

The Great Sacrifice

Into The Light @ <http://islam.itl.org.uk>

Every Muslim in the world celebrates the festival of '*Eid al-adha*' with great feeling. This festival is celebrated in memory of the sacrifice that Abraham offered. Muslims believe that God put Abraham to the test by asking him to sacrifice his son and at the right moment God provided a lamb. They claim it was Ishmael and not Isaac as the Bible states (Genesis 22). However, the Qur'an does not state whether that son was Ishmael or Isaac. Among early Muslims there were several who believed it was Isaac and not Ishmael.

Referring to this incident the Qur'an states that it was obviously a test and that God ransomed Abraham with a great sacrifice. "For this was obviously A trial - and We ransomed him With a momentous sacrifice" (Qur'an 37: 106 - 107).

Muslim commentators usually say that this 'great sacrifice' refers to the ram that was provided by God to be sacrificed in place of Abraham's son. But would a ram be a great sacrifice in comparison to Abraham's son? Note that it was the son, not Abraham, who was ransomed by the provision of that ram, so 'the great sacrifice' must refer to another sacrifice to ransom Abraham himself. This raises a question; was God pointing forward to a great sacrifice in the future?

In the Bible these incidents are all recorded in great detail from beginning to

end. By studying it one may learn the background of Abraham's test and what the supreme sacrifice was, by which God has ransomed not only Abraham but also all who are faithful like Abraham. We learn in this book that God's Messiah, Jesus Christ is the one who has been made the sacrifice and ransom for the whole world. John the Baptist (known as Yahya in the Qur'an) said of Jesus, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1.29). He gave Jesus this title to emphasise his role as a sacrifice, like the original lamb, but of much greater worth.

Jesus said, "... Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad...". He also said, "... before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:56 and 58). Talking of himself he said, "... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

Jesus has been presented as a sacrifice and a ransom in the *Torah* (The Law of Moses, e.g. Exodus 12:43-46), in the *Injil* (The Gospel of Christ, e.g. Mark 10:45), in the *Zabur* (the Psalms, e.g. Psalm 22) and in the *Sahaif-e-anbia* (the books of the prophets, e.g. Isaiah 53).

We also learn that people were expecting God to redeem them from sin and death through his mighty power. Thus their address to God was, "O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14), "... redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth" (Psalm 31:5), and "... You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name" (Isaiah 63:16).

God's Promise

God made promises to the people which reflect the fact that he would provide a sacrifice through which they would be ransomed: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death" (Hosea 13: 14) and "Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before" (Zechariah 10:8).

The Facts

It is an incontrovertible fact that only Jesus can be considered the one who could and did offer himself as a ransom for the world. Before his ascension into heaven he explained these things more clearly to his disciples:

"He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'

"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' "

(Luke 24:44-47).

Subsequently Jesus' disciples, in response to their Master's instructions, took this message to the whole world, preaching that Jesus is the Great Sacrifice provided by God himself as our ransom.

A Great Prophecy

Here is a prophecy, which the prophet Isaiah recorded approximately 700 years before Jesus came:

"See my servant will act wisely, he will be raised up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him - his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness - so he will sprinkle many nations and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard they will understand.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a shoot out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep, have gone astray, each one has turned to his own way, and

the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgement he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and

the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied; By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, Because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors"

(Isaiah 52:13 - End; & Ch. 53)

Hebrew manuscript copies of this prophecy which predate Jesus' birth are still in existence. There is no one else in History to whom this could refer other than Jesus. He is the great sacrifice provided by God. The hebrew text can be found on the internet at www.ao.net/~fmoeller/qum-44.htm.

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