

# An Exploration of “The Lamb of God”

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*”





# Sheep in Ancient Times

- Sheep were domesticated and tamed about 5000 B.C. from wild species
- Sheep is the most mentioned animal in the Bible
- Sheep were among the Hebrews' most treasured possessions
- Sheep herds of the ancient Jews were considered the main wealth of every family
- The process of taking care after the sheep was considered a matter of honor among Israelites





# Israel goes to Egypt as Shepherds

- When Joseph brought his family to Egypt, he told them to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds
- ...you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians." *Gen 46:34*





# The Passover

- Exodus 12: 1-29 has the instructions from Yahweh to Moses and Aaron on how to conduct the Passover
- When He speaks to them, Yahweh decrees initiates a new calendar with the first month of the year being Nisan
- Yahweh commands them to take a lamb on the 10<sup>th</sup> day, care for it til the 14<sup>th</sup> day, slaughter it at twilight, and put the blood on the doorframes
- On Nisan 14<sup>th</sup> Yaweh kills the firstborn among the Egyptians





# The Passover Celebration

- Yahweh commanded that Passover be celebrated annually as a lasting ordinance
- Passover is the most important Jewish celebration
- The Israelites followed the instructions in Exodus 12
  - On the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, they took a year-old male lamb without blemish and cared for it until the 14<sup>th</sup> day, when it was slaughtered at twilight
  - After the sacrifice, the lambs were hung on hooks or staves, then flayed, then taken home to be roasted and eaten that night. No leftovers.
- The lamb was the first animal sacrifice that Israel, as a nation, was commanded to make





# Chief Priests and Elders

- We hear that phrase in the new Testament
- It represents Sadducees and Pharisees
- They were at opposite ends of the political system
- Both made their living off the religious practices of the Jews
- Although they rarely agreed, one of their agreements was that Jesus needed to be murdered
- Let's break their roles down





# Sadducees – Chief Priests

Sadducees represented the liberal end of the religious spectrum in Israel

- They had a majority of seats on the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling religious council in Israel
- Because they controlled the Sanhedrin, they also controlled the temple and all temple business
- For this reason, the Sadducees were also called the chief priests





# Pharisees – the Elders

Pharisees were conservatives in the religious spectrum

Though they were only a minority on the Sanhedrin, they were the religious leaders of the culture

- Pharisees were in charge of the daily religious life of the Jewish people
- They had authority over training and appointing rabbis in local synagogues, and they were the judges of the Law
- For that reason, Pharisees were also called the elders of Israel
- Pharisees gained their wealth from the money given to local synagogues and by taking bribes in judging court cases





# Lambs – a fleecing temple business

- Besides money changing, there was a robust lamb business in the temple at Passover
- Passover brought up to 3 million Jewish males to Jerusalem – all needing a spotless lamb
- You could buy a ‘certified blemish-free prime grade’ lamb from the priests (Sadducees) at a nice mark-up
- BYOL? Sure - but the lamb inspectors (Sadducees) would always find a blemish and reject your lamb
- However, for just a little bit of cash you could trade in your blemished lamb for a ‘certified unblemished’ lamb (usually the one that was just traded in by the last pilgrim and is now miraculously unblemished)





# Lambs for Temple sacrifices

- Bethlehem is about 6 mi from Jerusalem
- Per rabbinic writings, lambs used for temple sacrifices were born and raised in Bethlehem
- The daily Temple sacrifice required two unblemished sheep from Bethlehem - one sacrificed in the morning and one in the evening
- One year old lambs were also needed during Passover and other festivals
- There were thousands of sheep raised around Bethlehem
- The shepherds in charge of these special lambs were from the tribe of Levi





# Migdal Eder – The Tower of the Flock

- Shepherds needed a high place to watch over their sheep, so they built towers that gave them a view
- Migdal Eder was a tower in Bethlehem used by the Levitical shepherds to protect their sheep and lambs
- On the ground floor, a room was designated for the delivery and protection of these special lambs
- And you, O tower of the flock,  
The stronghold of the daughter of Zion,  
To you shall it come,  
Even the former dominion shall come,  
The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem. *Micah 4:8*







# Nativity

- Luke states that angels told the shepherds that Jesus was born in a manger
- And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger... And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.  
*Luke 2:12-17*
- The shepherds weren't told exactly where He was born, but they went directly to Him
- Most likely in Migdal Edar where the temple sheep were born





# John's Baptism Ministry

- John preached a message of coming judgement
- The Jews knew that the last Divine judgement lasted some 600 years and began with them being deported to Babylon
- John's message of impending judgement affected many hearts
- The Jews had a ritual immersion known as mikvah that symbolized a ritual cleansing
- John's baptism ministry was an adaptation of the mikvah
- John's baptism was one of repentance.
- "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" *Matt 3:2*





# Baptism of Christ

- John was puzzled when Jesus asked to be baptized
- *And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" Matt 3:14*
- Only after the baptism did John realize that Jesus was Messiah
- *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. <sup>17</sup> And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matt 3:16-17*





# Revelation to John

- Although John was with others, he alone heard those words and saw the dove descending
- This revelation was obviously given by God to John but withheld from everyone else
- It was the next day that John called Jesus the Lamb of God
- 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*
- The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” *John 1:35*
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# Interesting Jewish Customs

- It was custom at the time for kings to indicate a peaceful intention by entering a city riding a young donkey that had never been ridden before
- Jews would lay their cloaks on the road to symbolize their recognition of the king
- Palm branches had an entirely different meaning. They were used as a symbol of national liberation
- Jews would lay palm branches to celebrate a military leader bringing political victory





# Palm Sunday

## *(Should it be Cloak Sunday?)*

- Matthew 21 begins with Jesus preparing to enter Jerusalem. He sent 2 disciples to get a donkey with her colt
- He rides the colt into Jerusalem fulfilling Zechariah 9:9
- Some Jews have laid their cloaks on the road, others palm branches
- Jesus enters through the East Gate
  - According to Jewish literature, the East Gate was used by the Temple Messenger to take a sacrificial lamb to the desert
  - And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. *Ezekiel 43:4*



# Preparing the Lamb for Passover

- It's Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan
- Jesus enters Jerusalem and goes to the Temple late in the day
- He cleanses the temple by chasing out the merchants
- He returns to the temple on each of the next 3 days (Mon, Tues, Wed) and teaches
- The chief priests and elders challenge him each day
- Jesus prevails in every test





# The Passover Lamb

- Remember Exodus 12 says the Passover lamb must be chosen and inspected for 4 days to determine that there is no blemish on it?
- Jesus presents himself in the Temple and is inspected (tested) by the chief priests and elders for 4 consecutive days
- At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> day, he is crucified per the Passover requirement
- But wait...





# A Difficult Translation

- If Jesus entered Jerusalem on a Sunday and was crucified on the 4<sup>th</sup> day, as the Passover required, doesn't that mean He was crucified on Wednesday?
- Maybe...
- Scripture allows differing views
  - Some scholars say Wednesday, most say Friday, a few say Thursday
- But they all agree He was crucified
- And on the third day resurrected





# Lamb of God

- It is clear that Jesus completes every requirement of the Passover and thus is the Lamb that God provided to be sacrificed for us
- Imagine the amazement of John the Baptist, when after baptizing Jesus, he is given the revelation that Jesus was the Lamb of God
- But one more question: with this revelation, why did John question if Jesus was Messiah? (Matthew 11:13, Luke 7:19)





# Rabbinical Misunderstanding

- The Jewish scholars were lacking understanding of the Messiah
- As they studied Scriptures concerning the Messiah's arrival, they noticed a two-sided nature to those prophecies
  - Some passages in the Bible spoke of the Messiah as a suffering servant who would die for the sins of Israel, notably Isaiah 53
  - Other passages taught the Messiah would be a conquering king who would rule over the whole world with power, notably Psalm 2





# Rabbinical Misunderstanding (cont)

- These passages appeared to contradict one another
- Eventually the rabbis determined that the Lord would send not one but two Messiahs
  - They invented terms for each to help keep them straight in their teaching
  - **The Prophet**, who would come to fulfill the prophecies of suffering and dying to atone for Israel's sins
  - **The Christ**, which means Anointed One who would rule all Israel
- John wasn't asking if Jesus was Messiah, he was asking Jesus which Messiah he was
- We know that there are not 2 Messiahs, but 1 Messiah with 2 arrivals

