

# The Prince of Egypt

In some cultures it takes missionaries years to discover a redemptive analogy. We are fortunate today that a key tool for witness has virtually fallen in our laps by way of the movie "The Prince of Egypt". During the last year literally millions of lost people around the world have seen this movie which portrays, with surprising accuracy, God's redemptive rescue of His people Israel. May we be alert to and use this redemptive analogy for sharing the gospel with the lost, particularly with the unreached Muslim peoples of the world.

by Roland Thomas

Jesus loved to tell stories. In fact, the Bible tells us he was constantly using parables to teach people spiritual things. "Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable." (Matt.13:34) Children love stories, as much, if not more than adults, so there were probably children in the crowds that followed Jesus and listened to him.

Among Jewish children there is one story that has been a perennial favorite. It is a story that is commemorated every year at their Passover festival. This story, which is known as the "Exodus", is recorded in the Bible, in a book by the same title. It is the story of how God freed his people from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The Lord ensured this story would be treasured by future generations when he instructed the Israelites, "In days to come when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'"(Exodus 13:14)

It is interesting to see how this ancient story was retold in a major motion picture last year. The animated movie, *The Prince of Egypt*, was an incredible success, as was its predecessor, *The Ten Commandments*. The story is Jewish, and the movie producer, Stephen Spielberg, is a Jew, yet it was a popular hit among Gentiles! In fact, it was one of the 5 most popular movies in the world last year! No doubt many Christians viewed the movie but I wonder how many of them realized the opportunity it affords us for showing unbelievers that God is Savior and Redeemer.

The Passover festival was instituted by God to be a perpetual memorial to future generations of Israelites. This festival underscored the fact that "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me." (Hosea 13:4) The exodus was a watershed in Israeli history—reinforcing God as their Savior and Redeemer. Now that this story is on cinema and video, millions of unbelievers have been able to glimpse the blood of the lamb and hopefully begin to understand something of God's desire to save mankind.

I believe many of us take seriously our responsibility to witness for Jesus. If this is where your heart is, I know your going to be excited about what we're going to learn from the Bible today. This movie and the story behind it can open people's eyes to see Jesus as the Lamb of God, fulfilling what is symbolized in the Passover Lamb.

Those of you who have seen the movie may barely remember its brief portrayal of the Passover Lamb. Although the lamb is not emphasized, it is definitely mentioned, and in doing so, the movie provides a clue that can point people to the fuller meaning. Some details in the movie admittedly distort the Biblical account but for the most part it is remarkably accurate, even to the extent of showing the blood of the lamb on the door posts of the Hebrew homes.

## Taking a Fresh Look

What I want to do, is to take a fresh look at the Exodus story, giving special attention to how the Passover Lamb points to the Lamb of God. We'll begin by imagining that you have invited a couple over for supper. I hope this doesn't seem strange to you. Jesus used to eat with sinners and he encouraged us to do likewise. The couple who come for supper—we'll call Jim and Mary—could be relatives or friends but, most importantly, they don't know Jesus as Savior. After the meal is finished you suggest that the children might want to watch the video movie,

*The Prince of Egypt*. They seem happy with this plan. You had hoped that Jim and Mary would want to watch the movie too, but they decline because they've already seen it.

Since they've seen the movie, you make a positive comment about it, hoping to draw some response from them. Then you ask Jim, "So what did you think of the movie, did you enjoy it?" His response is favorable so it seems that an opportunity is going to open up for you to discuss the movie. But, how to crack the nut? Is there some way to help Jim and Mary see the key truth—the kernel buried inside the drama?

At this early stage in the discussion you might be tempted to focus on the 10th plague—the crucial turning point where Pharaoh's resistance is finally broken and he releases the Hebrew slaves. Also, it is true that this final plague contains the heart of the story—that is, the blood of the lamb. Getting to the kernel is important but there are certain steps we need to take in order to crack the shell around nut. Although this approach may take some time in the long run it is far more effective.

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How then can we take the appropriate steps to crack the nut? If we want to understand the turning point and heart of the story it is helpful to get a feel for the deepening tension. We need to recognize, for example, that Pharaoh was an incredibly wicked and brutal man. Consider how he mistreated the Israelites and killed their sons. It is also helpful to sense the mounting tension in the story as Pharaoh refuses to comply with Moses and God had to repeatedly strike Egypt with plague after plague. Amazingly, in spite of all these blows, Pharaoh hardened his heart still more.

There is no magic formula for how to visualize or capture a sense of the deepening conflict in the story. Nor can I provide a list of questions that is appropriate for every situation where you might try to discuss this movie. I recommend that you familiarize yourself with the story—both the movie and the Bible account—and then, ask God to guide you into a stimulating and meaningful discussion. (A simple set of questions is available to start you in the right direction).

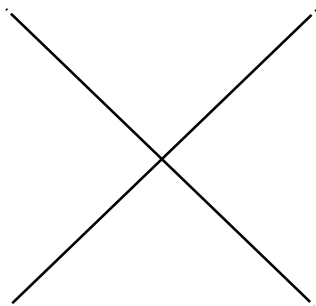
One problem we face as we try to explain this story to secular friends is that it may seem to them to be like a fairy tale, based as it is, on the unbelievable "coincidence" of a slave baby being found and adopted by a princess. Adding to this, there is the astounding series of Divine punishments unleashed on Egypt—these disasters could also be viewed as farfetched or fictitious.

As I've thought about this I've been impressed by something that lends credibility to this story. I realize how shocking and unthinkable the atrocities were, that Pharaoh committed, especially how he killed newborn babies. But if we compare this to what's happening in modern times it doesn't seem so farfetched after all. The brutality of Pharaoh seems somehow, more believable, when you see the carnage, genocide and ethnic cleansing in our century—even in the last decade or two, e.g., in Bosnia, Rwanda, Checoslovakia and some 60 years ago in Nazi Germany. These modern examples of man's inhumanity to man not only make the Biblical story seem real, they also humble us because we realize that after all these centuries man has not stopped abusing his fellow man and stubbornly refuses to learn from the down fall of leaders who refused to respect the human rights of their subjects and their neighbors.

### Opening the Kernel

We've been trying to get a feel for the rising tension in the story as preparation for cracking the hard nut around the kernel. Another way to begin "cracking the nut" of the story is to express the story in as few words as possible. We might summarize the story in one sentence like this, "God humbled the Egyptian oppressors and freed the Hebrew slaves." This is true enough, provided we honor God and recognize that he deserves the full credit for saving the Israelites. The rescue of the Hebrews was an act of mercy from God. He didn't save them because they deserved it.

We will examine the story shortly and see how incredibly forbearing and merciful God was. Mercy is implied in the symbol of blood from a lamb painted on the doorframes of the Hebrew homes. Unfortunately, most viewers don't grasp the significance of this ritual. The movie portrays this part of the story very briefly whereas the Bible describes it in great detail. The movie pays little attention to details surrounding the Passover lamb, however, it is important that we not pass quickly over these details pertaining to sacrifice and treat them merely as an incidental part of God's rescue plan.



God's wrath which fell on Egypt was diverted from God's people by the blood of the lamb. Is the blood of God's Lamb over your life turning away God's anger? It is written, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

The Passover lamb played a strategic role in the turning point of the exodus story. One way to appreciate this is to ask ourselves whether this ritual was really necessary? "Couldn't God instruct the angel of death to ONLY enter Egyptian homes?" If God had used this strategy it would have had no less impact on the Egyptian despot. Pharaoh's son would still have died, his stubborn pride would have been broken and, in the end, Moses' people would still have been released. Seeing that God could have used a simpler strategy, the question arises, "Why did he have to complicate matters by making the Israelites put blood on their door posts?" Furthermore, we might ask, "Was it really necessary for God to threaten to kill the first born sons of the Israelites?" "When you consider that the Egyptians were the oppressors and the Hebrews were innocent victims, what reason was there for God to punish the Hebrews or threaten them with the death plague?"

It may appear, on the surface, that the Egyptians were sinners and the Hebrews were "innocent" but in God's eyes everyone is a sinner. As the scripture says, "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin ... There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." (Romans 3:9; Eccles. 7:20)

The Bible tells how the Israelites repeatedly provoked God to wrath. One instance happened soon after they left Egypt, when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and found the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. God said, "I have seen this people, and they are a stiff necked people indeed! Let me alone so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven." (Deuteronomy 9:13,14) The Lord revealed through the prophet Malachi why he didn't destroy the Israelites, "I, the Lord, do not change. So you descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty. (Malachi 3:6,7)

In a similar way, the prophet Jeremiah reflected on God's severe judgment against Israel in the 5th century BC, "The Lord has withdrawn his right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it ... Yet I have hope. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail." (Lamentations 2:3; 3:21,22) Clearly, the Israelites and the Egyptians were all sinners before God so he was justified for sentencing all their first born sons to die. The truth of the matter is—we all deserve to die—because the wages of sin is death. It so happens, by God's grace, that most of us have the privilege of living a considerable number of years before we die.

## Bringing the Story Alive

I think it will help to bring the story of the exodus alive if we can visualize what it would have been like in that situation. Lets imagine, right now, that we have a visitor here with us who survived the death plague. His name is Zach, a Hebrew, and he's going to share some of his memories of the morning after the fateful plague struck Egypt.

"Zach, why don't you begin by telling us what woke you up that morning and what you experienced."

"I woke up very early in the morning, hearing screams from Egyptian families. They were shocked and overwhelmed to find their oldest sons dead. There was loud wailing and bitter weeping—it was pitiful, almost depressing. For us, of course, freedom was around the corner and this made us happy. But we couldn't help feel a twinge of sadness at hearing their heart broken cries. I remembered the occasional times when I used to play with an Egyptian boy. Now I wondered to myself, what was happening in his home. "Is it really true that he could be dead?"

"Zach, did you feel the urge to visit any of the grieving families?"

During the early morning hours we were very busy packing our belongings for the long journey. In spite of this pressure, however, my father made the time to visit one of our few Egyptian friends.... and, believe it or not, that family decided to leave Egypt with us. In fact, there were a number of other Egyptians who had had enough of Pharaoh. They knew our God was the true God and they abandoned their idols and decided to leave Egypt with us.

"What kind of thoughts went through your mind as you packed for the journey."

My mind was racing—turning over the shocking event that had just happened last night. In spite of all my busyness I couldn't deny that my emotions were in turmoil—one moment I was thankful to be alive, the next moment, I felt stunned and awestruck by this turn of events.

The realization began to sink in—how close I had been to dying. At one point I even wondered to myself, "What if I'd been born into an Egyptian family?" There were other times in the past when I was jealous of the Egyptians and wished that I had been born a free man like them. Now that the tables were turned I didn't understand why I would want to give this question a second thought. Perhaps pondering this question would help me be a better, more humble person. My father had a different viewpoint on this, suggesting that what I should be most thankful for, wasn't my nationality but the fact that an innocent lamb died so I could live.

"After the journey finally got under way, Zach, what happened next? How did you cope with those pent up feelings. Did you share them with anyone?"

The whole family was affected by my near death encounter but it was my mother who really understood what was going on inside me. And she did the most to encourage me to express my feelings ..... We had been walking and talking about these things for some time when she made an interesting suggestion. She asked me to consider comparing my experience with our forefather Isaac. He too had a close scrape with death but was rescued by God. As I thought about it, it struck me that Isaac's experience, like mine, involved a sheep dying instead of him.

The more I thought about it, the more this made sense to me. I talked with my father and he had some further insights. He reminded me—there was something more

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The overarching theme of the Exodus story reveals God as SAVIOR i.e., he saved the Hebrews from slavery as well as from sin and its penalty.

to the story. Isaac appreciated the ram God had provided, but there was another, more special, provision still to come. My father paused, and asked if I knew what it was. I thought for a moment and groped for an idea, "Does it have something to do with the name of the place where the sacrifice happened?" "Yes," he replied, "the name of the mountain where Abraham took Isaac means "the Lord WILL provide". Then he explained how the special provision would be a lamb. He retold the part of the story where Isaac questioned his father, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Then there was Abraham's confident answer, "My son, God himself will provide the lamb". (Genesis 22)

This discussion was intriguing. It prompted me to ask my father if he thought that the Passover lamb might be the one Abraham promised would one day come from God? My father agreed that the Passover lamb was a remarkable strategy masterminded by God and in this sense it was a provision of God. On the other hand, my father pointed out that it fell short of fulfilling Abraham's prophecy because the place where the promised lamb would be given is the specific place—otherwise called Mt. Moriah.

"Thank you Zach for sharing your amazing experience with us. It has certainly stirred our hearts to feel a deeper sense of appreciation to God."

Every year after that first Passover, Zach's family slaughtered a lamb as God commanded them to. It served as a constant reminder to Zach that God rescues his people and provides a way of escape from death and from sin. The Passover festival was an encouragement to future generations to keep alive their hope—that one day God would give his promised lamb on Mount Moriah.

Almost fifteen hundred years after Moses, the Lord announced through his prophet, John the Baptist, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) This lamb was obviously not a sheep but the Messiah himself. There are several things about Jesus which indicate that he is the prophesied lamb. Firstly, he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Ponder the two sacrificial events mentioned earlier—Is the idea of ransom not an integral part of each event? Secondly, Jesus died in Jerusalem which is, in fact, Mount Moriah. This fact is evident in many scriptures—one example reads, "Solomon began to built the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David." (2 Chron. 3:2 compare Luke 18:31-33) Thirdly, Jesus died on the cross while his Jewish brethren were celebrating their Passover festival, which included slaughtering a lamb. This provides further confirmation that he was indeed the Lamb of God. What is implied in the gospel record is spelled out clearly by the apostle Paul, "Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed." (1 Cor. 5:7) The apostle Peter also said, "that you were redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:18)

God's wrath which fell on Egypt during the 10th plague was diverted from the Israelite homes by the blood of the lamb. Is the blood of God's Lamb over your life turning away his anger or are you under God's wrath? It is written that "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36)

The wrath of God is something we don't like to talk about but it is real. Hell expresses the full force of God's wrath but his anger is also evident in our world. God unleashed his wrath against Pharaoh by sending the plagues and he did so with increasing severity. Psalm 78:49, 50 summarize God's judgments against Egypt saying that God "unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility... He did not spare them from death but gave them over to the plague." If we ponder the trends happening today, we can't deny that disasters are increasing—warning us that the end is approaching.

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The disasters and distress God inflicted on Egypt reached unprecedented proportions.

The 8th plague was the worst swarm of locusts that Egypt had ever known or would ever experience (Ex. 10:14). Similarly, the 10th plague caused "loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again." (Ex. 11:6) Scripture tells us that this crescendo effect will be repeated on a worldwide scale as the end draws near. Daniel prophesied "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then." Our Lord Jesus agreed, saying, "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again." (Matt.24:21)

The Bible warns us that in the last days God's wrath will be poured out on the world in a greater way. We have cause for concern, seeing millions of people killed in the last few years by disasters such as AIDS, earthquakes and floods. Don't wait to see whether an HIV cure will be found. Don't let your curiosity about the outcome of present trends dull the voice of God to your heart, "I tell you, now is the day of salvation" Don't wait any longer. Admit, today, that you are a sinner in need of God's mercy and accept the Lamb of God who came to bear your punishment on the cross and take away your sin.

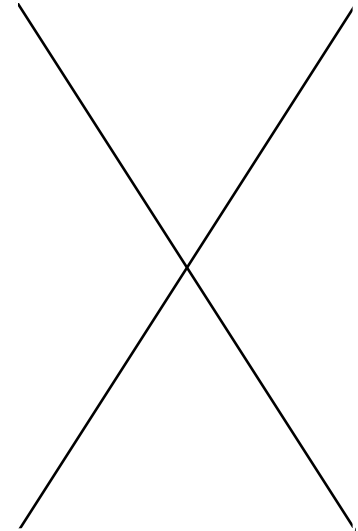
To receive God's pardon and his gift of eternal life you need simply believe that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him." (John 3:16,17)

### Questions to Start the Conversation

The popular movie "The Prince of Egypt" unveils a glimpse of the gospel by means of an intriguing analogy. The climax of the story sets in motion an astounding rescue operation—a rescue that raises some perplexing questions. These questions, as we've seen, lend themselves to being discussed by unsaved friends and acquaintances but they can also be an avenue for witnessing to people we've never met before, such as people we meet in door to door outreach. I have been pleasantly surprised to see strangers show an interest in discussing this movie—in response to 4 simple questions. These questions worked well in a predominantly Indian area and in a formerly white area. On hindsight, I realize this shouldn't have surprised me considering how many people watch movies (videos). Another reason I should have expected this warm response was because of the enormous popularity of this epic drama.

Let me walk you through the introduction and four questions that one can use to sow a seed of witness in our evangelistic outreach. Obviously you need to begin by introducing yourself. Explain that you want to ask 4 questions about one of the ten top movies of 1999—i.e. "The Prince of Egypt". You can't assume that everyone has watched the movie so naturally you want to know,

1. Have you heard of the movie "The Prince of Egypt" or have you seen it?" It may well be that only a fraction of people have actually seen the movie but a majority have certainly heard about it. Furthermore, many of those who have heard about it, may be open or interested to see it. It may be interesting for them to learn that this movie was the most expensive animated movie ever made. Many who've never seen this animation version of Moses story have seen the older classical version as portrayed in the block buster movie "The Ten Commandments". Since many in the general public have seen the Exodus story in one version or another it is usually feasible



to proceed by asking the next three questions.

2. Did you (or your children) enjoy the movie? (For those who didn't see it, try asking the following; "Do you hope to watch it some time?" [Of course, you are welcome to interject with some personal comments about how you felt when you saw the movie.]
3. The third question is best understood by refreshing the person regarding the main plot of the story. A brief summary is especially helpful if you're talking to someone whose only exposure to Moses' story has been seeing "The Ten Commandments"—a movie he may not have seen recently. Your summary might sound like this; "You remember that Moses' people—the Israelites—were enslaved in Egypt and the story gradually shows how God heard their cries for help and rescued them. The Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh, proved to be a very hardhearted evil man. He repeatedly denied Moses' requests to let his people go even when God unleashed his judgments against him in a series of disasters. The question I want to ask, focuses on the last of these plagues—the most terrible one, which finally broke Pharaoh's resistance and forced

him to let the Israelites go free. Do you remember what this plague was?" .....

4. The last question takes a closer look at this death plague which represents the turning point of the story. The critical event that broke Pharaoh's stubborn resistance was the plague that killed his son. You recall how the angel of death was sent through the whole land—not just Pharaoh's home. The angel inflicted death on all Egyptian first born sons and would have even entered the Israelite homes had it not been for the blood sign on the door posts. Why do you think it was necessary for the angel to visit EVERY home? In other words, why did God threaten to kill ALL the first born sons? Presumably God could have simply instructed the angel to go only to the Egyptian homes and kill only their eldest sons. Surely this would have been enough to cause Pharaoh to release the Israelites.

The implication of this is that all of us are sinners. "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin". The Bible says elsewhere, "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." (Romans 3:9 Eccles. 7:20) The next step you will want to guide your respondent to understand is the importance of the blood sign—not only for the Israelites in Moses time but also for later generations. Let me add a word of caution here. The way to do this is not necessarily by pressing on to tell as much as we can in the first visit. It is better to discern how open or hungry the other person is, and then to follow through accordingly. In some cases it may mean carrying on the discussion, in other cases it will mean coming back at another time.

We must remember what we originally asked for—we wanted to ask four questions. The person has graciously answered those questions. It is common sense and courteously for us to thank the person for giving us their

time—meanwhile we are asking the Lord for a sign whether to come back and make a follow-up visit later on.

### Watering the Seeds that Were Sown

The earlier discussion of the far-reaching implications of the death sentence in the 10th plague laid the foundation of sin and its death penalty. Hopefully this foundation has motivated the person to consider the answer to the problem of sin—a problem that we are all faced with. The 10th plague not only tells us we are sinners under God's judgment, it also points us toward the answer. The blood sign provides the key to understanding how God spared the first born sons from death. As we read in Exodus 12:13 "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you..."

Having seen only sketchy details of the blood in the movie, your friend will probably not understand much of what this sign means. How can you explain it to him? Let me suggest several steps which will help.

- 1) Read the Exodus story, especially chapters 11-15. Try your best to answer any questions which arise, particularly those relating to blood or redemption.
- 2) It is useful to draw a parallel between the first born Israelites under Moses and the rescue of Abraham's son by a sacrificial sheep. A vital truth lies at the heart of both these experiences. Suggest reading through the short story of Abraham's test as recorded in Genesis 22 paying special attention to: a) the three fold repetition of the term "provide" (see verse 8 and 14). b) notice that although a ram was provided a ram is not the same as a lamb. c) we conclude, therefore, that there is another provision yet to come, as it is written, "And to this day it is still said, On the Mount of the Lord it will be provided".
- 3) Ask a thought provoking question, "Do you suppose that the Lamb which Abraham prophesied was fulfilled in the Passover lamb? This question may lead to a recognition that God did provide this means of escape i.e., the passover lamb but the special lamb of which Abraham spoke was to be provided on Mount Moriah which is none other than Jerusalem (see 1 Chron. 3:1 ) where Jesus died for our sin, as the Lamb of God (Matthew 18:21 compare Jn. 1:29 1 Cor. 5:7 1 Pet. 1:18,19)

### Considerations for Sharing the Salvation Theme in Exodus

The overarching theme of the Exodus story reveals God as SAVIOR i.e., he saved the Hebrews from slavery. There are, however, two sub themes—sin and its penalty—which are implicit in the story. These three themes woven together give us an intriguing and compelling taste of the gospel.

It is no secret that Muslims have suppressed the glorious Divine attribute "Savior". In spite of this, the Qur'an contains some vital glimpses of this truth. This is apparent from the story of the Exodus as recorded in Qur'an. Many secular minded people find it difficult to believe that God miraculously saved the Israelites from Egypt but Muslims have no problem believing this because it is clearly taught in their Qur'an. We read in surah 2:49,50 "And remember we delivered you from the people of Pharaoh: They set you hard tasks and punishments, slaughtered your sons and let your

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women folk live ... Therein was a tremendous trial from your Lord. And remember we divided the Sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh's people within your very sight."

At this point we need to read Hosea 13:4 and make some comparisons. "But I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior accept me."

1. What parallels do you see between the Bible and the Qur'an, whether explicit or implicit?
2. Do you think this common belief can be a springboard for explaining salvation to a Muslim?
3. Do Muslims have any problem accepting God as the one who rescues or saves from death? ... (Ponder the near death experiences of Noah, Lot and Jonah, who are mentioned in the Qur'an.)
4. What do Muslims feel or think about the idea of God as Savior from sin?

We can shed further light on this matter of salvation from sin by taking a closer look at the sub themes of sin and its penalty. From a Muslim viewpoint there should be no difficulty accepting that the Hebrews—as well as the Egyptians—were guilty before God. This should be clear from the above-mentioned scriptures (Romans 3:9 Ecclesiastes 7:20 Deuteronomy 9:13 and Malachi 3:6,7).

After considering these verses, if a Muslim is still unsure about this he ought to consider what his own scripture, the Qur'an, says about God's attitude to sin, "If God were to punish men for their wrongdoing, He would not leave, on the (earth), a single living creature:" (surah 16.61) Compare this with Deuteronomy 9:13 where God said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and they are a stiff necked people indeed! Let me alone so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven." (Deuteronomy 9:13,14)

We might ask, Was God within his rights to punish all the Egyptian and the Hebrew first born sons? In this regard it is also significant to see how God warned Pharaoh after the 7th plague, "I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth." (Exodus 9:15) The final plague was the worst, nevertheless, we see a measure of restraint in that God did not destroy them all—he only killed the first born sons. The final plague made a deep impact, convicting the Egyptians that they were all "as good as dead". We read in the Bible how the fear of God fell on the Egyptians and they urged the Israelites to leave their country, saying, "otherwise we will all die". (Exodus 12:33)

These many evidences show that all men are sinners and that God was justified in passing a death sentence on the first born sons of both the Hebrews and the Egyptians. Understanding sin and death helps us appreciate how the Passover lamb was a fitting climax to the exodus story. However, some Muslims might try to evade implications involving a lamb since the Passover lamb is not mentioned in the Qur'an. On the other hand, there are significant reasons, from an Islamic point of view for accepting the genuineness of the Passover lamb.

Five of the 10 plagues recorded in the Bible are mentioned in the Qur'an, albeit very briefly. One plague, translated by Yusuf Ali as "wholesale death" (surah 7.133) is interpreted by Ali as possibly corresponding with the deadly 10th plague in the

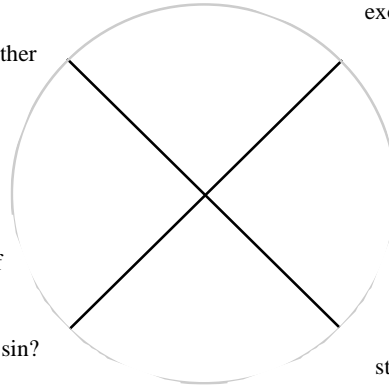
Bible. The Qur'an makes no mention of slaughtering a lamb, but neither does it deny the Passover lamb. There are at least two reasons why Muslims should have no problem accepting the Passover lamb as a genuine part of the exodus story.

The first is that the Qur'an merely alludes to certain aspects of the Exodus story whereas the Bible fills out the story in much more detail so one would expect to find certain parts of the story in the Bible which aren't mentioned in the Qur'an.

The second reason why Muslims need not be skeptical about the Passover lamb is that this type of ritual slaughter is not foreign to Muslims. The Qur'an affirms that "To every people did We appoint rites (of sacrifice) that they might celebrate the name of God..." (surah 22.34) Indeed Muslims perform two such rituals which are not unlike the Passover lamb.

5. What are these two rituals? In what way are they similar to the Passover lamb?

Note that according to the hadith "the greatest of the days near Allah is the day of sacrifice" Elsewhere in the hadith we read that "the son of Adam does not do anything of the actions of the day of sacrifice which is more pleasing to Allah than the shedding of blood ... so make yourself purified therewith." Do you think these beliefs cause Muslims to be more or less inclined to accept the idea of a Passover lamb? Although some Muslims might initially accept the Passover lamb, as the Messianic "kernel" of the story is gradually unveiled they may become reluctant or even resistant.



6. How does the Qur'anic story of Abraham's sacrifice reflect the basic idea of "ransom" as highlighted in the Exodus story? See surah 37:107
- a. What crucial feature in the Biblical account of Abraham's sacrifice-story is omitted in the Qur'an?
- b. If a Muslim suggested to you that Abraham's prophecy of a lamb from God was fabricated and inserted into the Jewish scripture at a later stage, how would you answer him?
7. It is not always necessary to engage a Muslim on the points in the Exodus story where discrepancies arise between the Qur'an and the Bible. In case you find it necessary, the following insights may be helpful in answer to the question:

### Does the Story End with a Bloody Climax?

In the book *Moses versus Pharaoh* Muslim scholar, A. Husain, expresses his opinion that the 5 plagues listed in surah 7.133 are sequential, therefore, he believes the last plague was blood. He explains the sign of blood to mean that water sources, such as wells and rivers were turned into blood. This explanation is nowhere given in the Qur'an so Husain imports these details from the Biblical account.

It doesn't seem that Husain considered the possibility that the blood sign pertains to the blood on the doorframes. It is important to notice that the Bible says the blood of the lamb "will be a sign for you." (Exodus 12:13) If Husain had taken the "blood sign" in surah 7.133 to be the blood on the doorframe, his rendition of the story would have been more believable. First of all, his story would have been consistent with surah 43.47 (we'll examine this shortly). Secondly, it would have harmonized better with how the plagues reach a logical climax in the Bible.

According to the Bible the 10th plague (including the lamb's blood) was the most painful and destructive judgment up to this point. Surah 43.47 tends to confirm this, explaining, that "every sign that We showed them was greater than its sister (signs) and We grasped them with the torment that haply they might turn again." If we assume Husain's view is correct and take the blood sign to be the changing of water to blood, we fail to see how this was a greater sign than all the others. On the other hand, if we take the blood to be a reference to the 10th plague it makes perfect sense. The final plague (and accompanying blood on the doorframe) involved massive loss of life—a fitting climax to the other "weaker" plagues. We get a sense of the climactic nature of this plague where we read how the 10th plague caused "loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again." (Ex.11:6) None of the plagues was able to convince Pharaoh to let go of his slaves except the final one—the death plague. This was, indeed, a bloody climax to the exodus story—not changing water into blood, but, rather the blood of lambs.

8. Perhaps we can gain some insights by reflecting on the disasters in the Exodus story. If we observe and ponder the trends in our age, we might detect some similarity between the disasters that struck Egypt and the natural disasters which are happening today.
- a. It is clear in the Exodus story that God used natural disasters to bring judgment against Pharaoh and his people. Is it proper for us to view end-time-disasters, prophesied by Christ, as judgments of God?
- b. Looking at the progression of plagues, it is evident that the Lord brought increasing force and pain on the Egyptians. Locusts were the 8th plague. The severity of this plague is described in Exodus 9:14 "Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again." When the 10th plague struck, we read that there was "loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again." (Exodus 11:6) Are we not seeing increasing numbers of disasters in our day? Based on these trends is it valid for us to draw a parallel between the time of the Moses and ours?
- c. Jesus foretold disasters would increase as the end draws near. They are intended to serve as warning signs, indicating God will not tolerate continuing decline in morals, etc. Do Muslims see these events in a similar light?

[Note: Seeing disasters as warning signs is a belief we share in common with Muslims. Earthquakes are one of a variety of calamities believed by Muslims to be a sign of the approaching end. This is illustrated in the following hadith—"The prophet of Islam warned, "when there come frequent earthquakes ... then wait for the Doomsday of the Earth"(as quoted in "*Doomsday & Life After Death*" page 32).]

Many people find it difficult to believe that God is behind disasters, whether directly or indirectly. It is difficult, for example, to accept that "good" people, along with wrong doers and criminals are killed in earthquakes. Can God allow such calamity to strike believers? One might turn to the story of Job for a partial answer to this general question. However, in the end Job survived. What about believers who are actually killed in such disasters?

Paul Fast, a structural engineer, has given a helpful answer in his book entitled, *When the Earth Trembles*. He looks at the many earthquakes—past and future—mentioned in the Bible and concludes they are an expression of God's judgment. But then he asks, "Can we conclude, then, that all destructive earthquakes are specific judgments



## Roland Thomas

for wrongdoing committed by nations or individuals? Earthquakes always have and will continue to cause deaths. In a general sense they execute the judgment of God by returning man from "dust to dust". However, the timing and reasons for God's specific judgment on earth remain a secret. In ancient Israel, God announced specific judgments through the Hebrew prophets. Christ announced it and the Bible describes the judgments awaiting us at the end of time. In the interim we are not given any specific reasons for judgment with respect to modern-era earthquakes, except that they, too, are consequences of mankind's original rebellion against God—its Creator." (page 54).

In some cultures it takes missionaries years to discover and discern a redemptive analogy. We are fortunate, in our situation, that a key to witness has virtually fallen onto our lap, by means of the movie, *The Prince of Egypt*. During this last year millions of lost people around the world saw this movie which portrays, with surprising accuracy, God's redemptive rescue of the Israelites. I wonder how many of us were alert to see this movie as a significant door for sharing the gospel, including with Muslims?

If Paul could use an altar to an unknown god as a meaningful bridge for witness, surely we can use this epic drama as a "redemptive analogy". Paul's bridge was a mere "walkway" in comparison with the "highway" that is available to us. The Exodus story, more than any other Old Testament story, provides the basis for understanding God as Redeemer and Savior.

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