

The Lambs of God

Mike Southern

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The Bible is filled with many titles for God that modern readers simply don't understand. And even though we use them, these titles often meant something very different to the people who first heard them, and they would be shocked to hear how casually we use them.

At this time of year, one of those titles in particular has special meaning—a title that refers specifically to Jesus. That title came from a feast celebrating how God delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt. That feast is described in Exodus 12.

It was a dark night in Egypt, in more ways than one.

Every home of every Egyptian was touched by death—
the death of the firstborn son
of every family in Egypt,
even the firstborn of their animals,
was struck dead in the middle of the night.

God had ordered Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt,
to release the Israelites from slavery.

But Pharaoh had refused.

He had even bragged that his magicians
could do anything God could do,
that his gods were just as powerful as the God of Israel—
so God sent the Angel of Death to Egypt
to show him just how foolish he was.

And that's how Pharaoh learned the truth,
that a mere man was powerless
against the one true God.

But God spared the young of the Israelites from His destroying angel.

He commanded every family to sacrifice a young lamb,
only a year old,
and smear its blood on the top and sides
of the doorframes of their homes;
the Angel of Death spared them when he saw the blood.

And they cooked and ate the lamb that died for them
in a special meal of thanksgiving to the Lord,
to thank Him for sparing their lives
when He showed His power to the Egyptians.

Then God gave them instructions for the Passover—
so called because the Angel of Death ‘passed over’ the Israelites—
which was to be a yearly feast,
a reenactment of this special event when
when God freed His people from Egypt,
a special celebration to remind His people
how much He loved them.

This way, each generation would understand
some what their ancestors had experienced that night.

But this yearly reenactment had an unusual twist:
Each family was to choose their lamb four days before,
and keep it in their homes and care for it until the feast.

Sheep are not the smartest of animals.
They will wander away from their flock if not watched.
They will die of thirst even when water is nearby
if they aren’t led to it.
They are unable to protect themselves in any way.

So for four days, each family had to care for their lamb
as if it were a baby.
It became like a member of the family, or a pet.

Then, on the day of the Passover meal, they had to kill it.
And it was a messy death
because its blood was needed for the Passover.
It was smeared on the doorposts of the family’s house—
a member of their own family dying to save them.

This was a painful celebration,
one that reminded them of the price of salvation.

So when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming and called out,
“Behold, the Lamb of God
who takes away the sins of the world!”
the crowds would remember all those helpless lambs
slaughtered for the Passover.

And when Jesus broke bread and poured wine with His disciples
and said it was His body and blood,
His disciples could not have missed the symbolism
because it was the Passover meal they were sharing with Him.

All the lambs they had sacrificed over the years
in all those previous Passover meals,
and the lamb they ate with Jesus that night,
were a reminder of
the one true Lamb of God
Who was about to die for them.

The ritual we call the Lord's Supper
is how we Christians remember that final Passover
where Jesus truly became the Lamb of God.
We don't have to deal with all the blood
the Israelites saw each time,
so we may not always understand its full meaning.

But unlike those baby lambs
that had to be sacrificed over and over each year,
the Lamb of God comes to live in us today
and He will never leave us or be taken from us.
That is something we can all understand.