

Dear friends, greetings once again!

Two motifs within John's Gospel can be combined to provide a deeper understanding of the then current Passover themes of redemption, sacrifice, covenant and eschatology: Christ as 'Lamb of God' and as 'Suffering Servant':

Christ as 'Lamb of God': John the Baptist's designation of Christ as the 'Lamb of God' can be understood from an apocalyptic eschatological perspective. The Baptist's apocalyptic preaching in the Synoptics has a strong eschatological emphasis, with the One who is to come executing judgment with fire and axe. This eschatological interpretation is consistent with the Johannine parallelism in 1 John 3:5, 8, where the concepts of taking away sin and destroying the devil's works are used synonymously, and with Johannine thought elsewhere in Revelation 7:17 and 17:14, where the apocalyptic 'Lamb of God' appears. The Johannine Baptist's eschatological understanding therefore portrays the Lamb as the One who will destroy sin and overcome Satan and his works.

A further Johannine eschatological understanding of the 'Lamb of God' appears in Revelation 5:9-10, 19:9, 21:1-3, 9: the messianic marriage feast in heaven, so anticipated within Judaism, is now open to people from all nations, not just Jews. As those who fed on the 'Egyptian' paschal lamb became part of physical Israel, so the personal and continual feeding on the body of the anti-typical paschal lamb incorporates the believer into a new messianic reality, into spiritual Israel, and thereby into the hope of participation in the great messianic wedding feast of the Lamb and His bride.

In addition to the Baptist's eschatological understanding of the 'Lamb of God', the table below shows the sacrificial paschal lamb aspects in John 18 & 19:

Text	Passover Linkage
John 18:28	Explicit timing linkage between Christ's trial and Nisan 14 (the day when the paschal lambs were slain).
John 18:39	Explicit timing linkage between Christ's trial and Nisan 14.
John 19:4	Pilate's admission of Jesus' innocence mirrors the perfection required in a paschal lamb.
John 19:14	Explicit timing linkage between Christ's verdict being pronounced and midday on Nisan 14 (when the slaughter of the paschal lambs in the temple began).
John 19:24	Christ's robe was seamless, as was the High Priest's robe that was used whenever the High Priest ministered before God.
John 19:29	The offering to Christ of a sponge of wine on a branch of hyssop fulfills the type of hyssop sprinkling blood in Exodus 12:22.
John 19:36	None of Christ's bones were broken, fulfilling the paschal type of Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12.

The Johannine Christ is in control of His own destiny. John portrays Christ as being in control of events, determining when to act or otherwise, so Christ's crucifixion at the time of the slaying of the paschal lamb must be seen within Johannine thought as a deliberate statement of self-understanding on Christ's part, stating his role as the anti-typical paschal lamb. This sacrificial understanding would have been understood by those of John's readers from a Jewish background as being expiatory and vicarious, particularly those

with a Pauline understanding of Christ's death ('For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed'), and those with a Petrine understanding ('You know that you were ransomed...with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish').

The 'bread of life' discourse in John 6 makes strongest sense within this Passover framework. Set near Passover, during the discourse Christ makes shocking use of explicit sacrificial terminology in a way that can only be understood within a paschal context. His statements about the 'bread that came down from heaven' would have been understood as a self-designation as the anti-typical manna of the Exodus. In effect, He was declaring His own self-sacrifice as the anti-typical paschal lamb to be the all-sufficient sacrifice for redemption from sin ('that takes away the sin of the world'), bringing eternal rather than temporal forgiveness for sin. The command to eat of Christ's flesh and drink of His blood, within the Passover context, points clearly to a covenant meal, but which covenant? The answer to this question is clearer when we consider the next motif, of Christ as 'Suffering Servant'.

Christ as Suffering Servant: John links Christ clearly with the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah: John 12:38 states that Christ fulfilled Isaiah 53:1; John 1:32-34 identifies Christ as being God's 'chosen one' upon whom the 'Spirit' has descended, a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1, the first of the Suffering Servant prophecies, which were well understood in the apostolic church as referring to Christ. A central feature of the Suffering Servant is that he suffers: he would be slain as an expiatory sacrifice, innocently on behalf of others. Although within contemporary Judaism the idea that the Messiah would suffer was almost anathema, Christ exhibited a strong sense that He was going to suffer and die vicariously throughout His ministry. This self-awareness was affirmed, if not initiated, during Christ's baptism. John 1:29 may be viewed as John's commentary on Christ's baptism, at which John, through the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah, concludes that Christ took upon Himself the role of the Suffering Servant.

This Johannine self-awareness of being the Suffering Servant was very strong, and climaxed in the eucharistic sayings of the Lord's Supper, in John 6's 'bread of life' discourse, John 10:11 ('I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep') and John 10:17 ('For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again').

According to Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8, a parallel feature of the Suffering Servant is that his innocent and vicarious suffering has a purpose - to re-establish a new covenant relationship between God and His people. In fulfillment of this covenant purpose, the eucharistic sayings of Christ all contain the words 'for many / for you', substitutionary concepts that reflect the role of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, and they all include the word 'covenant', which is, based on Christ's own eucharistic words and self-understanding, the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Despite the best efforts of critical scholars trying to identify the 'original' eucharistic words of Christ, these two concepts of substitutionary death and covenant-making stubbornly remain, being common to all the recorded eucharistic sayings. The Johannine Christ does not state these eucharistic words found elsewhere, but in John 6 provides the means by which believers can be incorporated within this new covenant, through feeding on the body and blood of Christ.

The dual ideas of substitutionary representation and re-establishing a new covenant are central to both the eucharistic and 'bread of life' sayings of Christ, and to the Suffering Servant prophecies, and form a theological nucleus for understanding the parallel 'Lamb of God' motif.

Furthermore, the Johannine Christ is in control of His own destiny. John 12:7, 23, 13:3, 11, 18, 18:14, and 19:28 portray Christ as determining of Himself when He will act, and what He will do when He acts. He is not subject to another person's agenda or timetable, hence the death of Christ at the time of the slaying of the paschal lamb must be understood as a self-designation by Christ as Himself as the anti-typical paschal lamb. This Johannine understanding is supported in Revelation 5:6, where John sees a Lamb,

‘standing as if it had been slaughtered’, and in 5:9, which says of the Lamb that, ‘you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation’, a reference to the ransoming nature of the original paschal lamb by whose blood the people of Israel were saved and redeemed from sin. This understanding for Christians from a background in Judaism of Christ’s sacrifice as being vicarious and expiatory would be based on their understanding of the Abraham and Isaac sacrifice on Mount Moriah, where an innocent victim was willing to be sacrificed, in whose place God provided a substitutionary sacrifice. As stated above, the willingness of an innocent individual to be sacrificed vicariously was viewed within contemporary Judaism as being of an expiatory nature.

Conclusion.

Much modern scholarship has focused on the ‘problem’ presented by the difficulty in reconciling the Passion Week chronologies. This attempt has generated considerable scholarly effort, yet as with the quest for the ‘historical Jesus’, will probably remain an inconclusive quest for two key reasons: the lack of historical data per se; and the theological rather than historical purpose of the gospel writers, particularly John.

John 18 & 19 present Christ’s death theologically as the anti-typical paschal lamb. Through the twin motifs of Lamb of God and Suffering Servant, John deepens the existing paschal understandings through focusing on the covenant-making, vicarious, expiatory and eschatological aspects of Christ’s death.

In redemptive terms, Christ’s anti-typical death redeems, not just physical Israel from temporal Roman oppression, but the entire human race from the eternal tyranny and degradation of sin. In covenantal terms, Christ’s death and the believers’ subsequent feeding on His body and blood are the means by which God establishes a new covenant with believers. This new covenant defines a new Israel, a new covenant people, that is not based on ethnic grounds, but simply on a believer’s faith as evidenced by his or her feeding on Christ’s body in the covenant meal. In sacrificial terms, Christ’s death is anti-typical. Paschal lambs need no longer be slain for individual Israelite households. Christ’s innocent, vicarious and expiatory sacrifice is cosmic in scope - sufficient for all people of all times. In eschatological terms, Christ’s death broadens the existing understanding: God will act redemptively in the future to save not just literal Israel, but ‘saints from every tribe and language and people and nation’, and thereby inaugurate a cosmic messianic feast.

It is because Christ’s death is such that John can write ‘but these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name’. May God nurture the gift of faith in of our hearts and lives, and may that gift of faith spread out from us to those around.

Have a blessed Sabbath, and praise God for the resurrection that shook yet shaped our world!

Conrad.