

Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

Prayer and Praises

Introduction

This study will look at Jesus as the Lamb of God both from the perspective of both the Old and New Testament writings. We will explore certain scriptures that discuss Old Testament requirements for a lamb as a sin offering under the Law of Moses, as well as New Testament scriptures that reveal how God would provide a more perfect sacrifice to redeem the people of Israel and all humanity through God's love.

Sin Offering under the Old Testament

A Lamb Offered as Sacrifice for the People's Sins

Sin includes those actions or lack of actions that separates people from God and one another. Periodically, the people of Israel were required to provide a sacrifice to the priest as an offering to God as atonement for sin. Various animals were used (e.g., cattle, goats, sheep) as sin offerings. Lambs that were offered had to be perfect – no flaws, defects, or imperfections of any kind, and the priest was required to prepare and then offer the sacrifice according to a prescribed pattern.

A partial reading of Leviticus 4:32-35 explains how the sin offering was carried out:

“If someone brings a lamb as their sin offering, they are to bring a female without defect... slaughter it for a sin offering ... Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar ... shall remove all the fat ... and

the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the food offerings presented to the LORD” (NIV).

In this way the priest made atonement for the people’s sin. The Hebrew term for atonement, “kafar,” appears in the Old Testament to describe that sins were not removed but rather covered as a sign of forgiveness revealed from God to God’s people. This term explains the necessity for the high priest to appear before God in the Most Holy place to atone for not only his own sins, but also for the sins of the people once a year, year after year.

- *Imagine what life might have been like for us living as ancient Israelites during the Old Testament period. Share with the group your thoughts about what that experience might have been like for you as compared to living according to Christ’s law of love through the grace of God today.*

Prophetic References to Christ

Old Testament References

We read in Old Testament scripture about how God sent prophets to the people to encourage and remind them of the importance of keeping God’s law (the Ten Commandments as well as various rules and regulations associated with the law). Various prophetic writings point to a time when sin would be removed from humanity through the blood of a perfect sacrifice, rather than “atoned for” through the use of animal sacrifices as required under the Law of Moses.

A partial reading of Isaiah 53:3-7 provides,

“He (the Suffering Servant) was despised and rejected by humanity... suffering, and familiar with pain... took up our pain and bore our suffering ... was pierced for our transgressions ... was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed... was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

Although the term “Suffering Servant” is used in this scripture to describe the nation of Israel, it also carried a prophetic reference to the One who would accept upon himself the sins of all humanity.

- *What differences do you see between the prophetic messages of God as revealed through the Old Testament prophets compared to the prophetic voice of God that speaks through us by the Holy Spirit during this dispensation of grace (the time in which we live – saved by grace rather than ruled by law)?*

The Lamb of God – New Testament Reality

New Testament references to Christ as the Lamb of God include the following texts. Here, we will take a closer look at several of these scriptural references to highlight the characteristics of God's gift of salvation through Christ:

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

John 1:29:

John proclaims Jesus as the Lamb whom God has chosen to reconcile humanity to God's self. Unlike the blood of those animals sacrificed under the Law of Moses that could not remove the sins of people (see Hebrews 10:1-4), Jesus would offer himself as a perfect sacrifice on the cross to fully satisfy the Law of Moses (see Hebrews 10:5-12).

...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 Peter 1:19

God required a sinless sacrifice to satisfy God's divine justice. Jesus, who is fully human and divine, lived without sin and offered his own shed blood on the cross, the love of God, to reconcile us to God. God received Jesus as a perfect sacrifice, who offered himself once and for all.

"So now we have a high priest who perfectly fits our needs: completely holy, uncompromised by sin, with authority extending as high as God's presence in heaven itself. Unlike the other high priests, Christ doesn't have to offer sacrifices for his own sins every day before he can get around to us and our sins. Christ has done it, once and for all: offered up Christ's self as the sacrifice. The law appoints as high priests those who are never able to get the job done right. But this intervening command of God, which came later, appoints the Son, who is absolutely, eternally perfect"

Hebrews 7:26-28 (Msg).

...I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne...

Revelation 5:6

Here we see Christ as the center of creation. Christ's sacrifice has revealed God's great love for all humanity and, indeed, for the entire universe:

"For God was pleased to have all God's fullness dwell in Christ, and through Christ to reconcile to God all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through Christ's blood, shed on the cross"

Colossians 1:19-20

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.' And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Revelation 7:17

The Lamb of God who shepherd's God's people. Here Christ is revealed as the Lamb who comforts God's people as they live out God's best for their lives:

"The SOVEREIGN is my shepherd ... makes me lie down in green pastures ... leads me beside quiet waters ... refreshes my soul... guides me along the right paths... anoints my head... goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the SOVEREIGN forever"

Psalms 23

"They triumphed over Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

Revelation 12:11

This scripture reveals that the blood of Christ has overcome the forces of darkness and empowers us to overcome evil in whatever form it manifests itself to us. Empowered by the fulfillment of God's divine law of love that has been revealed, is now revealed, and continues to be revealed through God's people, the reconciliation of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is alive within us to help us to live for God and to help ensure that the old, selfish nature that tries to manipulate and control us remains powerless and inoperative.

Conclusion

From Revelation we read that, "... the Lamb is God of gods and Ruler of rulers" (Rev. 17:14) (NTILB). There will be a time when evil will no longer run amok on earth. Just as Jesus overcame evil on the cross through the mighty power of God's unfailing love, Jesus' mighty victory on the cross will be revealed on earth in its fullness when Jesus returns. The perfection of God's great love will be revealed for all to witness.

The witness of this great revelation is alive within Christ. And by the Holy Spirit Jesus is leading us into a better understanding of how powerful is the love of God as we are continually reshaped into God's image. Unlike a victory that is won after an earthly battle between self-centered forces, the victory of the Lamb will be revealed through the peace of God. This is that peace that is beyond understanding (Philippians 4:7). Its strength comes through the Holy Spirit, and that by the power of God's love. The fullness and perfection of fearless love, free from sin, death, hell, and the grave has yet to be revealed here on earth.

As we live out our faith by following the Holy Spirit's lead into all truth (John 16:13), and remain joined to Christ as the Holy Spirit has taught us (1 John 2:27), we can look forward to a new heavens and a new earth where God's righteousness will fully live (2 Peter 3:13).

One of the greatest manifestation's of God witness through Christ is Christ's peace. As we read above, Philippians records that the peace of Christ is beyond understanding. Revealed as the

Lamb of God who through humility, gentleness, understanding, compassion, and so many more attributes, Jesus overcomes evil in our lives and encourages us to grow and thrive in love. We can receive regular encouragement from the One who loves us more than we may ever know, and encourage one another through the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world.

- *How has Jesus as the Lamb of God empowered you to live more fully for God and helped you to deal more successfully with the forces of evil that try to bring doubt, confusion, and chaos into your life?*
- *Open Discussion: Further thoughts and reflections you'd like to share?*