

THE GREAT SACRIFICE

With great feeling, Muslims all over the world celebrate 'Eid al-adha. This festival commemorates Abraham's stupendous faith when God put him to the test by asking him to sacrifice his beloved son. They sacrifice animals because at the crucial moment God provided a substitute for Abraham's son, a ram.

A MOMENTOUS SACRIFICE

In the Qur'an in Sura *as-Saffat*, where this incident is related, it says "*For this was obviously a trial - And We (God) ransomed him (Abraham) With a momentous sacrifice.*" (Qur'an 37:106-107). What was the *momentous sacrifice* that ransomed Abraham? Some suggest it was the ram. Compared to Abraham's son, would a ram be a *momentous sacrifice*? Also the ram ransomed the son, not Abraham. The Qur'an must then be referring to some other sacrifice, an essential one, a sacrifice greater than Abraham's son, offered by God himself, in order to ransom Abraham. This raises questions; what was the sacrifice and when did God offer it? The details are not given in the Qur'an. For example the Qur'an does not say whether this son was Ishmael or Isaac. From the **Kalam-e-Muqaddas** (the Holy Bible) we learn it was Isaac. (Genesis 22)

THE COMPLETE STORY

For the complete story we have to go to the Kalam-e-Muqaddas. There, recorded from beginning to end are the details of the background to Abraham's test and of a supreme sacrifice by which God has ransomed not only Abraham but also all who are faithful like Abraham. The Kalam-e-Muqaddas informs us that God's Messiah, the Lord Jesus, was made the sacrifice and the ransom for the whole world. Hazrat Yahya (John the Baptist) said of Him "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the world's sin!*" (John 1:29). Because He was that lamb, the Lord

Jesus said "... *Abraham was glad that he should see My day; he saw it and rejoiced...*". The Christ also said "... *before Abraham existed, I am!*" (John 8:56 and 58). Again speaking of Himself He said, "... *the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life instead of many as a ransom.*" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus has been presented as a sacrifice and a ransom in the Torah (the Law), in the Injil (the Gospel), in the Zabur (the Psalms) and in the Sahaif-e-anbia (the writings of the prophets).

ANTICIPATED

The people were expecting God to redeem them from sin and death through His mighty power. So they addressed God in the following manner:

"*O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer!*" (Psalm 19:14). "...*You, O Lord - our Father, your name from of old is our Redeemer.*" (Isaiah 63:16)

God promised that He would provide a ransom for them. He said "*I will ransom them out of the hand of the grave; I will redeem them from death.*" (Hosea 13: 14)

PREDICTED

The prophet Isaiah predicted in detail how God would do it, as follows:

"*See my servant will act wisely, He will be raised, lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were appalled at you - His appearance was so disfigured beyond any man and His form beyond human sons so He will sprinkle many nations - kings will shut their mouths because of Him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they did not hear they will understand. Who believed our message and to whom was the Lord's arm revealed? He grew up before Him like a sapling - like a root out of dry earth. He had neither beauty nor 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. He was*

despised like someone from whom men hide their faces and we esteemed Him not. Surely He took up our infirmities and bore our sorrows, yet we reckoned Him to be stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions - crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the punishment for our peace and we are healed by His wounds. We had all gone astray like sheep. Each one of us had turned to his own way, and the LORD laid on Him the iniquity of all of us. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and like a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. Seized and sentenced He was marched off. Who of his generation thought anything of it? For He was severed from the land of the living. He was stricken for my people's transgression. He was assigned a grave with criminals, and with the rich dead, though He did no violence, nor was deceit in His mouth. Yet the LORD intended to crush Him. He caused Him to suffer - When the LORD makes His life a guilt offering, He will see His offspring and extend His days, and the LORD's intention shall prosper in His hand. After His soul's anguish He will see light. He will be satisfied. My just servant will justify many by His knowledge. He will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great and He will divide the spoil with numerous people, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors. because He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors". (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

Isaiah recorded this prophecy approximately 700 years before the Lord Jesus came. Hebrew copies of it, predating His birth by more than 100 years, are still in existence. There is no one else in History to whom this could refer, other than the Lord Jesus. He is the great sacrifice.

THE FACT

It is an incontrovertible fact that only the Lord Jesus can be considered to be the one who could and did give Himself as a ransom for the world. Before His ascension into heaven He explained these things distinctly to His disciples. He said to them:

"I told you these ideas of Mine whilst I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, should be fulfilled" Then He opened up their mind so they would understand the Scriptures, telling them "That is why it was written: The Christ is to suffer and rise from the dead the third day, then repentance for forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:44-47)

THE OUTCOME

In response to their Master's instructions, His disciples took this message to the whole world. They preached that the Lord Jesus is the supreme sacrifice provided by God as our ransom. Those who believed and repented were immersed in water (baptised) for their sins to be forgiven. This baptism portrays the Lord's death, burial and resurrection. (Acts 2:38, Romans 6:1-11)

Since His resurrection the Messiah's followers have observed the Lord's supper, sometimes called the communion. Every first day of the week (Sunday) they come together to share a loaf of unleavened bread and drink a communal cup of grape juice in memory of the Lord Jesus' sacrifice of Himself for their sins. The loaf represents His sacrificed body and the grape juice His shed blood. He said *"This is My blood of the new covenant being shed for the forgiveness of sins. of many."* (Matthew 26:28)

THE LORD JESUS DIED FOR YOU!

The apostle John put on record these words:

"But I, being lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" He (the Lord Jesus) said this indicating the kind of death He was about to die.
(John 12:32-33)

IN GRATITUDE RESPOND TO HIM NOW

He said *"..those who come to Me, no way will I throw them out."* (John 6:37)

THE JUDGE

This time He came offering mercy. The next time He comes as judge. *"...now God tells people - All people - everywhere - repent! - because He has set a day when He will justly judge the world by the man He has designated, having provided everyone with a guarantee by raising Him from the dead."* (Acts 17:30-31)

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Qur'anic quotations are from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation "The meaning of the Glorious Qur'an" Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, Cairo.

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