

The Lamb

10/NT/2

SESSION 3

INSIGHTS FOR THE LEADER

WHAT THE SESSION IS ABOUT
Jesus is the sacrificial lamb.

SCRIPTURE STUDIED
Exodus 11:4—12:13, 29; Numbers 21:4-9; John 1:29-31; 3:1-18

KEY PASSAGE

"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

AIMS OF THE SESSION

During this session your learners will:

1. Compare the bronze serpent of Numbers 21 with the Passover lamb and with the cross;
2. Discuss what it means for Jesus to be the Lamb of God;
3. Evaluate their own present status with regard to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

In the Gospel of John the significance of Jesus' death on the cross is emphasized by reference to two Old Testament events: Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness; and the sacrifice of the Passover lamb in Egypt. These two events are applied to Jesus to illustrate His impending death on the cross, and to show clearly the meaning and purpose behind His death.

The Serpent and the Lamb

In His conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus that it was impossible for a man to be born again unless the Son of Man (Jesus Himself) were lifted up in the same way that Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. This Old Testament story is found in Numbers 21. The Israelites had been freed from bondage in Egypt, but on their journey through the wilderness they complained against God and against Moses. After facing the difficulties of the journey, they were sorry that they ever left Egypt. However, when God sent a plague of venomous snakes that killed many people, the Israelites repented and cried for mercy. God instructed Moses to make an image of a serpent and to place it on a pole. Those who were bitten could look upon this serpent and be healed. This was an Old Testament picture of what Jesus would do for us. If we look to Him in faith, we can be saved from the deadly venom of sin.

The second Old Testament story that

clearly illustrates the death of Christ for our sins involves the Passover lamb. In John 1:29, 36, John the Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God." We can understand how appropriate and significant that title is only in light of the story of the first Passover and the Exodus from Egypt. During a time of famine in the Middle East the Israelites had gone into Egypt to find food, and had settled there. The years went by, and generations of Israelites grew up. The Pharaohs who had welcomed the original Israelites died, and new Pharaohs rose up who made slaves of the more than 600,000 Israelites who now lived in Egypt (see Exod. 12:37). Conditions grew worse and the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance. God heard their cries and chose a leader, Moses, through whom He could free His people.

Despite plagues of frogs, flies, gnats, boils, pollution and pestilence, Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. God then prepared a plague so devastating Pharaoh would be forced to release the people. God would send the angel of death to every house in the land to strike down the eldest son in each family. No one would be spared the angel's visit. But if a family wanted protection, God provided only one way. The family was to follow these specific instructions (see Exod. 12:1-13):

1. They were to find a lamb and set it aside, declaring it to be their protecting lamb.
2. They were to watch the lamb for three

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3. On the fourth day, they were to kill the lamb on the porch of their house, letting its blood run freely into a basin.
4. They were to roast the lamb with fire and eat it, careful not to break a single bone of its body.
5. They were to dip a branch into the basin of blood and apply that blood to the top and two sides of the door.

When the angel of death approached a house, if he saw the blood applied to the door, he would then pass over that house and spare the oldest son. The blood of the lamb provided protection and shelter from the angel of death. This event would be known as the Passover, an event which Jewish people still celebrate.

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Both the Passover and the serpent in the wilderness, in addition to being historical events, also serve as symbols or pictures which point to an event whose importance and significance is far greater. The account of Moses and the serpent in the wilderness points ahead to that time when Jesus would be "lifted up" on the cross. It was because of what happened on that cross that people can be forgiven or "healed" from their sins. In much the same way, looking at the serpent healed the Israelites from the snakes' poison and saved them from dying. The healing that Moses' bronze serpent brought was merely a physical healing, while the healing that Jesus brings is spiritual.

The symbol of the Passover lamb illustrates Christ's death even more clearly. Look at the instructions the Israelites were given concerning the Passover lamb, and compare them to Jesus:

1. The lamb was set aside and declared to be the Passover lamb. John the Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God."
2. They were to watch the lamb for three days to make sure it was without blemish. Jesus' ministry lasted for three years, and people watched Him closely; He was without sin, perfect in every respect.
3. They were to kill the lamb, being careful not to break any bone in its body. Jesus was also

killed and not one bone of His body was broken. (Normally, a crucified person would have his legs broken to speed death—unable to support himself, he would suffocate.)

4. They were to apply the blood of the lamb to the doorposts of the house. It wasn't enough just to know how to do all of this, or even to do only the first few steps. If they didn't apply the blood, they wouldn't be saved. The same is true of the blood of Jesus. It's not enough just to know all about Jesus' sacrifice. The blood of Jesus must be applied to our lives through faith.

There are some other common threads that run through the accounts of the bronze serpent and the Passover which find their fulfillment in the death of Christ.

1. In all these accounts, death threatens as a consequence of sin. In the Old Testament, physical death resulted from sin, while in the New Testament, eternal death is the result. (See Rom. 6:23.)
2. In all these events, it is God Himself who provides the remedy. It is never something people achieve or earn on their own.
3. All three are visible demonstrations of God's mercy and grace in reaching out to mankind upon that belief by looking up to the serpent or by applying the blood to the doorpost or by trusting Christ are saved or healed from sin. The serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness was given by God so that all might be saved from the serpent's poison. Yet some still died. The instructions for the Passover were given to all so that they might apply the blood of the Passover lamb and be passed over by the Angel of Death. Yet many still died. The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, was sacrificed for all so that they might have their sins forgiven once and for all. And yet people still die in their sins. The truth in all of this is that while God has made the provision for our salvation, each of us individually must act in faith and trust if we are to be saved.