

It’s the one remembered each year by Muslims around the world.



CHAPTER 19 REVIEW

THE LAW OF THE SACRIFICE

1. What unpleasant reality did Adam and Eve discover not long after their first child was born?
2. Give the two main reasons God accepted Abel and his offering. Give the two main reasons God rejected Cain and his offering
3. Do you know of anything you can do to erase your sins? Why is it impossible to pay off a sin-debt with prayers and good works?
4. God must punish all sin. Was there a way for God to punish sin without punishing the sinner?
5. Explain how *the law of the sacrifice* “trumped” *the law of sin and death*.
6. In your own words, define “atonement” and then explain God’s words to Moses in Leviticus 17:11. *“The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”*

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A MOMENTOUS SACRIFICE

The family is gathered around.
The subdued creature is held to the ground.
Old and young alike lay their hand on the sheep or on the father bearing the knife.

The cut is swift and onto the sand pulsates the animal's life.

The sacrifice is over—until next year.

On *Eid al-Adha*, “the Feast of the Sacrifice,” Muslims point back to a four thousand year-old biblical event when God provided a ram to die instead of Abraham's son.¹⁸³ The Qur'an concludes its brief account of this classic story with these words: “*And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.*” (Sura 37:107)

To understand the full significance of this dramatic story, we must return to the book of Genesis.

ABRAHAM

Abraham¹⁸⁴ was born around 2000 BC in the land of Ur, modern-day Iraq. Like all descendants of Adam, he was born with a sin nature. Although Abraham grew up among pagan idol worshipers, he became a believer in the one true God. Abraham did not share the opinion of many people today who think they must be loyal to the religion of their parents no matter what.

Like Abel, Abraham approached the LORD God in worship with the shed blood of sacrificed animals.

When Abraham was seventy-five years old and his wife was sixty-five, the LORD appeared to him and said:

*“Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. **I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you**; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; **and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**”*

(Genesis 12:1-3 NIV)

God promised to make of Abraham a “*great nation*” through which He would provide salvation for all people groups on earth. This nation would be “*great*,” not in *size*, but in *significance*. To make this new nation a reality, Abraham and his childless wife Sarah were commanded by God to move to a land He promised to give to their descendants—though they still had none.

How did Abraham react to God’s seemingly impossible promises? He trusted God and obeyed, leaving his father’s household and heading to the land of Canaan, which today is known as Israel and Palestine.

ABRAHAM’S FAITH

Once Abraham arrived in Canaan, the LORD said to him, “**“To your descendants I will give this land.**’ *And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*” (Genesis 12:7)

God’s promise was nothing short of amazing. The land of Canaan was populated with many different people groups. How could Abraham and his descendants possess it? He and his wife had no descendants.

Imagine an elderly couple coming from a far away land to visit your country. When they arrive, you tell them, “One day you and your descendants will own this entire country!” The old man laughs and says, “Very funny! I don’t even have any descendants! I am an old man; I have no children and my wife is unable to conceive and you tell me that my descendants are going to multiply and possess this land? Are you ill?”

This is the kind of staggering promise God made to Abraham. And how did Abraham react? The Scripture says he “*believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*” (Genesis 15:6) Because of Abraham’s childlike faith in God’s promise, God declared him righteous. After he died, Abraham would live forever with the LORD in Paradise.

The word in the original Hebrew text for “*believed*” is *aman*, from which comes the expression, “*Amen!*” which means: “So be it!” or “It is trustworthy and true!”

Don’t miss this. To *believe in the LORD* is to hear what He has declared and to respond with a heart-felt “*Amen!*” It is such childlike faith that connects with God. Whether or not we have accepted God’s Word as true will be demonstrated by our actions. Abraham’s faith was authenticated by the fact that he chose the hard path, turning his back on his father’s religion in order to follow the LORD.

“‘*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*’ And he was called the *friend of God.*”
(James 2:23)

Abraham was God’s friend because He believed God’s Word. This does not mean that Abraham always trusted God in every area of life. Judicially, God had declared him perfectly righteous, but in his everyday living, Abraham was less than perfect.

The Scriptures do not hide the sins and shortcomings of the prophets.

ISHMAEL

Abraham and Sarah lived in the land of Canaan as nomads, dwelling in tents, moving from place to place. Over time, Abraham grew extremely wealthy in livestock.

More than ten years had passed since God promised to make of Abraham a great nation. He was now eighty-six years old and his wife was seventy-six, and they still had no children. How could Abraham become a great nation if he had no offspring? Abraham and his wife decided to “help” God fulfill His promise.

Instead of waiting for the LORD to work out His plan in His time, they followed their common sense and the local culture. Sarah gave her Egyptian house girl Hagar to Abraham so he could sleep with her and have a child by her. Hagar bore Abraham a son whom they named *Ishmael*.

Thirteen years later, when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, Almighty God appeared to him and told him that Sarah his wife would have a son.

*“Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for **Ishmael**, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with **Isaac**, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.’” (Genesis 17:17-21)*

ISAAC

God kept His promise. Sarah, in her old age, bore to Abraham a son named *Isaac*.

“So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.” (Genesis 21:8-9)

Ishmael did not appreciate God’s plan to use Isaac to raise up a nation through which the LORD would communicate His truth and offer salvation to the world. Instead, Ishmael ridiculed his half-brother. Tensions increased to the point where Abraham

had to send Ishmael and Hagar away. This was an agonizing experience for Abraham who loved his son Ishmael.

*“But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad [Ishmael] or because of your bondwoman [Hagar]... for **in Isaac** your seed shall be called. ... So God was with the lad [Ishmael]; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.’”*

(Genesis 21:12,20-21)

As the LORD promised, Ishmael became the father of a great people which God has blessed in many ways. Yet the LORD made it clear to Abraham that it would be *“in Isaac”* that He would fulfill His covenant to provide salvation for the world.

ISRAEL

Later, Isaac would marry and have twin sons, Esau and Jacob. God eventually gave Jacob a new name, telling him, *“**Israel** shall be your name.”* (Genesis 35:10) Jacob had twelve sons, the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, which in the time of Moses, God organized into a nation. The LORD called these descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *His chosen people*.¹⁸⁵

Why did He choose *them*? Were they better than the other nations? No, in fact God told the Israelites that they were *“**the least of all peoples.**”* (Deuteronomy 7:7) God chose these weak, despised Hebrew people so that no man could take the credit or praise for what He planned to accomplish.

This is how the LORD God delights to work.

*“God has chosen **the weak things** of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and **the base things** of the world and **the things which are despised** God has chosen, and **the things which are not**, to bring to nothing the things that are, **that no flesh should glory in His presence.**”* (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

A COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

God raised up this new nation as a channel through which He would communicate His message to the ends of the earth. God created this “channel of communication” long before the time of radio and television, but it would be no less effective. The mighty acts of the one true God in the midst of this nation would be heard throughout the world. For example, the Scripture records this testimony of a Canaanite woman: “***We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt... The LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.***” (Joshua 2:10-11)

Furthermore, it would be from this nation that God would select *the prophets* who would write *the Scriptures*.

Most importantly, it would be through this nation that God would provide *a Descendant*, who would Himself be the channel of blessing to the world. As we already observed (in chapter 16), this Descendant was none other than *the promised Seed of the woman* who came down from heaven to be born of a poor, Jewish maiden who was a virgin.

Whether we approve or not, this ancient nation was the communication channel established *by God* to transmit His truth and eternal blessings to every nation on earth. And it all began with the LORD telling Abraham to leave his father’s house and go to the land of Canaan.

God’s great covenant to Abraham had two major parts:

- 1) “*I will make you into a **great nation** and I will bless you...*”
- 2) “*And **all peoples on earth** will be blessed through you.*”

God’s love is not limited to one special group. He didn’t just want to bless Abraham or Israel. His heart of compassion yearns after “*all peoples on earth.*” The Old Testament abounds with stories of God using the small and stubborn nation of Israel to offer His grace to all nations and language groups on earth.¹⁸⁶ God’s purpose to bless all nations through this despised nation must be kept in mind whenever the Bible tells of the LORD protecting the Israelites from those who attempted to eradicate them. God was

defending them, *not because they were better* than other nations, but *because they were **the channel*** through which He determined to display His power and glory and provide salvation for the world. By protecting the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God was protecting His blessings for “*all peoples on earth.*”

What’s more, the LORD God’s reputation was at stake. He had sworn by His own great name to bless all nations through this weak and despised nation.¹⁸⁷

God would do precisely what He promised—for the honor of His name. Would we not do the same if our reputation, or the honor of our family, was at stake?

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM

Let us now return to the classic story of Abraham’s momentous sacrifice.

Here is the setting: Abraham was very old. Ishmael had been sent away many years earlier. Only Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, remained at home.

God was about to test Abraham’s faith to the extreme. The LORD God was also about to set before the world some patterns and prophecies about what He Himself planned to do to redeem the children of Adam from sin’s death sentence.

“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’

And he said, ‘Here I am.’

‘Take now 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.’” (Genesis 22:1-2)

God directed Abraham to travel to a specific mountain ridge and there to kill and burn his beloved son on an altar. What a dreadful request! This is something God had never before and would never again ask a man to do. Yet, because Isaac—like all descendants of Adam—had a sin-debt, the sentence upon him was a just verdict: death.

“So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.”
(Genesis 22:3)

Abraham trusted God, but it was not easy. For three agonizing days Abraham, his son, and two servants journeyed, each step bringing them closer to the site of execution.

“On the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.’” (Genesis 22:4-5)

Abraham told the servants, *“We will come back to you.”*

How could both Abraham and his son “come back” if Isaac was to be killed and burned on an altar? Elsewhere the Scripture provides the answer. Since God had promised to make of Isaac a great nation, Abraham believed that once he had offered up his son, God would raise him back to life.¹⁸⁸ Abraham had learned that the LORD always keeps His promises!

GOD PROVIDES A SUBSTITUTE

“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together.” (Genesis 22:6)

As father and son walked up the mountain, Isaac said,

“‘My father!’

‘Here I am, my son.’

*Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but **where is the lamb** for a burnt offering?’*

*And Abraham said, ‘My son, **God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.**’*

Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!'

So he said, 'Here I am.'

And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.'

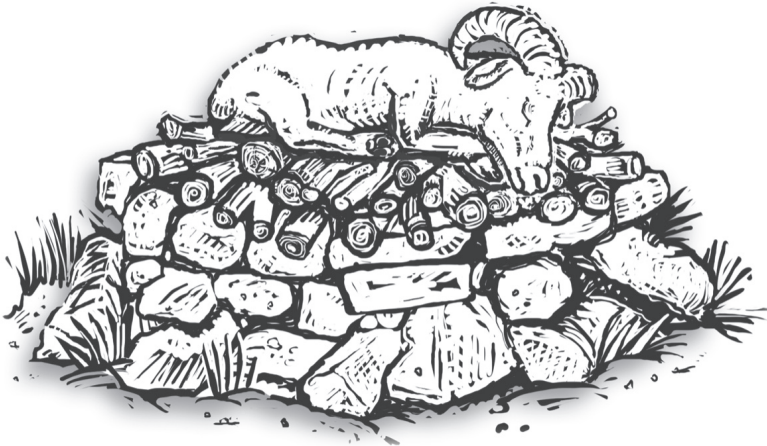
Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns."
(Genesis 22:7-13a)

The LORD intervened. Abraham's son would be spared the death penalty!

Abraham turned around, and in the distance, on the same mountain ridge, he spotted movement in the undergrowth. What was it...? Could it be...? Yes! Praise God! An unblemished "*ram caught in a thicket by its horns!*"

In keeping with His own "*law of the sacrifice,*" God had provided a substitute.

*"So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering **instead of his son.**"* (Genesis 22:13b)



Why did Abraham's son escape the death sentence that hung over him? The ram had died in his place.

God had provided a substitute.

THE LORD *WILL* PROVIDE

*“And Abraham called the name of the place, **The–LORD–Will–Provide**; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided.’ ”* (Genesis 22:14)

Why, after Abraham had killed the ram in place of his son, did he name the site, “*The–LORD–Will–Provide*”?

Why did Abraham **not** name it, *The–LORD–Has–Provided*?

In saying, “*the LORD will provide*,” the prophet Abraham was announcing a future event that would take place nearly two thousand years later. For it would be on this same mountain ridge (where Jerusalem was later built) that the LORD would provide another sacrifice—not to deliver just one man from death, but to provide a full and final ransom for the whole world.

Do you recall what Abraham said to his son as they were plodding up the mountain where the sacrifice was to be offered? He told him,

“My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”

What was Abraham talking about? Had God provided a *lamb* to die in the place of Abraham's son? No, He did not provide a lamb. God had provided a *ram*. So what did the prophet Abraham mean when he spoke of God providing “*for Himself the lamb*”?

The amazing answer will soon emerge, but first a few more stories must be told.

CHAPTER 20 REVIEW



1. God promised to make of Abraham a great nation and give his descendants the land of Canaan. What factors in Abraham's situation made these two promises seemingly impossible?
2. Why did God declare Abraham righteous? What does it mean to "believe God"?
3. Name three ways God communicated His truth and blessings to all nations through the ancient nation of Israel.
4. God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. Did Abraham conclude that God had broken His promise (to bring forth a great nation from Isaac's descendants)? Explain.
5. Why did Abraham's son not die on the altar?
6. In your own words, express your understanding of Genesis 22:14. *"Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided.'"*

21

MORE SHED BLOOD

Let's be honest.
When it comes to spiritual truth, we are slow learners.
God knows that.

*"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the **elementary truths** of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"*
(Hebrews 5:12 NIV)

Ouch!

Mercifully, God is the most patient of teachers, repeating and restating elementary truths we should have learned long ago. To help us out, He has included in His Book hundreds of stories which graphically illustrate one of the most important truths:

"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."
(Hebrews 9:22 NIV)

Forgiveness of sin has never been a simple matter for our perfectly holy Creator. From the day sin entered the world, God began to teach sinners that only the blood of a suitable sacrifice could atone for (cover) sin. That is how God, the Righteous Judge, would punish sin without punishing the sinner.

The LORD rejected Adam and Eve's self-efforts to cover their sin. Apart from a death payment, God could not pardon sin. Cain and Abel's story taught us the same lesson. So did Abraham and Isaac's.

The Old Testament books which follow Genesis, such as Exodus and Leviticus, abound with stories of men and women who submitted to this law of the sacrifice.¹⁸⁹

"I WILL PASS OVER"

The book of Exodus relates the captivating story about God organizing Abraham's descendants into a nation, just as He had promised.

Through a divinely arranged series of events, which God foretold to Abraham,¹⁹⁰ the descendants of Israel became slaves under the Egyptian Pharaohs. God promised to redeem them from their slavery and in the process, transmit to the world "pictures" of His plan to redeem Adam's descendants from their slavery to sin.

This is the story of the Passover.

Around 1490 BC, the LORD brought upon the land of Egypt ten devastating plagues by the word of Moses. The first nine of these miraculous signs—in which the LORD challenged and defeated the false gods of polytheistic Egypt—did not cause Pharaoh to submit to the word of God and free the Israelites.¹⁹¹ But the tenth plague would persuade Pharaoh to release them. God told Moses to inform the people that the firstborn in each family, Egyptian and Israelite, was condemned to die. At midnight on the appointed date, the angel of death would pass through the land and slay the firstborn in each home.

That was the bad news.

The good news was that God provided a way of deliverance from this death plague. The LORD told Moses to tell each family to select a "*lamb...without blemish, a male of the first year...from the sheep or from the goats.*" (Exodus 12:5) Then, at the appointed time, the lamb was to be killed, and its blood applied to the top and sides of the door-frame of each house. All who put the blood of a lamb on the doorposts and remained in that house when the plague of death passed through the land would be saved.

The LORD promised:

*“When I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall **not** be on you to destroy you.”* (Exodus 12:13)

Everything happened as God had said. On that solemn night in Egypt, God preserved all the firstborn who were *under the blood*; all others, including Pharaoh’s firstborn son, died.

Let us not fail to observe that every household witnessed a death. Yes, *every* household.

Either *a lamb* died or *the firstborn* died.

That night, those who had applied the blood to their doorposts walked away from a life of oppression and slavery. They went out a free, redeemed people.

What was the ransom price of their deliverance?

The blood of a lamb.

Once again, *the law of the sacrifice* had trumped *the law of sin and death*. In succeeding years, the Jews would celebrate *the Passover*, an annual feast in which they were to remember the great deliverance God had provided through the blood of a lamb.

GOD LEADING HIS PEOPLE

On the night of the original *Passover*, God led the Israelites away from four hundred years of bondage in Egypt and out into the desert. God planned to bring them back to the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. As they journeyed, God Himself accompanied them in a visible, comforting kind of way.

“The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.” (Exodus 13:21)

Not only did the LORD lead His people through the desert and give them light, but by His mighty Arm, He opened a path through the Red Sea, and delivered them from Pharaoh’s pursuing army. And then, just as He had promised to Moses, He brought them to Mount Sinai.¹⁹²

There, at the base of that mountain, this new nation of more than two million people set up camp for a whole year. How could they possibly survive in that arid desert? God, in His goodness and grace, provided bread from heaven and water from a rock.¹⁹³ Though the Israelites consistently failed to thank, trust, and obey the One who had redeemed them from slavery, the LORD was always faithful to them. He judged them when they sinned against Him and blessed them when they believed Him. The LORD worked with His chosen nation in this way so that the surrounding nations might see, consider, and learn His way of redemption. God also wanted people to understand that He can be known in a personal way.

After giving Israel the Ten Commandments (see chapter 15) and other laws, the LORD commanded His people to construct a unique sanctuary called *the Tabernacle*, or *Tent of Meeting*.

THE TABERNACLE

*“Let them make **Me** a sanctuary, that **I** may dwell among them. According to **all that I show you**, that is, **the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.**”* (Exodus 25:8-9)

For what purpose were God’s ancient people to construct this special tent? And why was it so important that it be made exactly “*according to...the pattern*” given to them by God?

God planned to use this tabernacle to teach them, in a very visual way, what He is like and how He must be approached.

The Bible contains fifty chapters about the tabernacle and what accompanied it, so it can’t all be explained here. We can only point out some of the most basic elements.

ONE WAY

God designed the tabernacle to teach the world that even though He is perfectly holy, He still wants to dwell with people. However, there is a major barrier between God and man.

That barrier is SIN.

The special tent that symbolized God's presence among humans was enclosed within a huge, rectangular courtyard. The *fence* of this courtyard was constructed of bronze pillars and fine linen material. It was two and a half meters in height—high enough so no man could see over it. God wanted people to understand that they are shut out from His presence. That was the bad news.

The good news was that God provided a way for sinners to come near to Him. The wall had a door which was made of blue, purple, and scarlet thread. The only way sinners could approach God was to enter through that *one door*¹⁹⁴ with a lamb or other suitable blood sacrifice.

The LORD told the Israelites to construct a large *altar* of acacia wood and overlay it with bronze. This altar was to be placed between the door and God's special tent. Those bringing a sin-offering would place their hands on the innocent creature's head and confess their condition as helpless sinners. Then the animal would be killed and its body burned upon the altar. Once again, God was telling people that *the law of sin and death* could only be overcome by *the law of the sacrifice*.¹⁹⁵

God's rule was clear: Without the shedding of blood, there could be no covering for sin. Without a covering for sin, there could be no reconciliation (right relationship) with God.

God also told Moses to construct a unique wooden chest overlaid with gold. This piece of furniture was called *the Ark of the Covenant*. It symbolized God's throne in heaven. The stone tablets on which God had etched the Ten Commandments were placed inside this golden chest. The solid gold cover of the box, called *the Mercy Seat*, was overshadowed by figures of two cherubim made of gold. Cherubim are the magnificent angels that surround God's throne in heaven. God told Moses to place the Ark of the Covenant in the innermost room of the tabernacle.

THE HOLIEST PLACE

The tabernacle was divided into two rooms. The front room was called *the Holy Place* and the innermost room was called *the Holiest Place* or *the Holy of Holies*. This inner sanctuary "*was only a copy of the true one... **heaven itself.***" (Hebrews 9:24 NIV)

The Holiest Place symbolized Paradise, God's dwelling place. This special room was shaped like a cube—its length, width, and height were equal. Near the end of our journey through the Scriptures, we will see that the heavenly city, which will one day be home to all believers, is also in the shape of a cube.

People talk about a cathedral, church building, mosque, synagogue, or shrine as being holy, even though these places are often filled with people who reject God's way of redemption. True holiness is found not by entering a special building, but by receiving God's provision of forgiveness and righteousness.

THE VEIL

The tabernacle's exterior was simple: a large tent made of animal hides. It was unimpressive on the *outside*, but stunningly beautiful on the *inside*.¹⁹⁶

The tabernacle's two rooms were divided by a thick curtain called *the veil*.

*"You shall make **a veil** woven of **blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen**. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim."* (Exodus 26:31)

The veil shut man out from *the Holiest Place* which housed the glory and light of God's Presence. To one and all, the veil declared: **KEEP OUT or DIE!**

This special curtain symbolized God's standard of righteousness. The LORD had informed mankind of that standard by giving Moses the Ten Commandments. Nonetheless, those ten rules only provided a limited view of what God demands. God's ultimate plan was to send to earth His Son who would demonstrate what He requires: PERFECTION.

The Messiah would be God's Standard. God designed the veil to make us think of **Him**.

This beautiful curtain was made of pure linen material, picturing the Messiah's purity. He would be holy; without sin.

Woven into the pure cloth were three brilliant colors—blue, purple, and scarlet (red).

Blue = color of the heavens. The Messiah would be the Lord from heaven.

Red = color of earth, man, and blood.¹⁹⁷ The Messiah would take on a body of flesh and blood in order to suffer and die in the place of sinners.

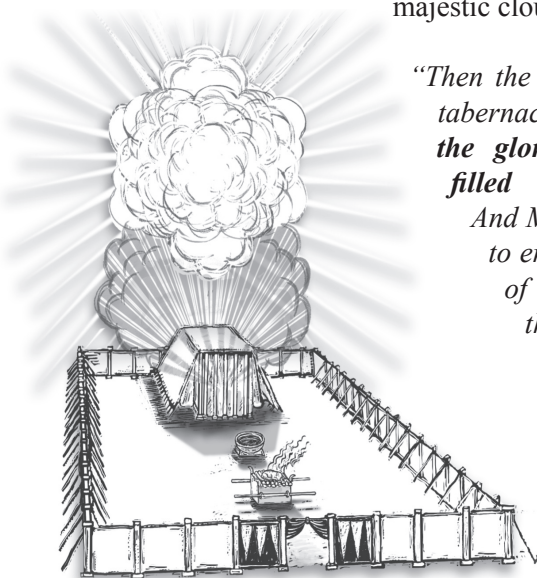
Purple = blend of blue and red. The Messiah would be the God-Man. Purple is the color of royalty: the Messiah would establish His spiritual kingdom in the hearts of all who trust in Him. Later, He will establish His physical kingdom on earth.

Just as purple is the intermediary color between blue and red, so the Messiah would come to mediate between God and man.

*“For there is one God and **one Mediator between God and men**, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”* (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

THE GLORY CLOUD

Once the tabernacle was constructed and everything was in place according to God’s plan, He sent down from heaven’s throne the glory of His Presence—contained in a majestic cloud.



*“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the **LORD** filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the **LORD** filled the tabernacle.”*
(Exodus 40:34-35)

The LORD placed the dazzling light of His Presence in the Holiest Place between the two cherubim on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant.

God had come in a visible kind of way to be with His people.

*“The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! **He dwells** between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved!”* (Psalm 99:1)

By placing His glory in the Holiest Place and His cloud above the tabernacle, the Creator was teaching the nations of the world, and generations yet to be born, an all-important lesson: the one true God invites sinners to have a relationship with Himself, but only under certain conditions.

VISUAL ILLUSTRATIONS

The tabernacle provided countless visual aids for those who wanted to know about God and His plan for people.

Picture the scene.

In accordance with God’s precise instructions, this redeemed nation of slaves—the twelve tribes of Israel—had pitched their tents at the foot of Mount Sinai in an orderly fashion in the form of a cross. The tabernacle was at the center, with three tribes pitching their tents to the south, three tribes to the north, three tribes to the west, and three tribes to the east.¹⁹⁸ With the radiant glory cloud hovering overhead, none could deny that the one true God was in their midst.

Other visual lessons could be learned from the fact that the tabernacle-tent was surrounded by a high, white linen wall with only one door. Inside the door was an altar. Sinners were shut out from the glory of God, unless they approached Him on the basis of the shed blood of a symbolically perfect sacrifice.

*“The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for **it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.**”*
(Leviticus 17:11)

Apart from a death payment there could be no forgiveness of sin. And since it was impossible for people to bring a sacrifice to the tabernacle each time they sinned, God commanded that a lamb be killed and burned on the altar every day of the year, morning and evening. All who trusted in the LORD and His plan could enjoy the benefits of these daily offerings, a restored relationship with their Creator.

*“This is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, **day by day continually**. One **lamb** you shall offer in the morning, and the other **lamb** you shall offer at twilight ... This shall be a **continual burnt offering** throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, **where I will meet you to speak with you.**” (Exodus 29:38-39, 42)*

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

To illustrate His truth further, God told His people there was only one manner by which sinners could enter the Holiest Place (the special room that symbolized heaven itself). One day a year, a specially-chosen man, called the high priest, would be allowed to enter that inner sanctuary. On this *Day of Atonement*,¹⁹⁹ the high priest would go past the veil. He would take with him the blood of a sacrificed goat and sprinkle it seven times both in front of and on the Mercy Seat (the lid of the Ark of the Covenant). If the high priest entered God’s presence in any other way, he would be struck dead. On the basis of that sprinkled blood, God promised to forgive the sins of the Israelites for another year – if they would simply trust in Him and His provision.

All the details of the tabernacle, its furniture, and activities, were designed to transmit vivid pictures to the world about how condemned sinners could have their sins covered and their broken relationship restored with their perfectly holy Creator. It all pointed to the promised Messiah and His mission.

Thus, down through the centuries, using the channel of His chosen nation, the LORD broadcast hundreds of pictures and communicated many wonderful promises to a world lost in sin.

THE TEMPLE AND ITS SACRIFICES

Five hundred years after Moses and the children of Israel built this special tent to house the Presence of the LORD, God directed King Solomon to replace the *portable tabernacle* with a more *permanent temple*. The layout of this new structure in Jerusalem was similar to the tabernacle, though it was much larger and even more beautiful. Solomon's Temple became one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world.

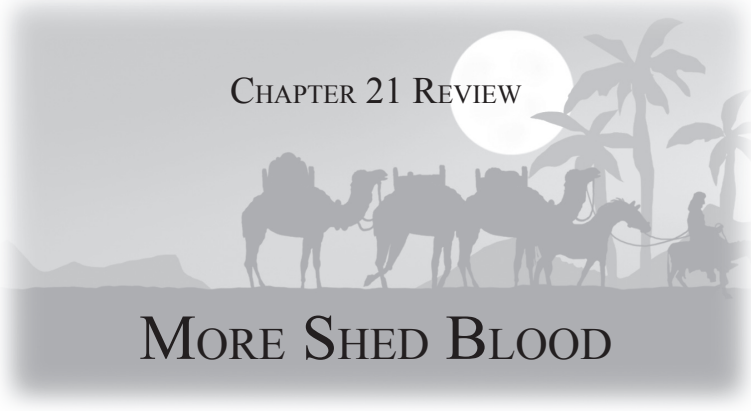
Just as the glory of God had descended from heaven to fill the Holiest Place in the tabernacle on the day of its inauguration, so the glorious, uncreated light of God's Presence came down and filled the temple.

*“When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and **the glory of the LORD filled the temple**. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.”* (2 Chronicles 7:1-2)

The temple was built on the same mountain ridge where, a thousand years earlier, Abraham had sacrificed a ram in place of his son.²⁰⁰ To dedicate this special temple to God, King Solomon ordered that 120,000 sheep and 22,000 bulls be sacrificed.²⁰¹ This extravagance symbolized the incalculable worth of the precious blood to be shed a millennium later on a nearby hill.

Thus, from the time of Adam, Abel, Abraham, and onward, millions of symbolic blood sacrifices were offered on altars to cover sin—year after wearying year....

Then the Messiah came.



CHAPTER 21 REVIEW

MORE SHED BLOOD

1. In the story of the Passover, in what way did *every* household throughout the land of Egypt witness a death?
2. Name two important lessons God intended for people to learn from the tabernacle.
3. What did the Ark of the Covenant symbolize?
4. Once the tabernacle was completed, what did God send down from heaven?
5. What was the purpose of the veil? Was there a way for man to go beyond the veil and enter into the Holiest Place? Explain.
6. In your own words, explain Hebrews 9:22. “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”



*“God is **love**. ”* (1 John 4:8)

*“God is **great**. ”* (Job 36:26)

The God who is *love* desires a close relationship with His people. The theme of God’s social-relational nature is revealed in the first chapter of His Book.

God created Adam and Eve “*in His own image*” so that He might enjoy fellowship with them (Genesis 1:27). This same “*God with us*” theme²⁰² carries through to the last chapter of the Bible, when His redeemed people “*shall see His face*” and be with Him forever (Revelation 22:4). Anyone who fails to see this has missed the central theme of God’s Book.

The God who is *great* can do anything He wants to do.

“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?” (Jeremiah 32:27)

No genuine monotheist can claim that God could not become man if He wanted to. If there were something the Almighty could not do (apart from contradicting Himself), then He would be less than God.

The question is not: *Can* God become man?

The question is: Did God *choose* to become man?



GOD'S TRUE TABERNACLE

One thousand five hundred years after God commanded the Israelites to construct a unique tabernacle-tent so that He might *“dwell among them”* (Exodus 25:8), the Scriptures declare:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1,14 NIV)

The phrase translated *“made his dwelling”* comes from a Greek word meaning *to set up a tent or tabernacle*. It can be translated literally: *“He set up His tent among us.”* The Scriptures describe a person's body as the *“tent”* or *“temple”* in which his or her soul and spirit dwell.²⁰³ As we learned in chapter 16, the eternal Son of God was born as a baby boy. His human body was *the tent* in which He chose to dwell.

In Moses' day, the tabernacle structure in which God placed the glorious, uncreated light of His Presence was covered with *animal skins*. But in the Person of Jesus, God's glorious, uncreated light and Presence had come to dwell in *human skin*. Thus, His disciples could say, *“We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father!”*

The Scripture declares that Jesus was *“the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.”* (Hebrews 8:2)

In Old Testament times, the tabernacle, and later the temple, was a place where sinners could present animal sacrifices to cover their sin. When Jesus was a boy and as He grew into manhood, He visited the temple in Jerusalem on many occasions, but we never read of Him offering a sacrifice for sin. Why not? He had no sin. Jesus had *“appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”* (Hebrews 9:26) He would become the offering and a Roman cross would become the altar.

Jesus was the reality behind the symbols.

“God was manifested in the flesh.” (1 Timothy 3:16)

On one occasion, Jesus was standing near the great temple in Jerusalem and told a group of men:

*“‘Destroy **this temple**, and in three days I will raise it up.’*

Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’

***But He was speaking of the temple of His body.** Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”* (John 2:19-22)

The Jews didn’t understand that “*the temple*” of which Jesus spoke was His body. They thought He was talking about the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. But the light and glory of God’s Presence was no longer in the Holiest Place of that man-made temple.

It was now in the “*temple*” of Jesus’ body.

Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus allowed three of His disciples to witness this glorious outshining of God.

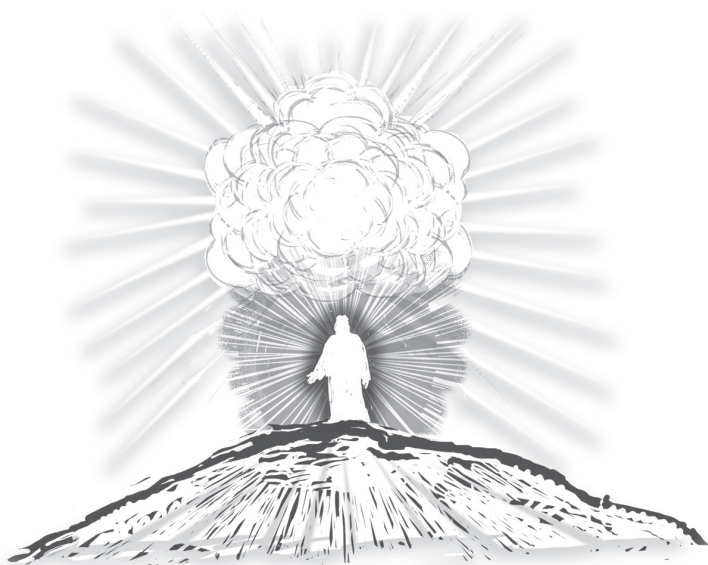
*“Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. **His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.***

*And behold... **a bright cloud overshadowed them;** and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying,*

***‘This is My beloved Son,
in whom I am well pleased.***

Hear Him!’” (Matthew 17:1-5)

The blazing, dazzling, pure light of God that causes angels in heaven to cover their faces was *in Jesus*. The same glorious Presence that had resided in the Holiest Place of the tabernacle and temple was dwelling *in Jesus*.



The brilliant cloud that had once overshadowed the tabernacle now overshadowed the place where Jesus stood.

Jesus was God's visible Presence on earth.

This radiant outshining of the glory of the Son of God was accompanied by the Father speaking from heaven:

*"This is **My beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased. **Hear Him!**"*

God is serious about this.

A thousand years before the Son of God became the Son of Man, the prophet David wrote, "**Kiss the Son**, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him!" (Psalm 2:12)

"Kiss the Son," means **honor the Son**.

From time to time, I see people kissing the heads and hands of religious leaders—men who are helpless sinners like themselves. I see those same people making pilgrimages to honor men whose flesh has returned to dust. Meanwhile, God has announced to the world "**that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him... for the Father loves the Son.**" (John 5:23,20)

THE FORERUNNER

Isaiah was one of two prophets who wrote about a specially chosen herald who would “*prepare the way of the LORD.*” (Isaiah 40:3) That forerunner was the prophet John, son of Zacharias.²⁰⁴ While previous prophets proclaimed, “God *will send* the Messiah into the world,” the prophet John had the distinct honor to announce, “The promised Messiah, the LORD Himself, *is here!*”

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.”’” (Matthew 3:1-3)

REPENTANCE

To prepare people for the LORD’s arrival, John’s message to the people was simple.

“Repent!”

The word *repent* comes from the Greek word *metanoeo*. It has two parts: *meta* and *noeo*. The first part means *movement* or *change*. The second part refers to the *thoughts of the mind*. Therefore the basic meaning of *repent* is to have *a change of mind*; to replace your wrong thinking with right thinking.

To put the term “repent” into an everyday context, suppose I want to travel by bus from one city to another—let’s say from Beirut to Amman. I climb on what I believe to be the correct bus and settle into my seat for a nap. Some time later, as the bus is speeding along the highway, I discover that it is not heading south to Amman, but north to Istanbul! What should I do?

I have two choices:

Being too proud to admit my error, I can *remain* on that bus and end up at the wrong destination.

Or, I can humble myself and *repent*, that is, have a change of mind, admitting that I chose the wrong bus. The sincerity of my

repentance becomes evident when I get off at the next stop and get on the proper bus.

True repentance leads a person to *turn from falsehood* and *trust the truth*.

Repentance can be compared to the two sides of a coin.

One side says: **REPENT!**

The other side says: **BELIEVE!**

The two sides are part of the same truth:

“...repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21)

Repentance means to have a change of mind about what you are trusting for salvation. *Faith* means to trust in God’s provision of salvation.

There is no true faith apart from repentance.

Accordingly, the prophet John’s message went something like this: “Repent of your wrong thinking! Admit that you cannot save yourselves and welcome the promised Messiah-King from Heaven! He has come to deliver you from your worst enemies—if you will stop trusting in yourselves and start trusting in Him!”

Those who admitted their sinful condition before God were baptized by John in the river. That is why John became known as *John the Baptizer*. Being baptized in water could not and cannot wash away sin. Being immersed in the river was a way for people to express *outwardly* that they had embraced *inwardly* God’s message about the Messiah who was coming to cleanse repentant, believing sinners from their defiled condition.

THE CHOSEN ONE

At the start of His earthly ministry, Jesus came to John to be baptized in the Jordan River. The sinless Messiah did not need to repent of anything, but by being baptized He identified Himself with the fallen human race He had come to deliver.

What followed Jesus’ baptism is a scene never to be forgotten. It gives us another glimpse of the one true God in His complex oneness and majesty.

*“When He had been baptized, **Jesus** came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly **a voice came from heaven**, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” (Matthew 3:16-17)*

As on the first day of creation, this narrative reveals the Presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, at this key moment in history, God was revealing His plural oneness with greater clarity. In our journey through the Scriptures, this is one of those spots where each traveler needs to stop, take some pictures, and reflect.

Here is the scene. Under a dramatic and radiant sky, **the Son of God** (*the Word* by whom heaven and earth were created) walks up out of the river. At the same moment, **the Spirit of God** (*the Spirit* who was hovering over the face of the waters on the first day of creation) descends from heaven, hovering over and settling on Jesus in the form of a dove. And, finally, the voice of **God the Father** resounds from heaven: *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

Throughout the previous thirty years, Jesus had lived behind the scenes in a poor family in the modest town of Nazareth. Though He was out of the public eye, the Father in Heaven had His eye on His beloved Son all those years. And now we hear God’s verdict on Jesus’ life: *“**I am well pleased.**”*

God could not say this of any other human being ever born. Only Jesus pleased Him in every detail—inwardly and outwardly. As the Son from Heaven, He was holy, undefiled, and qualified to do what He came to do. He was the Messiah—*the Anointed One*—God’s Chosen One. God anointed Him, not with oil (as was done for priest and kings²⁰⁵), but with the Holy Spirit Himself.

*“**God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power....**” (Acts 10:38)*

Jesus was the One about whom all the prophets had written.

THE LAMB OF GOD

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29)

The prophet John’s announcement is loaded with meaning.

- *“Behold! The Lamb of God...”*

John’s audience understood to some extent the meaning of “the lamb.” Ever since sin’s entrance, people began bringing lambs as sin offerings. Over fifteen long centuries, lambs had been sacrificed morning and evening on the bronze altar. And now *God’s own Lamb* was on the scene! Two millennia earlier, Abraham had told his son, “*God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.*” (Genesis 22:8) God did indeed provide a substitute to die instead of Abraham’s son, but it was not “*the lamb.*” It was “*a ram.*” (Genesis 22:13) “*The lamb*” in Abraham’s prophecy was the Messiah Himself. Abraham was pointing forward to Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus said, “*Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*” (John 8:56)

- *“...who takes away the sin...”*

Since the time of Adam, innocent animal blood had symbolically *covered* the sin of those who trusted in God and His plan, but what Jesus came to do would be different. He would *take away sin*—completely and forever.

- *“...of the world!”*

In the past, blood sacrifices for sin had been offered on behalf of a *person*, a *family*, or a *nation*. But the blood of Jesus would make available a full and final payment for the past, present, and future sin-debt of the *entire world*.

Does the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world mean that every person ever born is automatically forgiven by God? No. From the day sin entered the human race God has always required personal faith in Him and His provision.²⁰⁶

*“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But **as many as received** Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those **who believe** in His name.” (John 1:11-12)*

SHADOWS AND SYMBOLS

In bygone years, each innocent, spotless lamb sacrificed for sin was “*a shadow of the good things to come.*” (Hebrews 10:1)

A shadow is not to be confused with the object that casts the shadow. If you are looking down at the ground as a friend walks in your direction, you may see his shadow before you see him, but once he is standing before you, will you not look at your friend and speak with him instead of his shadow?

Old Testament sacrifices were God-designed *shadows* that outlined and announced the coming Messiah. God expects us to look and listen to Him.

*“For it is **not possible** that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when **He** [Messiah] came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, **but a body You have prepared for Me.** In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I [Messiah] said, ‘Behold, **I have come**—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.’... He takes away the first [animal sacrifices] that He may establish the second [His own sacrifice]. By that will we have been sanctified [made holy] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all.**” (Hebrews 10:4-7,9-10)*


Animal-blood sacrifices were mere *symbols* of what God would ultimately require. Animals were not created in God’s image. The value of a lamb is not equal to the value of a man. Just as you can’t take a toy model car to a car dealer and offer it as payment for a real car, so the blood of a lamb could not pay man’s sin-debt. A sacrifice of equal or greater value was required.

Jesus the Lamb of God came to provide that sacrifice.



A POOR PLANNER?

A couple of years ago, I corresponded with a doctor of philosophy. In response to the declaration that Jesus came to “*take away the sin of the world*,” he wrote:

 Send	Subject: Email Feedback
<p>What happens to the people who were born and died before God decided to concoct this charade only 2000 years ago? It seems that the Christian God is a poor planner and a late thinker because it took him thousands if not millions of years to find a way of forgiving ‘the sins’ of mankind.</p>	

It seems that this man, who has since passed away, failed to recognize the meaning behind the millions of sacrificed lambs and the hundreds of prophecies, which all pointed to the day when the Messiah would endure the penalty for the sins of mankind—past, present, and future. From the beginning, God’s rescue plan included paying for “*the sins that were **previously** committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness.*” (Romans 3:25-26)

God forgave sinners before the time of Christ on the same basis He forgives sinners today—by faith in the promises and provision of God.

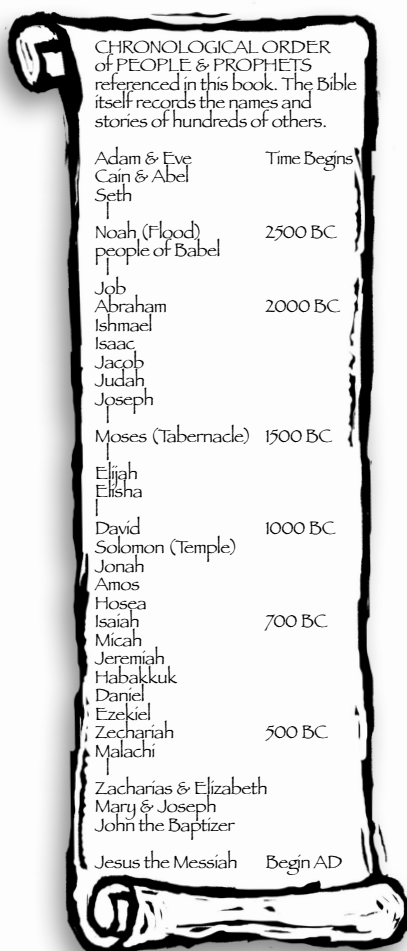
Of course, there was a difference.

Believers who lived before the time of Jesus Christ had their sins *covered*. It would be only after Jesus had shed His blood and overcome death that a sinner’s debt could be forever *canceled* from the record books.

Before Jesus the Lamb of God came to earth, a man offering an animal sacrifice on an altar was somewhat like a struggling businessman who takes out a loan at the bank.

A wealthy friend agrees to cosign the loan, promising to pay off the debt if the businessman fails to reimburse the borrowed money. With each passing year, the businessman fails to pay back the loan, going deeper and deeper in debt. And each year his rich friend signs another note at the bank to cover the struggling man’s debt. What keeps the failing businessman from going bankrupt and to jail? His debts are covered by the notes of guarantee from his wealthy, trustworthy friend.

Old Testament animal sacrifices were a sinner's "notes of guarantee," temporarily accepted by God. The Record Keeper of the universe, who has a flawless history of respecting His contracts and balancing His books, promised to accept the blood of blemish-free animals as a *covering* for sin. But animal blood could not *cancel* man's accumulated sin-debt. It only served as "***a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.***" (Hebrews 10:3-4)



Sin is a serious problem that only the shedding of the blood of God's eternal Son could resolve. Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to pay off the sin-debt of mankind.

What do *you* think?

Is God "a poor planner and a late thinker"? Or did the prophet John and his followers have good reason for identifying Jesus of Nazareth as "***the Messiah... of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote,***" and as "***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***"? (John 1)

Our Creator, the Best of Planners, never had any other plan for dealing with man's sin problem. From His timeless perspective, His beloved Son always was, is, and shall evermore be:

***"...the Lamb slain
from the foundation
of the world."***

(Revelation 13:8)



CHAPTER 22 REVIEW

THE LAMB

1. What is the central theme of God's Book?
2. Name at least two ways the Messiah fulfilled the symbols of the tabernacle.
3. Using an illustration from everyday life, explain what it means to "repent."
4. What did God say about Jesus that He could not say about any other person?
5. In what way did sacrificed lambs provide shadows and symbols of God's plan to pay off the sin-debt of mankind?
6. In your own words, explain John 1:29. "*John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'*"

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 19: THE LAW OF THE SACRIFICE

¹⁷⁸ How did Abel know to do all this? God had told him. Hebrews 11:4 tells us that he brought the sacrifice “*by faith*”—faith in what God had commanded and promised. Later, the Scriptures would provide in written format God’s detailed laws concerning the substitutionary sacrifice, which Abel had obediently presented long before. Genesis 4:4 states that Abel brought “*the firstborn*” (compare Exodus 13:12-13), a lamb “*of his flock*” (see Leviticus 5:6), and offered “*of their fat*” (see Leviticus 3:16). It is not stated that Abel offered his lamb on an altar, but it is likely he did so, just as the believers who came after him did. Genesis 8:20; 12:7; 13:4,18; 22:8-9; Exodus 20:24-26; Leviticus 17:11; etc.

¹⁷⁹ Daniel 6; Esther 3:8-15; 8:7-17

¹⁸⁰ Strong, James. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948, p. 57. Compare Genesis 6:14 (“*cover*”) with Leviticus 5:18 (“*atonement*”). The same Hebrew word *Kâphar* (atonement) is used in these verses.

¹⁸¹ Leviticus 5:7

¹⁸² More than 50 times the Scriptures declare that the sacrifice had to be “*without blemish*.” For example, “*If his offering is of the flocks—of the sheep or of the goats—as a burnt sacrifice, he shall bring a male **without blemish***.” (Leviticus 1:10)

CHAPTER 20: A MOMENTOUS SACRIFICE

¹⁸³ *Eid al-Adha* is the most significant Islamic holiday of the year. It points back to the event when God provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son. According to widespread Muslim belief the son to be sacrificed was Ishmael, not Isaac—although the Qur’an itself never states that it was Ishmael, and the Bible clearly shows that it was Isaac. The sacrifice of Eid is carried out by Muslims worldwide. It is also performed as a final ritual in the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca. Pilgrims complete the Hajj by shedding the blood of an animal (usually a sheep or a cow) after the morning Eid prayer. Most Muslims believe these rituals provide them with a kind of “new birth” and that if they perform them correctly their sins are washed away. However, Muslims also acknowledge that these

rituals cannot provide assurance of salvation since they immediately begin to accumulate more sins after the Hajj and sacrifice of Eid. (For the biblical perspective, read Hebrews chapter 10 and John chapter 3.)

¹⁸⁴ At first, Abraham's name was Abram. Due to space constraints, this part of the story is not explained in ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE. See Genesis 17. For Abraham's full story, read Genesis 11 to 25; also read Romans 4, Galatians 4, and Hebrews 11.

¹⁸⁵ Deuteronomy 7:6-7; 14:2

¹⁸⁶ Here are a few examples in which God used the nation of Israel to bless non-Jewish people: Joseph saved the lives of millions of Egyptians (Genesis 37–50). Naomi, a daughter of Abraham, was a blessing to two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth (Book of Ruth in Old Testament). The prophet Elijah was a blessing to a Sidonian widow (1 Kings 17; Luke 4:26). Jonah, though reluctantly, delivered a message of salvation to the Ninevites (Jonah). King Solomon was a blessing to Queen Sheba of Arabia (1 Kings 10; Luke 11:31). Daniel blessed the Babylonians (Daniel 1–6). Esther and Mordecai brought blessing to the Persian Empire (Esther)...

¹⁸⁷ Genesis 12:2-3; 22:16-18; Hebrews 6:13-20; John 4:22; Acts 1–10, etc.

¹⁸⁸ *"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called, concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.'"* (Hebrews 11:17-19)

CHAPTER 21: MORE SHED BLOOD

¹⁸⁹ I started counting the "sacrifice stories" in the Old Testament, but stopped counting after reaching the 200th story! The four words: "blood," "sacrifice," "offering" and "altar" are found more than 1400 times in the Bible (NKJV).

¹⁹⁰ Genesis 15:13-14 *"Then He said to Abram: 'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them **four hundred years**. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; **afterward they shall come out with great possessions**.'"* The fulfillment of God's promise is recorded in Exodus 1:1-12; 12:35-41. God is sovereign. His plans always happen.

¹⁹¹ Exodus 5-11

¹⁹² Some time earlier, from within the burning bush on Mount Sinai, God had promised Moses: *"I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."* (Exodus 3:12)

¹⁹³ Exodus 13-17; “He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it ran in the dry places like a river.” (Psalm 105:41)

¹⁹⁴ Exodus 28:9-19; Later, when the Messiah was on earth, He said, “I am **the door**. If anyone enters by Me, he will be **saved**.” (John 10:9) Every element in the tabernacle pointed to His Person and work.

¹⁹⁵ “And he shall **lay his hand** on the head of his offering, and **kill it** at the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron’s sons, the priests, shall **sprinkle the blood all around on the altar**... and Aaron’s sons shall **burn it** on the altar.” (Leviticus 3:2,5)

¹⁹⁶ The Tabernacle presented a kind of picture of the Savior who would come from heaven to earth. To those who really know that Savior, “He is *altogether lovely*” (Song of Solomon 5:16)—like the inside of the tabernacle. To those who don’t know Him, “there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” (Isaiah 53:2-3)—like the outside of the tabernacle.

¹⁹⁷ Adam (*Adamah*) is the Hebrew word for “man” and literally means “red earth,” because God formed Adam’s body from the earth’s soil.

¹⁹⁸ Numbers 3:23-39

¹⁹⁹ Leviticus 16; Today Jews call the Day of Atonement *Yom Kippur*, but the Day is devoid of its original meaning since they have no temple, no priesthood, and no sacrificial lamb. Ironically, one of the symbols of Judaism today is a wall (the Western Wall; a retaining wall built by Herod the Great to enlarge the Temple Mount area). Jews stand before it daily and pray for the Messiah—who has already come—to come! As foretold by the prophets, the Jewish nation is spiritually blind (Isaiah 6:10; 53:1; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6). One day their eyes will be opened to understand that Jesus (*Yeshua*) is the One who fulfilled the symbolisms of the temple, priesthood, and sacrifices (Hebrews 8–10; Ephesians 2). The wall of spiritual blindness will come down (Ephesians 2:14; Romans 9-11). See chapter 5 in this book, under subtitle: PROPHECIES ABOUT A PEOPLE. Also read the endnotes.

²⁰⁰ 2 Chronicles 3:1 compare with Genesis 22:2. It was on this same location that Muslims built the Dome of the Rock mosque in the 7th century.

²⁰¹ 2 Chronicles 7:5

CHAPTER 22: THE LAMB

²⁰² One of the LORD’s titles in Scripture is *Immanuel*, meaning literally, “*With us (is) God*.” (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23)

²⁰³ 2 Corinthians 5:1-4; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Peter 1:13-14; Ephesians 2:21

²⁰⁴ Isaiah 40:3-9; Malachi 3:1; Luke 1; John 1

²⁰⁵ Throughout the Bible, whenever a man was chosen by God to be a

priest or king, an authorized person such as a prophet would anoint him with oil to show that he was selected by God for a specific task. God anointed His Son with the Holy Spirit Himself. In Scripture, oil is often used to symbolize the Holy Spirit. **Note:** Just as all three Persons of the Godhead were involved in the work of *creation*, so the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were also involved in the work of *redemption*.

²⁰⁶ “*The righteous will live by his faith.*” (Habakkuk 2:4) While the sacrifice Jesus came to offer would be sufficient to “*take away the sin of the world,*” it would only benefit those who believed that Jesus’ sacrifice was for them. This truth can be illustrated by our “Way of Righteousness” radio programs in Senegal (www.twor.com; www.lesprophetes.com). On many broadcasts, listeners are offered a free copy of the Scriptures. All who write and ask for it, receive it free of charge. Is this offer valid for *all* the millions of people who tune in? *Yes*. Do *all* listeners write to us to request their free copy of the Scriptures? *No*. Most do not take advantage of the offer. Similarly, through the all-sufficient sacrifice of His Son, God has provided forgiveness and eternal life for all. However, only a small percentage of Adam’s offspring accept God’s offer. See Luke 14:15-24.