

## Portraits of Christ in the Old Testament – Lesson 1

### Typology – The Lamb of God

“Are you telling me your God is a carnivore?” said Sanjay.

“No, absolutely not, God is not a carnivore or an herbivore,” Gloria said fast. How did Sanjay reach this conclusion? Quickly, Gloria backtracked trying to discover where their Bible study had made a wrong turn. When Gloria and her husband befriended a college student from India, she dreamed of a day when she might share a Bible study with him. Years later, after many holidays and family dinners her dream was now a reality, but she had not fully appreciated Sanjay’s Hindu background as they began the story of Cain and Abel. And, his conclusions about God’s acceptance of Abel’s sacrifice were definitely obscuring the true message of the gospel. Without a clear understanding that God is prophesying through the story of Cain and Abel, we too will draw the wrong conclusions from this passage.

The story of Cain and Abel is an example of Old Testament typology. Typology is the study of types or pictures of Jesus which foreshadow the coming of Christ in human history. Cain and Abel’s story in Genesis 4:1-10 is the first portrayal of a lamb in the Old Testament.

In John chapter 1, John the Baptist calls Jesus “the Lamb of God” and with this pronouncement he identifies a portrait of Christ first introduced in the Old Testament. Why did God choose a lamb as a metaphor to picture Jesus? Animals usually adopted as a symbol for a group to rally around are picked because they are ferocious in some way and will look intimidating or menacing to an enemy. Nobody picks a lamb. For example, both Mexico and the United States use an eagle as part of their symbolism. Other groups have chosen lions, tigers, bears, and even sharks. So, why was God choosing a lamb?

Look again at John the Baptist’s words in John 1:29, “...Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” When lambs appear in the Bible, they are usually in a story of sacrifice. Sheep are docile animals that have been domesticated from early times, but John isn’t just referencing sheep. Specifically, he speaks of a lamb, a baby sheep. Lambs are playful, helpless, innocent, pure, and willing to be led to the slaughter. Jesus is gentle and does not force his will on anyone. A lamb, then, is a perfect picture to illustrate Jesus’ mission and his character. He would go to the cross willingly, live a sinless life and lay down his life for the sins of humanity. As one of my professors used to remind us, “If we would follow Jesus, we must remember we are following a lamb.”

In Genesis 4:1-10, God accepted Abel’s sacrifice, but rejected Cain’s. Abel, a shepherd, brought a first-born lamb from his herd to be sacrificed to God, but Cain, a farmer, brought a sacrifice from the produce of the land. God accepted Abel’s sacrifice because it pointed to Jesus. If you want to understand the portrait of the Lamb, you must see God is prophesying through this story.

In Hebrews 11:4, the writer wrote this, “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.

And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.” How was Abel’s choice of a sacrifice an example of faith? In Luke 11:51, Jesus references Abel as a prophet who along with other prophets gave their lives to proclaim God’s truth. So, God must have told Abel what sacrifice to use. Abel’s obedience then becomes an example of faith. He worshipped God through the only way which was acceptable to God; God designed worship to be done through the blood of the lamb.

Scripture does not say how God endorsed Abel’s sacrifice, but theologians have speculated by examining other passages where God approved of a sacrifice. In Genesis 15:7-21, God provides the fire for the sacrifice which Abram made to him. Additional Bible passages record God himself supplied the fire during the offering at the dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Lev. 9:22-24), during the dedication of Solomon’s temple (2Chron. 7:1-3), and during Elijah’s battle with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:24, 36-39). Whatever method God chose, he made it clear that Abel’s offering was accepted and Cain’s was not. Not only does God use the events of this sacrifice to prophecy, but in the next lamb snapshot we learn that God alone can provide our sacrifice.

If you want to understand the portrait of the Lamb, you must see God alone provides our sacrifice through this story. In Genesis 22, we find the story when God tested Abraham’s devotion by asking him to sacrifice his only son Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Isaac was the son of the promise God had given to Abraham. Yet, Hebrews 11:19 records Abraham trusted God as he climbed Mt. Moriah reasoning that God could raise Isaac from the dead. While on that mountain, God miraculously provides a ram for Abraham, so Isaac could be spared after he saw Abraham’s willingness to obey God’s call no matter the cost. Listen to the angel of the Lord’s words to Abraham in Genesis 22:11b-13a, “‘...Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’ He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.’ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns...”

Did you catch the parallels between Jesus’ sacrifice and this story? The ram God provided to save Isaac’s life is literally wearing a crown of thorns. In Genesis 22, God provided a ram, so Abraham would not lose his only son of the promise, Isaac. At Golgotha, though, God would give his one and only son as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. Abraham’s son was saved while God’s only son was slain. We cannot in our strength provide a sacrifice good enough to meet the demands of a holy God (Rev. 1:5b). Without God’s plans of deliverance and Jesus’ willingness to go to the cross, we cannot be set free from our sin (John 10:17-18). When God provided the ram caught in the thicket, he was foreshadowing Christ’s sacrificial death for the sins of the world.

Lastly, in Exodus 12 there is one more Old Testament event we need to examine to fully see the importance of the Lamb’s typology. If you want to understand the portrait of the Lamb, you must see God is protecting through this story. This episode is an example of a community’s shared faith in the power of the Lamb’s blood. In this piece of history from the Exodus, we find the final plague sent to Egypt, when God executed his judgments against the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12). To protect the Israelites from the Destroyer of the first born, the lambs not only were slain, but their blood was poured into a basin and sprinkled over the door post and lintels of their homes. When God saw the blood, he passed

over the houses under the protection of the blood of the lamb. Like the Passover Lamb, Jesus' blood is our only means of deliverance from God's future judgment and wrath, and it also speaks of our need for personal application (Heb. 9:22). Many of us have a theological understanding that Jesus is the Lamb of God, but we have never applied his blood to our lives. We possess head knowledge, but not real heart knowledge. His sacrifice will not spiritually protect us without a personal faith in the power of Christ's work on the cross. Nothing but physically applying the blood of the lamb to their homes could defend the Israelites from the death marching on Egypt. Those who mistakenly trusted in the palace's shields were helpless to protect even the son of Pharaoh from the terror of that night. Likewise, our only hope is trusting in the power of Jesus' blood sacrifice.

The picture of the Lamb is one of the greatest portraits of Christ in the entire word of God. It is a metaphor illustrating God's mercy embedded in the pages of Genesis and found all the way through to the book of Revelation. In Christ, God did for us what we were helpless to do for ourselves. Jesus' sacrifice restored our broken relationship with God when he willingly paid the ultimate price for our sins. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who was slain before the foundation of the world (Rev.13:8). If you want to understand the portrait of the Lamb, you must see God is prophesying about Jesus' coming (Gen. 4:1-10), providing the way of salvation (Gen. 22), and protecting us under the blood (Ex. 12) through this Old Testament portrait.

Before engaging in these questions stop and ask God to speak to you and then begin.

- 1) God's long-range plans to rescue humanity are quite surprising in their depth and detail. What would change if you believed God's plans for your life were that long range?
  
- 2) Scriptures teach we come to God through Jesus' sacrifice and not our own attempts at good works (John 14:6). What might change if you believed God prescribes the way we come to him?
  
- 3) Many people believe Jesus is the Lamb of God, but have not personally applied his blood to their lives. If Israel had only shed the lamb's blood, but had not applied it to the door post and lintels of their homes, the Destroyer of the first born would not have passed over their abodes. The spiritual protection of God is found under Jesus' blood (Rev. 12:11). Have you personally applied the blood of Christ to your life?