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THE LAMB OF GOD

JOHN 1:29

THERE IS PERHAPS NO BETTER WAY TO GET TO know Christ more deeply and intimately than understanding His names. While we might think that is limited to “Jesus Christ,” the fact is that more than 50 names are ascribed to Him in Scripture. But why so many names? Multiple names serve three purposes that could never be served by any one name simply because of the limitations of language.

First, multiple names more fully *describe His nature*—*what He is*. Among the countless attacks upon Christianity through the ages, none has been more violent in its execution or critical in its importance than the exact nature of Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus Himself asked the most important question in the universe: “What think ye of Christ?” (Mat 22:42). Man, philosopher, sage, revolutionary, and “a god” have all been used to describe Him. This question is answered, however, simply by turning to His names. Every single one of His names underscores something about His nature.

Second, Jesus’ names *delineate His character*—*who He is*. There is perhaps no better summation of Christian character than Galatians 5:22–23. The reason those nine characteristics can reign in the Christian is because they are the very character of Christ, and His names describe that character.

Third, Jesus’ names *display His work*—*what He did*. He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10), and His names display it in vivid pictures. Just a few of those some 50 names that describe Him are: The Son of God; The Son of Man; I Am; the Bread of Life; the Light of the World; the Door; the Resurrection and the Life; the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the Vine; the Alpha and Omega; The Cornerstone; The Prince and Perfecter of Faith; Savior; the Bridegroom; The Carpenter; Prophet; Priest; King; Messiah; The Root and the Offspring of David; The Bright and Morning Star; and of course, The Word.

But still, few of the pictures of our Lord that hang in the Scripture gallery are as touching and tantalizing than is the one titled **Lamb of God**. It should, indeed, captivate us. The word **Lamb** here is the Greek *amnos*. It refers to a young sheep, frequently one year old, used for sacrifice. John the Baptist, therefore, heralds, **Behold the Lamb of God**, which literally means, “*The [not just a] Lamb provided by God.*” As the great expositor J. C. Ryle well observes, “Never was there a fuller testimony borne to Christ upon earth than that which

is here borne by John the Baptist.” Luke likewise pictures Christ as the submissive lamb before the shearers (Acts 8:32), and Peter declares that Jesus is the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19). *Amnos* is also used in the Septuagint for a sacrificial lamb (e.g., Exod. 29:38ff).

It is truly fascinating, however, that while the Apostle John uses *amnos* only twice in his Gospel account, he adopts another word later in his gospel (21:15) and then throughout the entire book of Revelation (29 times). It is the word *arnion*, which refers to a *young* lamb, a “*little lamb.*” Why the difference in terms? One Greek authority offers, “*Amnos tou theou [the Lamb of God] denotes God’s offering, Christ, whom he destined to bear the sin of the world, while arnion emphasizes the fact that He who is eternal Lord is also Christ crucified for us.*”¹ In other words, *arnion* pictures Christ as *both Redeemer and Ruler.*²

I greatly enjoy doing overviews, as demonstrated in *We Preach Christ: The Bible Story* (TOTT #82), which will soon be expanded into a small book. Tracing the Lamb through the biblical record is another such overview, one which demonstrates the true wonder of this picture. In so doing, we discover ten passages where the Lamb is specifically mentioned. These ten can be presented through eight principles.

I. The Prefiguring of the Lamb

First, we see the *prefiguring* of the Lamb in **Genesis 4:3–7a**. The scene is Cain and Abel bringing their offerings to God. While Cain did not bring the best he could offer, rather only what he could “get by on,” Abel brought “of the firstlings,” that is, one of the firstborn of his flock (Gen. 4:4, *bekorah*), the best he had to offer. Cain *personifies* the way of religion, but Abel *proves* the way of faith. Some teachers insist the problem was that Cain did not bring blood, as did Abel. It is argued that Genesis 3:21 reveals that God taught Adam and Eve that blood had to be shed for sin, so this same knowledge was undoubtedly handed down to Cain and Abel. While we respect that view and its defenders, that is not what the text precisely says. The Hebrew, in fact, for the **offering** both men brought is *minchāh*, which does not refer to blood at all, rather the general idea of a gift. The offering each man brought, therefore, was appropriate to his vocation and could have been accepted equally.

So again, Cain *personifies* the way of religion, while Abel *proves* the way of faith. He also prefigured Christ as the best and ultimate offering that was yet to come.

II. The Provision of the Lamb

Second, we see the *provision* of the Lamb in **Genesis 22:6–8**. In one of the most heart wrenching scenes in Scripture, God tests Abraham to see if he was willing to sacrifice his “only begotten son.” Responding to Isaac’s question, “Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God will provide himself a lamb.” And you know what? He did! What faith in the promise of God!

The picture of Christ here is striking. In verse 2 we find the first occurrence of the word “love” in the Bible, the love of a father (Abraham) for his son (Isaac). This story, therefore, is a type of the heavenly Father and His only begotten Son, depicting the coming sacrifice at Calvary.

Also remarkable is the fact that the first occurrence of “love” in each of the three synoptic Gospels (Matt. 3:17; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22) records the Father calling out from heaven, “this is my beloved Son,” at the baptism of Jesus (which, of course, also speaks of death and resurrection). In contrast, it is also significant that in John’s Gospel, where “love” occurs more often than in any other book of the Bible, its first occurrence is in John 3:16. God loved the world so much that He, like Abraham, was willing to sacrifice His “only begotten son.”

Still deeper, we should also focus on the substitute for Isaac, the ram (vv. 11–13). This illustrates the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Again, this pointed unwaveringly at John the Baptist’s declaration centuries later: **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.**

III. The Punishing of the Lamb

Third, we see the *punishing* of the Lamb in **Exodus 12:3–23**, which describes the sacrificial lamb slain at Passover (cf. the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16). The chosen lamb was to be (vv. 5–7):

- “without blemish,” picturing Christ’s *sinlessness*;
- “a male of the first year,” picturing Christ’s *strength* in the prime of life;
- “[taken] . . . out from the sheep” and kept “until the fourteenth day of the same month,” picturing Christ’s *separation* and testing in the wilderness;
- “[killed] in the evening” (about 3:00 PM), picturing Christ’s *sacrifice* on the Cross, which occurred at the same time of day;
- and the “blood” was applied to “to two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses,” picturing Christ’s blood as the *satisfaction* of God’s demand.

So, as Paul proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 5:7: “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” As we will see, this was the substitute. Our Lord was punished for us. That innocent little lamb had to be punished for the people’s sin, and this pointed unwaveringly to **the Lamb of God** who would be punished for us.

IV. The Personage of the Lamb

Fourth, then, we see the *personage* of the Lamb in **Isaiah**

53. This chapter is well-known, so we quote only verses 5–8:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Here is a giant leap forward in the developing revelation of **the Lamb of God**. Up to this point, the lamb has been an animal, certainly one that *pointed* to more, but *still* an animal nonetheless. But for the first time we now learn that the Lamb God provides is a *person*. “**He** was wounded for our transgressions.” “**He** was bruised for our iniquities.” “With **His** stripes we are healed.” “The LORD hath laid on **Him** the iniquity of us all.” “**He** [was] brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” Fifteen times, in fact, we see that the Lamb is a person, and only one person in history matches the detailed description in this chapter. Ah, but *who*?

V. The Presentation of the Lamb

Fifth, we see the *presentation* of the Lamb here in our main text, **John 1**. While Isaiah 53 tells us that the typified Lamb is a *person*, we now learn who this person *is*. When asked who he was, John the Baptist answered, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet [Isaiah]” (v. 23). He began preparing the way for Jesus’ arrival by preaching, “Repent . . . for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1). While there is much debate about “the *kingdom*”—when was it offered; when will it come; is it already here?—is it not better to talk about the *King*? Yes, the Kingdom will culminate earth history, but it is the *King* who should be our focus.

So, seeing Jesus coming toward him one day, John said those staggering words, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world** (Jn. 1:29). The word **Behold** (*ide*) is an interjection that calls attention to its object, so we could translate the phrase, “*Look*, the Lamb of God.” And what would the Lamb do? He would [**take**] **away the sin of the world**. The Greek behind **taketh away** (*airō*) means to lift up and carry away and indicates permanence.

John, in fact, here combines two wondrous theological truths: (1) the “Lamb of God” (i.e., the Passover lamb idea from Ex. 12:3), and (2) the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement (from Lev. 5:16). While the first goat on *Yom Kippur* was killed, the second was anointed with the blood of the first and sent into the wilderness, all a picture of what Messiah would do in dying for His people. Every lamb that preceded could only temporarily *cover* sin; this Lamb would forever *carry* it away.

It is for that reason that the book of Hebrews repeatedly proclaims that there is only one sacrifice for sin. “By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained

eternal redemption for us" (9:12). "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10). "After he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (10:12). And it is for that very reason that the Roman Catholic Mass is the most horrific blasphemy that is done in the name of Christ. To supposedly call Jesus down from heaven and lay Him on the altar so as to sacrifice Him again and again is profane, perverted, and pagan. This is *one* sacrifice for sin.

VI. The Promise of the Lamb

Sixth, we see the *promise* of the Lamb in **Acts 8:26-39**. Here we read that the Angel of the Lord directed Philip the evangelist to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. On that road, traveling south in his chariot, was an Ethiopian dignitary of great authority who had the charge of all the treasure of Candace queen of the Ethiopians. What a scene this is! As he sat in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah 53. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked him. "How can I," he answered, "except some man should guide me?" Philip then preached the Gospel to Him, making it clear that Jesus Christ was indeed the promised Messiah Isaiah so graphically described. What was the result? The man testified, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

VII. The Power of the Lamb

Seventh, we see the *power* of the Lamb in **1 Peter 1:18-21**:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

This passage is of pivotal importance in the developing doctrine of the Lamb. It amazingly looks *backward* and then *forward*, tying together the OT and NT Lamb, but then also adds a startling new truth.

First, notice carefully the *review*. Peter's words review and sum up all the different aspects of the Lamb that we have already noted.

- We started with Abel and saw the *prefiguring* of the Lamb. Here it is again in Peter's words in verse 18: "ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold."
- In the Abraham-and-Isaac incident, we saw the *provision* of the Lamb. And here in verse 20 we see it again as Peter tells us that this "was *foreordained* before the foundation of the world."
- Next we saw the emphasis on the *punishing* of the Lamb in the Passover drama, and here it is once again in Peter's summary. We are redeemed, not by Jesus' perfect life or magnificent teaching, but rather by His "precious blood." We also saw the specific requirement

that the Passover Lamb had to be with blemish. Likewise Peter noted that Jesus was "a lamb without blemish and without spot."

- We then noted the *personage* of the Lamb in **Isaiah 53**. We then saw in John 1 that identity of this person was Jesus and in Acts 8 that He was the promised Christ.

And so it is all here. Peter tells us that this fore-provided Lamb is none other than the personal Lord Jesus Christ of the Gospel.

Second, however, note the *reason* for Peter's review of all this. Why did he do this? Having looked back on all these aspects of the Lamb, Peter then declares the resurrection of the slain Lamb in verse 21: "God...raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory." While not a single sacrificial lamb was ever brought back to life, this Lamb would rise again. It is, indeed, significant that His resurrection was something never foretold in OT times. Yes, the fact of His *death* is declared many times, but His *resurrection* is never mentioned. It is that resurrection of the Lamb, in fact, that demonstrates His true *power* to redeem us from sin and deliver us from hell. As Peter also adds, it is that fact that is the reason "that [our] faith and hope might be in God." Men look to everything under the sun to bring them even the smallest hint of hope—whether it be reason, religion, refinement, or reform—but only in Christ is there hope (1 Tim 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:3). And it is that very hope that leads to one other aspect of the Lamb.

VIII. The Praising of the Lamb

Eighth and finally, we see the *praising* of the Lamb in two passages in Revelation.

In 5:6-14, we see the Lamb Ruling Formidably over His worshipping people.

While it takes the entire chapter to describe the enthronement of the Lamb in Heaven, let's note just verses 6-8:

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain. . . . And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.

So the Lamb is now in Heaven and seated on the very throne of the universe.

Now, before we see the implications of this in our final passage, we need to note the striking contrast in the very verse preceding this passage (v. 5): "And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." In striking contrast, while Jesus is called the "Lamb," He is also called the "Lion."

Our English word **lion** actually comes from the Greek *leōn*, which is found in writings all the way back to the time of Homer. Not only does it refer to the literal animal, but it also carries a figurative sense, such as the constellation or a brave or violent man. Of all animals, the lion is seen most often in

ancient fables, usually as a symbol of power and courage.

The lion is mentioned some 150 times in the Septuagint, usually in a comparative way. Ezekiel 1:10, for example, describes the cherubim as having heads like a lion, picturing power.

A fascinating feature of the NT use of *leōn* is that every occurrence (there are nine) alludes to the OT. Paul, for example, writes to Timothy about being “delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim. 4:17), that is, mortal danger, an allusion to Daniel’s ordeal in the lion’s den (Dan. 6:22). The same reference to Daniel occurs in Hebrews 11:33. Peter’s warning about apostasy in 1 Peter 5:8 (Satan as a roaring, devouring lion) also alludes to the OT (Ezek. 22:25; Hos. 13:8). In Revelation 4:7 we see the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and then see images using the figure of a lion (9:8, 17; 10:3; 13:2).

But the greatest image of all is here in Revelation 5:5. Looking back to Genesis 49:8–10, one of the “elders” before the heavenly throne refers to the chief member of the tribe of Judah, the Lord Jesus Himself, Who is of the “Root of David,” that is, He Who fulfills God’s covenant with David (cf. Isa. 11:1, 10). He is also pictured there as holding a scepter, as He will become the King of Israel, and will rule the world.

Before the King comes to rule, however, He must judge. The image pictured here occurs just before the judgments of the Tribulation begin in chapter 6 and continue through chapter 18. While Christ came the first time as a *Lamb* to the *slaughter*, He will come the second time as a *Lion* to *devour*. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (22:20).

So what does this mean for the future? We see the answer in our final text about the Lamb.

In 21:1—22:5 we see Him Reigning Forever over the eternal state.

What a climax to the story of the ages! Think of it! Everything throughout history (that is, *His* story) has been moving toward this moment. In these last two chapters of God’s final revelation to man, we see our Lord reigning forever over a restored universe. The curse is forever gone, sin is banished, pain is healed, and sorrow is wiped away. The climax comes in 22:3–5:

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever.

So, the final picture of the Lamb is that of His everlasting kingship. He is enthroned, honored, and praised forever.

If we may interject here, it is a sad fact that most people today completely miss the focus of Heaven. Surveys, in fact, indicate that 90% of all Americans think that they will be in heaven. But we cannot help but ask here, “Why do they want to go to heaven?” They have little or nothing to do with Christ here on earth but talk much about going to heaven. Most, in fact, think Heaven will be a place of entertainment (just like how many churches operate today). They envision it as being all about people, pleasures, and possessions, a place where we can kick back on our cloud and watch the Heavenly Foot-

ball League for all eternity. But Scripture says none of that. It explicitly states that the primary activities throughout eternity will be the worship, praise, and service of God (Rev. 4:4–6, 10–11; 5:8–14; 7:9–17; 11:15–17; 14:6–7; 15:2–4; 19:1–4; 22:1–5).

Before we close, let us take a quick trip through all this again and see the amazing progression of doctrine it all presents. Doctrine is less and less emphasized nowadays, but if we may put it bluntly: a lack of *doctrine* leads to *deterioration*, a deterioration of the Church, Christianity, and Truth itself.

- In the story of Abel in Genesis 4:3–7, the sacrifice of the Lamb pictures either *dedication* (the best he had to offer) or perhaps *expiation* (a covering for sin).
- In the Abraham-and-Isaac incident in 22:6–8, we vividly see the doctrine of *substitution*.
- In the Passover story (Ex. 12), the blood of the Lamb provides *protection*.
- In Isaiah 53, the sufferings of the Lamb paint a graphic picture of the doctrine of *satisfaction*. He was wounded *for us*, satisfying God’s demand.
- In John 1, “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,” gives us the doctrine *propitiation*, the complete removal of our sin with all its guilt, penalty, and even bondage.
- In Acts 8, the doctrine of *salvation* is presented in full clarity. The Ethiopian believed the Gospel that was foretold in the book of Isaiah.
- In 1 Peter 1:18–21, there is the wondrous emphasis upon the doctrine of *redemption* through the Lamb. We are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ.”
- And finally, in Revelation 5:6–14 and 21:1—22:5, we see the doctrine of *glorification*. Here the Lamb is seated on the throne ruling in glory forever.

But wait, let’s go through it one more time and see the progressive expansion of what the Lamb accomplished. In other words, what the Lamb accomplished gets broader with each progressive step:

- With Abel, the Lamb is brought as either an *offering in general* or perhaps for *sin in general*.
- In the Abraham-and-Isaac incident, the Lamb was offered for *one person*, Isaac.
- In the case of the Passover, the Lamb was offered for *one family*.
- In the Day of Atonement, the Lamb was offered for *one nation*.
- In Isaiah, the Lamb was offered for *the elect*.
- In John 1, the Lamb was offered for *the whole world*.
- In Acts 8, the Lamb was offered for *whosoever*.
- In 1 Peter 1, the Lamb “foreordained from the foundation of the world” was offered for *all history*.
- In Revelation 5, we see the Lamb *for the universe*.
- And in Revelation 21–22, we see the Lamb *for all eternity*.

And on top of all that, we are also reminded of the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. This was the gate through which sacrificial animals were brought into the city, washed in the pool of Bethesda, and then taken to the temple for sacrifice. Nehemiah 3

recounts those who participated in rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem after the Israelites' return from Babylonian captivity, and the gate on which each labored. It is, therefore, a striking scene when Nehemiah's tour of the gates *began* and *ended* the tour of the gates at this gate. Perhaps he did so to direct attention to the Ultimate Sacrifice, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; cf. v. 36; 5:2).

Oh, what magnificence we see in the Lamb! We see His *prominence* throughout history, His *preeminence* in reality, and His *permanence* in eternity. But how tragic and suicidal it is to deny this, as is true in our day. Instead of the Lamb, men rely on *lies*. Instead of the Lamb, they live according to *license* and *lust*. Instead of the Lamb, they substitute their own *labor*. Instead of the Lamb, they offer only *lip-service* to God. Worst of all, instead of the Lamb, they *laugh* at the truth of Scripture, which is the Word who became flesh, the Lamb. Those who in any way whatsoever dilute, deny, dishonor, or disregard

Scripture spit in the face of the Lamb.

So, let us cling to and ever proclaim that only in the *Lamb* is there *life*. We close with these lines:

Worthy is the Lamb of God who was slain
To redeem from death and depravity.
His praise and glory will be our refrain
Now and forever through eternity.

Dr. J. D. Watson
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NOTES

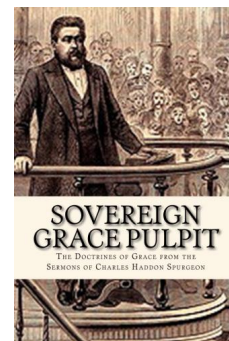
- 1 Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan), Vol. 2, 412.
- 2 Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans), Vol. I, 341.

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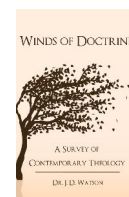
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