

Worthy is the Lamb: The Nature of Christ as Lamb  
And Rightful Worship of the Godhead

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**Abstract**

The Lamb motif can be traced throughout Scripture and is often paired with depictions of a sacrificial, substitutionary, and atoning nature. The New Testament portrays Jesus Christ as the perfect and acceptable Lamb of God, confirmed through His victorious death on the cross. Revelation 5 parallels the worship of Christ as Lamb with His death that provided payment for the justification of man and qualified Him to bring about God's final judgment and redemption of creation. Thus, Christ's identity as the Lamb results in the justification and judgment of mankind, the glorification of God the Father, and the worship of Jesus as the spotless Lamb of God.

**Worthy is the Lamb: The Nature of Christ as Lamb and Rightful Worship of the Godhead****Introduction**

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing,” (Revelation 5:12b).<sup>1</sup>

The image of Jesus Christ as a Lamb can be traced throughout the entirety of Scripture and each instance sheds light on the intricacies of His nature. The goal of this study is to analyze how the Lamb motif of Scripture highlights Christ’s substitutionary death as the perfect sacrifice for the atonement of mankind’s sins and gives further purpose to the worship of both the Father and Himself due to the redemption that His death brought to men. The image of the Lamb seen throughout Scripture is perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ as the victorious, atoning, salvific, substitutionary, and sacrificial Lamb of God and is effectually seen in the justification of man and the worship of the Godhead.

**Lamb Terminology**

Scripture uses at least 5 major words for the main sacrificial animal found within its pages. While each of these terms is important, two are vital to the contents of this study: *ἀμνός* and *ἀρνίον*. These terms are the only two used within Johannine literature and provide a foundational understanding of the sacrificial lamb concept seen throughout Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical references and quotes will be taken from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

## Αμνός

The term αμνός was used initially for a young sheep, commonly a one-year-old, and was used in cultic occasions for sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> Fragments of writing from Sophocles and Aristophanes make a clear distinction between this term and the generic term for sheep (πρόβατον), but αμνός did not become commonly used until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>3</sup> The LXX often accompanies the term with ἐνιαύσιος (Ex 29:38; Lev 9:3; etc.), making even clearer the specific designation of αμνός as a lamb of about one year.<sup>4</sup> The term occurs over 100 times within the Septuagint and is used predominately within sacrificial passages, over half of which are found in the book of Numbers.<sup>5</sup> The lamb played a vital role within Israel's sacrificial system and is seen consistently throughout the Old Testament in presentations as burnt offerings and sacrifices (Lev 9:3; Num 15:5). They were used by God as a mechanism by which “to atone for and to cleanse individual persons (e.g., lepers, Lev 14:10) or the people as a whole or at the sanctuary.”<sup>6</sup>

J. Gess briefly mentions the Passover feast in Exodus 12 as well as the prophecies of Ezekiel as important mentions of the αμνός.<sup>7</sup> However, Gess emphasizes the Christological foreshadowing of the Old Testament within the Isaiah 53 portrayal of this αμνός as a lamb acquainted with patient suffering and grief. This is the first time that Scripture speaks of a human

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<sup>2</sup> J. Gess, “αμνός.” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Edited by Colin Brown, 410-412, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 410.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Second edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 266.

<sup>4</sup> G. Dautzenberg, “Αμνός, Ἀρνίον, Ἀρνίον.” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, 1:71-72 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 70.

<sup>5</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 266.

<sup>6</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 266.

<sup>7</sup> Gess, “αμνός,” 410.

as fulfilling the functions of a sacrificial animal.<sup>8</sup> This passage will be subsequently discussed in further detail, but it is significant that this text is quoted within a New Testament Christological context in Acts 8:32. This text contains a discussion between Phillip and an Ethiopian Eunuch which directly correlates the text of Isaiah 53 with the risen Jesus.

Including the Acts 8:32 passage, there are only 4 uses of ἀμνός in the New Testament. 1 Peter 1:19 displays a strong parallel between the person of Jesus and the Jewish sacrificial system and “belongs to the multifaceted juridical and cultic interpretations of the death of Jesus in the primitive Christian tradition.”<sup>9</sup> This passage describes the blood of Christ as that of a spotless and unblemished lamb, alluding to the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) in which an unblemished lamb was an absolute necessity. The simile of the lamb is introduced “in order to make clear the atoning power of the sacrificial death of Jesus.”<sup>10</sup> The New Testament image displays the ransom Christ provides and the idea of purification from sin through His blood to form a complex metaphorical image of a sacrificial lamb from its’ Old Testament roots.<sup>11</sup> Both Acts 8:32 and 1 Peter 1:19 use this symbolic language to paint a picture of Jesus Christ as one *like* a lamb, which is alluded to through the inclusion of the particle ὡς in both passages.<sup>12</sup>

The other two uses of ἀμνός within the New Testament are found within the first chapter of John’s gospel in John the Baptist’s proclamation which declares Jesus as “the Lamb of God”

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<sup>8</sup> Verlyn Verbrugge, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Abridged Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 41.

<sup>9</sup> Dautzenberg, “Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον,” 71.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Dautzenberg, “Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον,” 71.

<sup>12</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 267.

to the world (John 1:29, 36). Moisés Silva differentiates John's NT usage from references of *αμνός* outside of Johannine writings in that these declarations by John are "not merely a comparison in which Jesus is said to be *like* a lamb; rather he *is* the Lamb of God."<sup>13</sup> This identification of Jesus is analogous to John's other *εγω-εμυ* sayings and expands upon the metaphorical concept of Jesus' identity as *the* perfect Lamb of God.<sup>14</sup> G. Dautzenberg notes that John uses the genitive case "of God" to specify Jesus as the only one who can fulfill the reality of a perfect sacrifice to which the OT sacrificial system points.<sup>15</sup>

Christ's identification and title as "Lamb of God" is found exclusively in Johannine literature, whereas other texts only use the metaphorical picture of Christ *as* a lamb. The first of John's two proclamations of the Lamb is accompanied by the phrase "who takes away the sin of the world," which is a seemingly clear allusion to the *αμνός* of Isaiah 53 which has taken upon himself "the iniquity of us all."<sup>16</sup> Jesus as the *αμνός* is publicly identified as one able to take away sin, pointing again to His perfection and capability as seen necessary in Leviticus 16 for the atonement of sins.<sup>17</sup> J. Jeremias notes that John's view of Christ as shown through John 1:29 and 36 "describe[s] the atoning power of his death: he bears, i.e., wipes out, the sin of the

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<sup>13</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 267.

<sup>14</sup> Dautzenberg, "Αμνός, Αρήν, Αρνίον," 71.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> J. Jeremias, "Αμνός, Αρήν, Αρνίον." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, 1:338–41 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 339.

world.”<sup>18</sup> John’s high Christological view of the ἀμνός is thus displayed through his portrayal of Jesus as the perfect atoning Lamb of God in connection with Leviticus 16 and Isaiah 53.<sup>19</sup>

### **The *Talyā* Debate**

One additional meaning for the phrase “Lamb of God” found in John 1:29 and 36 must be discussed. There are possible ties between ἀμνός and the Aramaic term *talyā*, which has a dual meaning of “lamb” and “servant” or “boy.”<sup>20</sup> Jeremias poses the question as to the origin of the “Lamb of God” phrase, arguing that this was either a mistranslation or a gradual creation of the Christian community and should in fact be rendered as “Servant of God.”<sup>21</sup> He notes that the primitive community of the earliest periods saw Jesus as the fulfillment of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 and that Jesus Himself identified as such.<sup>22</sup> The Isaiah 53 passage displays a view of a suffering servant in comparison to a lamb, which Jeremias sees as a connection that demonstrates a high possibility of being the origin of Jesus’ description as the ἀμνός.<sup>23</sup> He argues that there is a “highly singular genitive combination” found in the expression “Lamb of God” which is only explainable in light of the Aramaic expression “Servant of God.”

While this interpretation is certainly thought-provoking and does hold some merit, Jeremias’ interpretation seems to neglect the phrase ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου which has

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<sup>18</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 267.

<sup>19</sup> Dautzenberg, “Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον,” 71.

<sup>20</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Carlisle, Cumbria; Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 351.

<sup>21</sup> Jeremias, “Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον,” 339.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Jeremias, “Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον,” 339.



a strong view of the Old Testament sacrificial system of atonement and its' apparent fulfillment in the person of Jesus. Dautzenberg holds to this position, stating that the opposing argument "cannot even begin to account for its inclusion of the idea of the removal of the guilt of the κόσμος."<sup>24</sup> A lamb with the nature of a servant is a plausible explanation, and Christ's humble nature is certainly portrayed through passages such as John 13, Mark 10:45, and Luke 22:26-27. However, the complete dismissal of the lamb concept in John 1 is highly unlikely due to the symbolic nature of the Old Testament seen in the removal of sin from the world. Scholars such as Silva and Gess link John's declaration with the lamb imagery in Isaiah 53 and the clear picture of this Messianic figure healing through His wounds, bearing the sins of many, and being crushed for the transgressions of the world.<sup>25</sup> It is suggested that the lamb and servant concepts are not in opposition to one another and rather make an insightful addition to the overall profile of the αμνός.

### **Ἀρνίον**

The term ἄρνιον originated as a diminutive of ἀρήν, translating as "little lamb," but by the time of the New Testament was no longer considered as such and was used generically for a sheep of any age.<sup>26</sup> This is common within the general tendencies of colloquial Greek in New Testament Times which used forms ending in -ιον and easily lost diminutive significances.<sup>27</sup> Balz notes that this validates a broad scope of translations such as *ram*, *sheep*, or *lamb*.<sup>28</sup> The

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<sup>24</sup> Dautzenberg, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον," 71.

<sup>25</sup> Gess, "αμνός," 410; Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 267.

<sup>26</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 266; Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 133.

<sup>27</sup> Dautzenberg, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον," 71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Jewish usage of the term within the Greek is extremely important for its' understanding in the New Testament as it is seen only four times within the LXX and is always precisely translated as a "lamb."<sup>29</sup> This same specification holds steady throughout the Psalms of Solomon as well as in the works of Aquila and Josephus.<sup>30</sup>

Within the New Testament, the term is solely found in Johannine literature: once in the book of John and 29 times in the book of Revelation. In John 21:15, Jesus exhorts Peter to feed His "lambs" and uses the term in reference to "the community as an object of the loving care of Jesus."<sup>31</sup> Apart from this one usage, every other occurrence of ἀρνίον in the New Testament is found in the book of Revelation, and all but one of these verses are used in direct reference to Jesus. The only exception to this is found in Revelation 13:11 in which the term is used in reference to the beast as an anti-type of Christ.<sup>32</sup>

The term ἀρνίον is the most common title that John uses for Jesus within the book of Revelation.<sup>33</sup> It seems to be apparent that this is a Christological term in John's eyes, however, what translation of the term should be used is more commonly debated. On the one hand, the standard meaning of ἀρνίον as a lamb is often rendered as such due to its' appearance of standing as one who had been slain (Rev 5:6). Dautzenberg describes this term as a reference to the salvific effect of the slain lamb's blood and therefore a connection with statements from the New

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<sup>29</sup> Jeremias, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον," 341.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 267; Jeremias, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον," 341.

<sup>33</sup> Dautzenberg, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον," 71.

Testament which speak of Jesus as a sacrificial lamb, such as 1 Peter 1:19.<sup>34</sup> Scholars such as Verlyn Verbrugge, Gess, and Silva don't make any mention of the discussion in their analysis of the words and automatically translate the term as "lamb."

The arguments against a "lamb" translation are not to be overlooked. Several textual markers may seemingly point towards a translation of "ram," such as the anger of the ἀρνίον (6:16) which points to its function as judge (14:10), the ἀρνίον's victory in war against its' enemies, the ἀρνίον leading his own, and the 7 horns as symbols of a mighty king and warrior.<sup>35</sup> Old Testament passages such as Ezekiel 34 and Daniel 8 symbolize the ram as one of might and victory, therefore it is not out of the question that the powerful ἀρνίον of Revelation could possibly be translated in relation to such passages. Jeremias also presents an intriguing historical argument, noting that there has been a common inclination over the years "to identify the ἀρνίον of Rev. with the zodiac and to explain its individual features astrologically" in light of the zodiac ram.<sup>36</sup>

No matter the chosen translation, the text clearly presents a singular figure who is an ἀρνίον of both sacrificial humility and victorious might. It seems as though the text itself points to a combination of both ram and lamb concepts to form an all-encompassing view of the ἀρνίον. There is no clear semantic background to the term that would lead John to use it over ἀμνός, therefore, it is plausible that John chooses a word that is open to various interpretations to allow

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<sup>34</sup> Dautzenberg, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον," 71.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Jeremias, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον," 341.

the reader a view of multiple Old Testament connotations of the lamb.<sup>37</sup> The inclusion of Christological traditions such as the ransom of the Church and the sacrificial death of Jesus in the book of Revelation seemingly point to the author's reshaping of the symbol "so that a complex and scarcely more concrete metaphorical statement emerges: the ἀρνίον as the one who shares God's throne (5:6; 7:17; 22:1, 3) and as the Redeemer and Master of the Church (5:9f.; 7:17; 14:4; 19:7, 9)."<sup>38</sup> The tension presented by the semantic range of ἀρνίον is not irresolvable as the Hebrew word *kebes*, most frequently defined as a young ram, is found within the LXX under the Greek translation ἀρνίον and was a commonly used term for a humble sacrificial animal.<sup>39</sup>

A dual significance of the ἀρνίον, such as that of the ram and lamb, is a common presentation within John's literature. The dynamic picture of the slain lamb as the victorious ram is used throughout the entirety of Revelation and is specifically highlighted within chapter 5. This is the first presentation of Christ as lamb and constructs the image of the lamb which is to be held throughout the remainder of the book.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, John's image of the lamb in Revelation 5 is twofold; He is the divine opener of the seals and is worthy of all worship, yet is equally and fully the slain lamb who has redeemed people of every race to God through His blood and made them to be a kingdom and priests.<sup>41</sup> The lowliness of the crucified ἀρνίον is contrasted and combined with the omnipotence and omniscience of the powerful ἀρνίον with

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<sup>37</sup> Ed Hindson, class notes of Rebekah DeGroff in BIBL 450, Daniel and Revelation, Liberty University, Fall 2020; Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 266.

<sup>38</sup> Dautzenberg, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρνίον, Ἀρνίον," 71.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> This is apparent through the notable absence of the Greek article at the first mention of the lamb in Revelation 5:6 and the inclusion of the article in all other mentions of the lamb throughout the book.

<sup>41</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary*, 267.

seven horns and seven eyes.<sup>42</sup> This concept is also seen through the original description of the lamb as a mighty lion in verse 5.

### **The Old Testament Image of the Lamb**

#### **The Lamb Necessitated**

The necessity of the can be traced back to Genesis 3 in which the fall of man is recorded. While this is not a distinct portrait of a lamb by any means, the basis of humanity's need for a sacrifice is displayed and there is a possible allusion to sacrificial offerings. The fall of mankind led to broken communion between God and man, displayed through Adam's knowledge of his nakedness and avoidance of God's presence (Genesis 3:10). God then presents what is often seen as the "first gospel promise in the Scriptures... called the 'protoevangelium,'" (Genesis 3:14-15).<sup>43</sup> This passage contains the promise of God's judgment on sin through the guarantee that the head of the serpent will one day be crushed.<sup>44</sup> There is an underlying notion within Genesis 3:14-15 that salvation is necessary on the behalf of mankind, seen through the New Testament's broadly Messianic tone when referencing this passage (Rom 16:20; Heb 2:14; Revelation 12).<sup>45</sup> Therefore, although unspecified, this is the beginning of the need for the Salvific Lamb.

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<sup>42</sup> Dautzenberg, "Ἀμνός, Ἀρήν, Ἀρνίον," 71.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann and Tremper Longman III, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), Accessed January 23, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>44</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 200.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 81.

There is also the matter of mankind's covering in verse 21 of the same passage. It is widely debated if there is an allusion to atonement within the verse and scholars such as Victor Hamilton suggest that it is slightly too speculative to claim this text as a referent to the sacrificial system.<sup>46</sup> However, he claims that "the word *skin* here refers to animal skins, and we do have in Genesis itself the idea of animal skins as coverings."<sup>47</sup> It seems an apt conclusion that this skin-covering likely had origins in an animal of some type. Howard Vos also holds to this position, although he mentions nothing of symbolism or typology in the passage.<sup>48</sup> The necessity for a covering of some kind is apparent and God steps in to accomplish what Adam and Eve are unable to do for themselves.<sup>49</sup> While the possibilities of salvific promises and sacrificial coverings can be debated within the text of Genesis 3, the necessity of the Lamb and His work is portrayed through the description of man's fall and the hope of God's promised redemption.

### **The Lamb Displayed**

Genesis 22 describes a pivotal moment in Jewish history and the first widely agreed upon portrayal of the substitutionary nature of the coming Lamb as seen in Scripture. This chapter, often titled the 'Akedah' or 'Akedath Yitzhak' (the 'binding' or 'binding of Isaac'), showcases the provision of God in the face of what could have been the collapse of the coming nation of Israel before it was even begun.<sup>50</sup> When Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, "he was

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<sup>46</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 207.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Howard F. Vos, *Genesis*, Everyday Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), Accessed January 23, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>49</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 207.

<sup>50</sup> Gustav Dreifuss, "Isaac the Sacrificial Lamb," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 16, no. 1 (January 1971): 69–78.

being asked to sacrifice the son in whom God's promises were stored up."<sup>51</sup> God gave Abraham a promise in Genesis 12 that, along with a national land, there would be a great nation that would arise from his descendants.<sup>52</sup> This great familial nation would continue to be a blessing to all other nations. Therefore, the sacrifice of Isaac which God commanded was a steep one, as the death of his promised son would've ended the Jewish nation and dissolved the promises of God. Yet Hebrews 11 states that Abraham was convinced of the faithfulness of God and obediently brought Isaac to Mount Moriah to be offered as a sacrifice per God's commands.

Upon the recognition of the missing sacrificial animal, Isaac raises one of the most vivid questions in the entire Old Testament. J. Wesley Ferguson notes that "his question, 'Where is the lamb?' marks one of the great moments in OT foreshadowing of the Lamb of God."<sup>53</sup> This seems to be a theme cry of the Old Testament: the need for a greater sacrifice. Much of Old Testament prophecy is in preparation and longing for the coming of the great Messiah who would answer this question once and for all. Abraham's answer is also extremely notable: God will provide. Note the utter dependence that Abraham displays on God for the provision of the sacrifice. God had provided a son for Abraham in Genesis 21 and would continue to provide for His glory to be shown and His will to be done.

Abraham reaches the top of the mountain and prepares Isaac by binding him and placing him on the altar as is customary of sacrificial offerings. Yet at the last moment, Abraham is halted by the angel of the Lord who commends him for his fear of God. Abraham is instructed to

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<sup>51</sup> J. Wesley Ferguson, *What the Bible Teaches: Genesis* (Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd., 2000), 142.

<sup>52</sup> Note that Abraham's seed is the continued seed of the women as seen in Genesis 3.

<sup>53</sup> Ferguson, *Genesis*, 144.

abstain from killing his son and sacrifices a ram which was caught in a thicket nearby in Isaac's place. This ram is an evident example of provision from God in order that a sacrifice still be made in the place of Isaac and thus signifies the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. This has dramatic implications for the future Messiah and points forward to when the promise of God is "ultimately fulfilled by the Lamb of God (see John 1:29)."<sup>54</sup> The substitutionary nature of the coming Lamb is seen through this picture of Isaac taken off of the altar and the ram placed upon it.

A major theme of Genesis 22 shows a grand picture of Isaac's continued life due to the provision of God found in this substitutionary ram. This is the gospel being declared decades before the coming of the Messiah. Ferguson notes that God had brought life from death two times with the birth of Isaac from a barren woman (Genesis 21) and the substitution of the ram in Isaac's place as a sacrifice.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, God would bring life from the death of His perfect Lamb. Allen Ross makes similar comments on this passage, noting that "in the New Testament God substituted His only Son for the animal, and the perfect Sacrifice was made."<sup>56</sup> God orchestrated this event in the lives of Abraham and Isaac as a foreshadowing event for the provisional sacrifice that would one day be found in His Spotless Lamb. The substitutionary provision of the ram for Isaac showcases God's care for mankind, for in this act "God spared Abraham's heart a

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<sup>54</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 59.

<sup>55</sup> Ferguson, *Genesis*, 142.

<sup>56</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 65.



pang He would not spare His own.”<sup>57</sup> It is through this passage that the believer truly comes to understand the words of Jesus: “Greater love has no man than this” (John 15:13).

One final detail must be explored concerning the Genesis 22 narrative: the ram caught in the thicket. The danger with this passage would be to swap out details such as this for logistics that would seemingly suit the intentions of thematic study. However, it is evident according to Scripture that the animal in question is not specified as a lamb, but rather as a horned ram. Brent Sandy provides some insight into the biblical image of the ram, noting that this animal is often seen as a symbol of power (ex. Ezekiel 34 and Daniel 8).<sup>58</sup> The contrast of this is noteworthy, as the powerful ram of Genesis 22 takes the place of the bound young man as a sacrifice to God. It is important to note that a ram is literally a fully matured male sheep (whereas the immature specimen would be a lamb). Thus, a distinction of terms may be used to bring out different nuances and biblical implications, but cannot be overemphasized unless biblically evident. Sandy himself states that “clear distinctions cannot be made between sheep, ram, and lamb in this symbolism, for lamb can symbolize each of these concepts.”<sup>59</sup> Many church fathers such as Augustine, Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Ambrose discerned a type of Christ from the ram of Genesis 22.<sup>60</sup> Thus, historical evidence and tradition join solid biblical documentation to solidify the usage of a ram in this section as an addition to the depth of the

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<sup>57</sup> MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 59.

<sup>58</sup> D. Brent. Sandy, “John the Baptist’s ‘Lamb of God’ Affirmation in Its Canonical and Apocalyptic Milieu.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (4), 447-459: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000848280&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, 1991, 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>60</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, *Genesis*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 284.

lamb narrative in Scripture. The specific title does not pose threats to any qualities placed at the forefront of Christ's designation as Lamb.

### **The Lamb Commanded**

Another clear example of the lamb in Scripture is the sacrificial animal used within the Passover meal. Much of the usage of the term "lamb" throughout the remainder of the Old Testament is concerning this event which is described in Exodus 11-12.<sup>61</sup> The Passover signaled the protection of Israel from God's judgment on the Egyptians and their release from Egyptian bondage. The last of 10 plagues that God would send on the Egyptian people was the slaughter of every firstborn in the land of Egypt by the power of the Lord. However, provision was made for Israel to be passed over in this judgment through their sacrifice and consumption of a lamb. Detailed instructions for the children of Israel are laid out by God through Moses in Exodus 12 and are concluded with God's statement: "When I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt," (Exodus 12:13). The blood on the doorpost of each home would signify to the angel of the Lord that the sacrifice had already been made and blood was no longer required.

Verse 5 of Exodus 12 gives the qualifications of this Passover Lamb: unblemished, male, a year old, and from the sheep or goats (kid or lamb) (Ex. 12:5). This was to be a perfect specimen. Douglas Stewart notes that the reason for this perfection was not for the quality of the meal, but the symbolic purpose both seen in the original Passover and its' later fulfillment: "The animal served as a reminder of the eventual deliverance that a perfect God perfectly provided for

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<sup>61</sup> Dorothy Lee, "Paschal Imagery in the Gospel of John: A Narrative and Symbolic Reading," *Pacifica* 24, no. 1, 13-28 (February 2011), 16.

His people as a part of the process of making them holy like Himself.”<sup>62</sup> Just as God provided for His people in the Passover event, He would one day provide the final perfect lamb in the person of Jesus Christ. The Passover feast was placed into the annual Jewish calendar as a reminder of God’s saving power towards His people. The people were to sacrifice to God just as had been done in the Passover event as a reminder of God’s work on behalf of His people and as a foreshadowing of the greater sacrifice to come. It is noteworthy that God’s instructions for the coming Passover event and the continual remembrance feast lead to His worship by the people for His provision (Ex. 12:27). The work of God in their lives naturally led them to worship out of thankfulness and honor.

An important passage concerning ritual sacrifice within the Old Testament is that of Leviticus 16 which describes the Day of Atonement. This yearly event required a lamb to be sacrificed in order to temporarily cleanse the people of their sins before the Lord (Lev 16:30). The animal seen here is a ram, just like the animal in Genesis 22. These are among the only occurrences of “burnt offering,” “appear, be seen”, and “ram” appearing together and both instances contain the concept of sacrifice on behalf of another.<sup>63</sup> However, one difference between this passage and the Genesis 22 narrative is that the sacrifice is made specifically with the view of atonement from sin. It was necessary that the people be cleansed from their impurities before they were able to stand before the Lord. Once the Tabernacle, which was their meeting place with God, had been purified of the people’s sin they were able to have access to

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<sup>62</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 275.

<sup>63</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 113.

God's presence. These sin offerings strongly foreshadow the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ which would be made to redeem mankind to God.<sup>64</sup>

The following sections in Leviticus further discuss sacrificial mandates for the Israelite nation. Within the next chapter, chapter 17, two important theological statements are necessary for this discussion: "the life of the flesh is in the blood" and that "it is the blood by reason of life that makes atonement" (Lev 17:11). This is one of the first and only times that Scripture specifically notes why blood (sacrifice) is necessary for the atonement of sins. Mark Rooker explores this concept, noting that "because the life of a creature is in the blood, blood makes atonement for one's life. One life is sacrificed for another. The shedding of substitutionary blood on the altar makes atonement, since the blood of the innocent victim was given for the life of the one who has sinned."<sup>65</sup> Blood is the chosen substance of sanctification and cleansing, so unless the people are cleansed they will be declared as unclean and unable to fellowship with God in any form.<sup>66</sup>

The death of an animal was only used to temporarily cover the sin of mankind as demonstrated in Exodus 12. Just as the blood of the lamb signified a passing over of the household, the blood of the sacrificial lamb in Leviticus 16 indicated a passing over and temporary atonement of the sins of God's people. Therefore, the Day of Atonement took place

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<sup>64</sup> Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 225.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>66</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 236.

yearly and could not be discontinued because this sacrifice was not adequate to justify the sinner eternally (Heb 8:7). A greater sacrifice was necessary.

It might be noted that this sacrificial aspect of Jesus Christ also points to His other characteristics. The laws which were given to the Children of Israel clearly state that the animals used in sacrifices must be without any sort of impurity (Lev 1:3, 10, 3:1, 6, 4:3, etc.). This points the reader to a beautiful picture of the pure and perfect character of the Messiah: “Jesus, the Sinless One, fulfilled the requirement of being the Lamb “without blemish” who delivered sinful humanity at the price of his blood.”<sup>67</sup> The sacrifice would not be possible if the Lamb were not spotless. Yet John the Baptist’s announcement that this Lamb would take away the sins of the world is a sweet reminder of the perfect qualification of the Lamb to sacrifice itself for the salvation of His people (John 1:29).

### **The Lamb Foretold**

Isaiah 53 uses the metaphor of sheep both as a negative example of humanity and a positive example of the coming Messiah who shares the same nature with mankind but is altogether pure and separate from humanity’s fallen state.<sup>68</sup> The figurative language emphasizes the story of humanity’s fall and the Slaughtered Lamb who did not resist as the Lord caused the iniquity of mankind to fall upon it. While this is not the primary metaphor of Isaiah 53 (often called the “suffering servant” passage), it is impossible to separate this servant from the

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<sup>67</sup> Victoria B. Parco, “The Christian Passover.” *Landas* 18 (1): <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLAIiEYD170814001771&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, (2004), 39.

<sup>68</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 391.

sacrificial analogy of the Old Testament.<sup>69</sup> Even Sandy, who argues heavily against the general lamb motif within the passage, notes that “the reference to a lamb in v. 7 cannot be completely divorced from the wider sacrificial context.”<sup>70</sup> John Oswalt comments on this passage, noting the undeniability of the sacrificial narrative:

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that it is not accidental that the only extended metaphor in this poem involves sheep, the primary animal of sacrifice. The Servant is to be struck down on account of the rebellions of His people (v.8), and He will go as a lamb to the slaughter. If the author did not intend his readers to think in terms of sacrifice, he certainly made a major blunder in his choice of metaphors. Many commentators (cf. C. K. Barrett; R. Schnakenburg) agree that this verse is a primary source of John’s ejaculation, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).<sup>71</sup>

Exegetes have connected lamb imagery in Isaiah 53 and the ritual sacrifices of the Pentateuch from the dawn of biblical interpretation.<sup>72</sup> It is hard to miss the vivid connection between the sacrificial lamb for the Israelites and Jesus Christ as the sacrificial Lamb for all of humanity. This section has ties to both the Old Testament sacrificial system and its’ Christological narrative; such as the burnt offering through Christ’s wholehearted sacrifice, the meal-offering through His perfect character, the peace offering through the atonement provided, the sin offering through His payment for the transgressions of men, and the trespass offering for His death regarding sin’s impact.<sup>73</sup> These ritual sacrifices in the Pentateuch have been interpreted

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<sup>69</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Sacrificial Life and Death of the Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).” *Vetus Testamentum* 66 (1), 1-14 (2016), 14.

<sup>70</sup> Sandy, *John the Baptist’s ‘Lamb of God’ Affirmation*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 392.

<sup>72</sup> Jeremy I. Schipper, “Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (2): <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001982669&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (2013), 317.

<sup>73</sup> Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Through the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 192.

throughout the Christian tradition through the lens of Jesus Christ in the crucifixion accounts, which is notably consistent with the character of the Isaiah 53 lamb (Matt 26:63; 27:12-14; Mark 15:5; Luke 23:9; John 19:9).<sup>74</sup>

### **Christ's Fulfilment as the Lamb**

#### **Declaration of Christ as Lamb**

The first instance within Scripture of Jesus Christ being directly referenced as a lamb is seen in John the Baptist's declaration, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," (John 1:29). However, scholars have different opinions as to John's intended emphasis within this statement. Allen Ross sees this statement as John's reference to the Genesis 22 event, foreshadowing God's final substitution of His only Son as the perfect sacrifice to take away man's sin.<sup>75</sup> John's declaration could've been a notable signal to the Jews that Jesus was to be the substitute for their own lives. Others, such as John Heading, argue that the Jewish background of John the Baptist would've given him proper knowledge of the Old Testament with which to easily recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of the original Passover event.<sup>76</sup> The Exodus 12 narrative of Passover is present in most OT mentions of the term "lamb" and is often considered the primary referent of the Johannine metaphor due to the significant lambic typology present in the Gospel of John.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Schipper, *Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53*, 317; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 392.

<sup>75</sup> Ross, *Genesis*, 65.

<sup>76</sup> John Heading, *What the Bible Teaches: John* (Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd., 2000), 30.

<sup>77</sup> Lee, *Paschal Imagery in the Gospel of John*, 287.

While there is clear symbolism behind John the Baptist's powerful statement, it is unclear if the full essence of the title "Lamb of God" was meant or even known by John. It is probable that John the Baptist did not fully understand the depths of Christ as the Lamb. Brent Sandy argues that "John the Baptist should be understood to be saying, 'Look, here is our deliverer who will purge the world of evil,'" and that there is no evidence that John the Baptist had any indication of the sacrificial element of this title.<sup>78</sup> John was presumably not anticipating Jesus' redemptive death and was rather proclaiming Jesus as the messianic ruler who would restore the kingdom to the Jewish nation.<sup>79</sup> Sandy supports these findings through his survey of the Messianic Lamb in passages such as Isaiah 53 and argues that this Lamb was not portrayed as a substitutional or atoning sacrifice and was intended to be displayed as a victorious conqueror who would free the Jewish nation.

While it is plausible that John the Baptist may have not known all of what the Messiah would be, the Holy Spirit assuredly had full power over John the Baptist to portray connotations of the title that John the Baptist did not fully, or even slightly, comprehend at the time.<sup>80</sup> While passages such as Isaiah 53 and John 1:29 certainly display the victorious nature of Christ as the Lamb, it is clear through the Gospel accounts that Jesus fulfills these passages in a sacrificial and atoning way as well. This is the paradox of the death of Christ: His sacrifice was victory and His death brought life. Even Sandy remarks that, by the time the book of John was written, the

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<sup>78</sup> Sandy, *John the Baptist's 'Lamb of God' Affirmation*, 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>80</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 149.



Church had a deeper understanding of this title being that of the spotless atoning Lamb portrayed within the Old Testament.<sup>81</sup>

It cannot be ignored that John the Baptist's declaration references the removal of the sins of the world. The concept of Christ as a lamb is here paired with that of His work in sin-removing and the sacrificial significance of the cross is highlighted through the relation between the forgiveness of sins and the appellation 'Lamb of God.'<sup>82</sup> "The verb 'takes away' conveys the notion of bearing off. It is perhaps not specific enough to point to any one particular means of atonement, but it does signify atonement, and that by substitution."<sup>83</sup> Even if the atoning aspect of Christ's character had not been fully revealed at the time of the proclamation, it is still clear that much of the identification of Christ as Lamb is paired with this concept of victory over sin in some aspect.

### **Confirmation of Christ as Lamb**

Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the crux of the biblical imagery of the Lamb. All Old Testament imagery came to a meeting point as the sacrificial, substitutionary Lamb of God was crucified for the salvation of mankind. This event is recorded in all four of the gospel accounts and is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>84</sup> The lamb motif is one of substitutionary sacrifice, atonement, and salvific victory. This is what Jesus was on the cross: a sacrificial substitute whose death made atonement for sin and offered victorious salvation to fallen

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<sup>81</sup> Sandy, *John the Baptist's 'Lamb of God' Affirmation*, 12.

<sup>82</sup> Daniel G. Reid, *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament: a One-Volume Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 281.

<sup>83</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 130.

<sup>84</sup> Accounts of the crucifixion are recorded in Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 19.

humanity. Johannine theology merges the different events throughout the OT lamb motif in the death picture of Jesus Christ.<sup>85</sup>

While the crucifixion merges the entire lamb motif into the person of Jesus Christ, scholars have paid special attention to the connections between this event and that of the Passover. The Exodus 12 narrative is a clear foreshadowing event of the perfect Passover that was fulfilled by the Lamb of God. It is clear from the vantage point of the full plan of redemption that Jesus' death and victory over sin were in mind when the Passover was initiated in Exodus.<sup>86</sup> Just as the blood of the Passover lamb had a redemptive power that protected God's people, Jesus Christ provided a means of atonement and salvation through His death on the cross.<sup>87</sup> The writer John makes a clear attempt to depict the death of Jesus as that of a Passover sacrifice throughout the passion story.<sup>88</sup> It is plausible that Jesus may have attempted to link Himself with the pascal lamb in the mind of the disciples through His commands to take and eat His body during their celebration of the Passover, just as was done in the original Passover event (Exodus 12:1-13; Matt. 26:26-30; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

The qualifications for the pascal sacrifice further confirm Christ's identity as the final Passover lamb. Jesus was young at the time of His death, a male, and the embodiment of perfection.<sup>89</sup> Stuart notes that "His sinlessness qualified Him and Him alone to be the lamb of

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<sup>85</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 274.

<sup>86</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 275.

<sup>87</sup> Parco, *The Christian Passover*, 37.

<sup>88</sup> Reid, *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, 281.

<sup>89</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 275.

God, a human lamb rather than an animal of the flock, and yet a lamb in the sense of one meeting the criteria for the Passover meal.”<sup>90</sup> Jesus the Lamb of God perfectly met the qualifications necessary for the Passover lamb, yet was also fully God and thus able to bring about its’ cessation as the final fulfillment of Passover.

The timing of the Passion Week events must also be noted. Gerald Borchert comments that “as indicated in 19:14, it was the day before Nisan 15, the day before Passover; it was the day of Preparation, the day on which the lambs were slaughtered... The Lamb of God (cf. 1:29, 36) had died along with the Passover lambs, and that confluence of events must have seared itself into the mind of John.”<sup>91</sup> John’s decision to include such details further shows his conviction that Jesus was Passover’s fulfillment. The *IVP Dictionary* also notes the hyssop and basin present at the cross (Jn 19:29, Ex 12:22), the emphasis on blood flowing from Jesus’ side (Jn 19:35, Ex 12:13), and the detail that the soldiers did not break His legs (Jn 19:31-37, Ex 12:46).<sup>92</sup> The offer of salvation for mankind was fully completed as blood and water flowed from Jesus’ side: symbols of salvation that the paschal lamb of Exodus 12 could only imperfectly mirror.<sup>93</sup> The beauty of the saving Lamb of the Old Testament Passover is a mere glimpse of the beauty of the perfect Savior who died for the sins of all mankind.

1 Corinthians 5 likewise confirms Jesus as the final Lamb amid the rebuke of immorality within the Corinthian church. Paul appeals to the Passover feast and uses Christ’s death as

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<sup>90</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 275.

<sup>91</sup> Borchert, *John 12-21*, 273.

<sup>92</sup> Reid, *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, 281.

<sup>93</sup> Parco, *The Christian Passover*, 39.

grounds for being holy. This appeal contains the phrase “Christ our Passover” and alludes to His sacrificial crucifixion. He is pleading with the believers to recognize Christ’s sacrificial death which made them His children and calling them to live up to that status.<sup>94</sup> While not the main point of this verse, this description of Christ as our Passover displays the growth that had taken place within the church’s understanding of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. There was an apostolic understanding, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that Christ was the perfect fulfillment of the Passover lamb. Gordon Fee argues this same point:

As in John’s gospel, this is a direct application of the death of Christ to the slaughter of the Paschal lambs on the first day of Unleavened Bread. The slaying of the lamb is what led to the Jews’ being ‘unleavened.’ So too with us, Paul says. Our Lamb has been sacrificed; through His death we have received forgiveness from the past and freedom for new life in Christ.<sup>95</sup>

### **The Lamb of Revelation**

The book of Revelation mainly uses the title “Lamb” for Jesus Christ throughout the book and introduces Him in the scene depicted in Revelation 5 which describes the work and worship of this Lamb. However, the first look that the reader gets at this character is not a view of a Lamb, but that of a Lion. John is weeping due to the complete inability of any being in heaven or on earth or under the earth to open the scroll which is held by God the Father upon the throne. This weeping is likely due to the fear of an unrealized final kingdom of God contained within the scroll (Rev. 5:4).<sup>96</sup> Yet he is told to weep no longer as a victorious Lion has prevailed

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<sup>94</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 214.

<sup>95</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 239.

<sup>96</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2002), 252; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 131; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 348.

to open the scroll (Rev. 5:5). This victorious Lion is important within Messianic text in early Judaism and Christianity and is a clear indicator of a Messianic figure.<sup>97</sup> G. K. Beale notes that this Lion is used to bring out a conquering significance since it concerns the prophecy of a messianic figure who will overcome His enemy through judgment.<sup>98</sup> This is seen through the elder's declaration that this figure "has been victorious" as seen in ἐνίκησεν. The root word νικάω can also be seen with a meaning of overcoming, prevailing, or conquering.<sup>99</sup> Thus, David Mathewson argues that this verse could be translated as "He conquered so that He is worthy to open the scroll."<sup>100</sup> It should be understood that the victory of the Messiah is seen here, not only in the opening of the book but in why He is able to open this book. The Lion's victory in opening the book demonstrates that the book is only open due to the worthiness of the Messiah.

The Lion portrayed in this passage shows a connection to the victorious and powerful Ram of the Old Testament. Yet the passage continues to show that this mighty figure is the same as the sacrificial Lamb. When John turns to view the one who has opened the scroll he is met with the picture of a Lamb who is standing as if it was slain (Rev. 5:6) The term used to describe this slain Lamb is a perfect passive participle, emphasizing that, although the Lamb's slaughter has passed, it has ramifications that are continued and permanent. This term used by John

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<sup>97</sup> David Edward Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), 350; Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 593&906.

<sup>98</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 349.

<sup>99</sup> Michael H. Burer and Jeffrey E. Miller, *A New Reader's Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 479.

<sup>100</sup> David Mathewson, *Revelation: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 73.

highlights for the reader the fact that the Lion/Lamb has been victorious in both the current opening of the book and the conquering of sin and death through His sacrifice.

The description of this Lamb also shows seven horns and seven eyes. The reader must take note that the horns and eyes are deeply symbolic (as is much of John's writing in this book). Robert Mounce notes that "the seven horns of the Lamb symbolize his irresistible might. His seven eyes speak of that completeness of vision which leads to perfect knowledge."<sup>101</sup> Osborne sees this as a show of the Lamb's omnipotence (horns) and omniscience (eyes), which are characteristics of deity and show the Lamb's equality with the one on the throne.<sup>102</sup> Christ is pictured as the conquering Lion of Judah and a Lamb with seven horns who has won the right to open the scroll which represents the covenant of God to give the kingdom.<sup>103</sup> These portrayals of Christ as Lion and Lamb are parallel as the seven horns signify immense strength as a powerful ram.<sup>104</sup> John is highlighting the antithetical nature of Lion and Lamb and is showing the character who embodies the connection between both.<sup>105</sup>

This title of Christ as a Lamb also has clear Old Testament Messianic roots, yet which ones are to be emphasized is debated among scholars. There are ties to many passages within the Old Testament such as those previously discussed, but most scholars tend to hone in on the Isaiah 53 and Exodus 12 passages. Beale argues that both of these views should be included, "since both have in common with the metaphorical picture in Rev. 5:6 the central function and

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<sup>101</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 133.

<sup>102</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 257.

<sup>103</sup> George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *John*, . Word Biblical Commentary, Second edition (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 24-25.

<sup>104</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 24-25.

<sup>105</sup> Hindson, Daniel and Revelation Notes.

significance of the sacrifice of a lamb, which accomplishes redemption and victory for God's people."<sup>106</sup> There are possible ties to the Aramaic term *talia'*, which has a dual meaning of "lamb" and "servant."<sup>107</sup> If that is the case, it would make evident the combination of the suffering servant lamb of Isaiah 53 and the Passover lamb.<sup>108</sup>

The Greek word that is used by John for the Lamb in Revelation is *αρνιον*, which does not have clear ties to any specific Old Testament picture of the lamb. Ed Hindson notes that "by picking a word for Lamb that isn't so close to one particular connotation, John allows the reader to see all of the connotations in the word used. He is all of these things."<sup>109</sup> Thus, the Lamb of Revelation is shown to have the victorious, atoning, sacrificial, substitutional, and salvific character that is shown throughout the Lamb motif of the Old Testament. This Lamb (who is also a mighty Lion as seen in verse 5) is a clear image of Jesus Christ who was prophesied through these Old Testament passages and portrayed in the gospels.

### **The Effects of Christ as Lamb**

#### **Justification and Judgment of Man**

The necessity of a final sacrifice began in Genesis 3 and was completed by Jesus Christ as the final salvific Lamb. Passages such as Romans 3:24-25, 5:8-9, and 1 Peter 1:19 make it clear that it is through Christ's death alone that humanity can be redeemed and restored to God. The justification that God provides through the death of the final Lamb includes the forgiveness

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<sup>106</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 351.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Hindson, Daniel and Revelation Notes.

of the believer's sin and imputation of Christ's righteousness on their account (Gen 15:6; Luke 7:50; John 3:15-16; John 6:40; Col. 2:13-15; Rom. 4:5). Christ's death acted as a payment for the believer and purchased the redemption of mankind to God, bringing to an end the separation between God and man. Through His victorious death and defeat of the grave, the final Lamb has brought the sacrificial system to completion and has provided that the sins of all men might be atoned. The description of the slain Lamb standing in Revelation 5 seems to emphasize the victory of the resurrection and indicated that the marks of His sacrifice will remain throughout eternity as a reminder to His people of the payment for their redemption.<sup>110</sup>

The Christian picture of the slain Lamb brings together the entirety of Scripture to see Christ's fulfillment of the lamb motif through His act of giving His life as a sacrificial lamb to achieve our forgiveness and salvation.<sup>111</sup> Even John the Baptist's initial declaration of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God identifies Him as qualified to take away sins. The need for the permanent justification of man can now be met due to Christ's perfection as both the Son of God and Son of Man: the perfect Lamb. The Lamb was able to overcome and open the scroll in Revelation 5 due to His victorious purchase of mankind for God with His sacrifice. Jesus puts into action God the Father's great purposes; including the judgment of sin/sinful men and the salvation of those who put their trust in Christ's sacrifice on their behalf.<sup>112</sup> The victorious Lamb will initiate the final judgment upon sin one day as seen in John's vision, but He has already

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<sup>110</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Revelation*, Everyday Bible Commentary Series (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1968), 41.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Gardner, *Revelation: the Compassion and Protection of Christ*, Focus on the Bible (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 83.

<sup>112</sup> Gardner, *Revelation*, 89.



taken upon Himself this judgment for those who trust in Him.<sup>113</sup> The Lamb's perfect justifying work is seen throughout the book of Revelation in passages such as 7:14 in which the saints are made white (purified) by the blood of the Lamb and 12:11 in which the salvation and power of Christ allow them to overcome by His blood.

### **Worship of the Father**

The basis of the believer's justification rests upon God the Father, as He is both the one who demands it and the one who provides it through the blood of His Son. This is seen paralleled in Genesis 22 through the account of Abraham's faith by (almost) offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice and God's provision of a substitutionary sacrifice. Abraham then worships God the Father through the ram that was provided and honors Him as Jehovah Jireh. Likewise, God the Father's glory is seen through His provision of Jesus Christ as a substitutional lamb for mankind's penalty of death.

Revelation 4 and 5 seem to emphasize God the Father's role in creation and God the Son's role in redemption.<sup>114</sup> God the Father set in motion a redemption plan that He would fulfill through God the Son. The completed work of Christ as Lamb ultimately leads to the Father's glorification. Philippians 2 overviews the work of Jesus Christ in redeeming mankind which leads to His worship and verse 11 states that the worship of Jesus Christ as Lord results in the glorification of the Father. This is a fulfillment of Jesus' desire in John 17:1-5 that His Father may be glorified on the earth and that this would lead to His own glorification as well. This displays a mutual glorification between the Father and the Son that is highlighted through the

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<sup>113</sup> Gardner, *Revelation*, 89.

<sup>114</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series, Vol. 18 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 86-87.

worship scene of Revelation 5. The work of the Son through the provision of the Father leads the believer and all of the heavenly hosts to the worship of both members of the Godhead.

### **Worship of the Son**

Revelation 5 displays an “integral interpretative relationship between God as creator and as redeemer through his work in Christ” which suggests that the redemption by the Lamb is a continuation of the Father’s creational work.<sup>115</sup> While the creational and redemptive works of God are all done in the fullness of the Trinity, Revelation 4 and 5 seem to emphasize God the Father’s role in creation and God the Son’s role in redemption.<sup>116</sup> This is seen in the worship song of verse 6 and again here in verse 12: “Just as God the Creator is worthy to receive praise and glory for his work of creation in 4:11, so Jesus is worthy to receive praise for his redeeming work which will eventually lead to a ‘new creation’ (21:1-5).”<sup>117</sup> The Lamb was slain for the purchase and redemption of mankind and thus is worthy to receive the praise given to Him. He is exalted to the throne, shares in the rule of creation, and receives the full power and authority to achieve final eschatological victory as seen through the Lamb’s reception of the book and the opening of its’ seals.<sup>118</sup>

The worthiness of the Lamb in taking the book and opening its seals is defended in verse 9 by the addition of the causal conjunction *ὅτι*. This signals that the remainder of the sentence is a cause for the worthiness of the Lamb. Thus, the Lamb’s sacrificial death and purchase of

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<sup>115</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 369.

<sup>116</sup> Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, New American Commentary, Vol. 39 (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012), 174; Fee, *Revelation*, 86-87.

<sup>117</sup> Hindson, Daniel and Revelation Notes.

<sup>118</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 374.

mankind for God is a prerequisite for His worthiness to receive sovereign authority and bring about God's judgment on mankind. He is victorious and omnipotent to open the scroll and bring about the final judgment of mankind while also being merciful to bring about the justification of all men who would believe. He is the ultimate redeemer who has displayed His power and right to judge the world through His sacrificial and victorious death with which His children are justified.

The contents of this worship song are unique, as no other creature can bring about the coming judgments and thus the final restoration of God with mankind. Beale notes that "the Lamb's saving word has created a new situation and this elicits a new outburst of praise. No song that has ever been sung fits the situation quite right, thus the song is *new*."<sup>119</sup> While verse 9 of chapter 5 introduces a new song, it is certainly an eternal one. The slain Lamb is worshipped throughout the rest of the chapter and book (ex. Rev. 15:3). Christ will be worshipped for all of eternity by both mankind and angelic beings in light of the justification provided through His sacrifice.

### **Conclusion**

This has by no means been an all-inclusive study on the lamb-imagery of Scripture and must not be taken to be so. Rather, an attempt to compile the major passages has been made to display the prevalent theme of Christ as the fulfillment of the Lamb motif in Scripture. The display of Christ's salvific, substitutionary, and saving nature ultimately points to His qualification to both justify and judge the earth. This in turn is a clear designation as to why God the Father and God the Son are worthy of worship. The worship scene of Revelation 5 displays

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<sup>119</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 97.

Christ as the powerful Lion, the humble Lamb, and the victorious Ram.<sup>120</sup> He is the nondiscriminatory and sacrificial Savior, the sovereign Ruler, and the graceful creator of kingdoms and priests to God. This is a God who is the ultimate definition of worthiness.

All of the events displayed in the book of Revelation are brought about because of the worthiness of the Lamb and His ability to justify and judge mankind. The triune God will one day bring to completion every work which was started in creation and was already won by the Lamb's victory over sin and death. Revelation 5 is a glimpse into the future that the Lamb has in store for each one of His justified children: the eternal worship of the Godhead. Let the reader recognize their desperate need to join the hosts of heaven in absolute adoration and worship of holy God.

“To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever,” (Revelation 5:13b).

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<sup>120</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 266.

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