Sacrifices – Ishmael and Isaac

1. Introduction

- **The need for clarity in our aims in evangelism**
  - To introduce my friend to the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, so he/she can become a friend and disciple of the Lord Jesus and join a local group of others of His disciples in a Kingdom Community.
  - Three contributory aims:
    - ✓ To get my friend to read the Bible for him/herself
    - ✓ To pray with and for him/her in his/her presence
    - ✓ To study and discuss with him/her the Bible and its message for us today
  - From time to time you will meet those who have in some way been prepared by the Holy Spirit to be your friend. These days the most common preparation is via a Christian satellite television.

- **Most Muslims come from honour-shame conscience cultures**

Cultural anthropologists have identified most cultures as fitting into three categories of conscience:

- Guilt-truth cultures
- Shame-honour cultures
- Fear-power cultures

Fear-power cultures are largely animistic. Fear is generated because when breaking known or unknown taboos punishment by evil spirits is inevitable.

Guilt, shame and fear are all a consequence of sin. Notice in Gen. 3:7, 8, 10 Adam and Eve experienced shame, ***"They sewed fig leaves together"***. They experienced guilt and as a result, ***"They hid themselves from the presence of the Lord"***. Adam said to the Lord God, ***"I was afraid"***.

Most Muslims grow up in an honour-shame culture. Some tend more to guilt (those who are westernised) and others tend more to fear (those involved more heavily in Folk Islam).

- **What is shame?**

Where once we were secure in ourselves, but now have feelings of mounting anguish because of an event – this is shame. To feel shame is to feel diminished in one's self-identity. The feeling of being exposed as you really are is an essential part of shame. You feel deficient and inadequate as a human being.

- There is a **healthy sense of shame**. Embarrassment often leads to blushing. We need the ability to blush! We need to know we have made a mistake. We need to keep a sense of proportion. If we have no sense of shame our conscience is seared.
- **Unhealthy shame** is a sense of one's world disintegrating. It is a loss of dignity and self-respect. We have three basic needs:
  - ✓ Meaning and a sense of purpose ⟶ "I am significant."
  - ✓ A sense of belonging ⟶ a personal sense of security
  - ✓ A sense of my own value ⟶ self-worth

  If any of these needs are left unmet, the result is self-doubt, self-blame and **shame**.

- **The Effects of Shame – how do we respond when we feel shame?**

Shame leads you to feel unfit for your family/community or worse, your family/community may leave you alone or exclude you. There are several forms of solution:

- Seek to control others who might be in a position to expose you
- Rage – leading to violence, revenge and vindictiveness – so-called 'honour killings' are an example of this
- Arrogance in public
- Being critical of others
- Judgmentalism/moralising
- Contempt of others shamed
- Being a 'people-pleaser'
- Envy

To avoid shame usually results in an attempt to project oneself in public as **greater** than the **real** self – i.e. be 'superhuman' or in fact put others down and exalt self.

The Lord Jesus was tempted by shame! Because of the stories surrounding His birth, it was assumed He was illegitimate. As a baby He was responsible for an infanticide on a large-scale causing great grief to a whole town. He was a refugee. He was hung up to die naked, in public, in front of his own mother! At the Last Supper the Lord Jesus, ***"Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand and that He had come from God and was going to God …."*** behaved as a slave and washed the disciples' feet. He is unique in that He never experienced shame! He was completely assured in His identity! He was eternally secure!

2. Some thoughts about Ishmael and our sacrifice

As we work among those God has called us to we have the assurance of an abundant harvest because of the testimony of God's Word. God's promises are always fulfilled and those worldwide promises are not put in such a way as to exclude anyone. The Bible tells us that many false prophets will arise and deceive many, but it doesn't for a moment allow that the Kingdom of Christ will divide and rule with any of them:

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him."

"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands." "God has exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name ... far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come."

"That at the name of Jesus every tongue may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

The present may see other religions triumphing, but the future belongs to Christ. We lift the banner:

"Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?"

The divinity of Christ, denied by Muslims, decides the destiny of all world kingdoms.

There is a general failure among Christians to realise the number and importance of the great promises in the Old Testament.

Read the following:

Genesis 12:3; 18:8; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

Numbers 14:21	Micah 5:4.
Isaiah 2:2,18	Habakkuk 2:14
Jeremiah 3:17	Zephaniah 2:11
Daniel 7:13, 14	Haggai 2:6,7
Jonah 3 & 4	Zechariah 9:10; 14:9
Joel 2:28	Malachi 1:11

The Great Commission was based on these tremendous promises. For a long time the nations have been in God's plan. Is it not remarkable that nearly all of these Old Testament promises are grouped around the names of countries which are now the centre and strength of the Muslim World?

"Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the World" or will these promises of worldwide coverage only stretch beyond Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Arabia and not include those lands in God's plan of redemption? Is there not a special blessing in store for the lands that border Palestine when the Lord shall comfort His people and restore all her waste places?

"In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of Hosts has blessed saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance." (Is. 19:24, 25)

As portrayed in the New Testament the Muslim World is in no better condition and in no worse condition than the rest of the world. The need of both is the same and we have the same duty to share the Gospel with them and the same promises of God's blessing on our work of witness. The Muslim World is without excuse (Rom. 1:20, 32), without hope (Jn. 3:36, Eph. 2:2), without peace (Is. 58:22), without feeling (Eph. 4:19), without Christ (Rom. 13:13, 14) as is the rest of the world. But our responsibility towards them is no less neither is the power of God's love to win them.

There is no land in the world and no people (with the exception of Palestine and the Jews) that bears such a close relationship to the Covenant and the Old Testament promises as Arabia and the Arabs. The promises of an abundant harvest for the Kingdom of God in Arabia are many, definite and glorious. These promises group themselves around seven names that have been identified with the Arabian Peninsula from time immemorial – **Ishmael, Kedar, Nebaioth, Sheba, Seba, Midian and Ephah**. These names only are selected. Others have been omitted that have only an indirect reference to Arabia or the Arabs, as well as those promises so numerous and glorious concerning the wilderness and desert lands. For the dwellers of Palestine the latter would surely have primary reference to northern Arabia. But the argument is strong enough without these special promises. (See Isaiah 35:1-3; 40:3; 41:19; 43:19; 51:3 and Ezekiel 34:25; 47:8.)

In order to understand the promises given to the sons of Ishmael – Kedar and Nebaioth, we first need to know the relationship that Ishmael bears to the Abrahamic Covenant and the place he occupies in God's plan for the nations as outlined in the book of Genesis.

Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, seems to have occupied a prominent place in Abraham's household and she appears to have had an inward participation in the faith of the God of Abraham. She was probably added to the family of faith during Abraham's stay in Egypt and occupied the same position towards the female servants that Eliezar of Damascus did for the male servants. It is when she was driven into the desert by the jealous harshness of Sarah that we have the first revelation of God concerning her seed:

"Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the desert ... and he said, 'Hagar where have you come from and where are you going?' And she said, 'I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarah'. Then the angel of the Lord said to her, 'Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her authority. Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, 'I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count. The angel of the Lord further said to her, 'Behold you are with child, and you shall bear a son and you shall call his name Ishmael (God will hear), because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. And he will be a wild ass of a man. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him and he will live in defiance of all his brothers'. Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her "Thou art a God who sees me", for she said, 'Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"

It is plain from the context that the Angel of the Lord and the Lord Himself are identified here. It was the Angel of the Lord (YHWE), the Angel of the Covenant of the Christ of the Old Testament. Why

should this "Angel" first appear to Hagar? Lange suggests the following in his commentary, **"The Angel of the Lord, as the Christ who was to come through Isaac, had a peculiar reason for assisting Hagar, since she, for the sake of the future Christ, is involved in this sorrow."** In any case the special revelation and the special promise were given not only to Hagar but also to her seed. Christ, if we may so express it, outlines the future history and character of the Ishmaelites as well as their strength and glory. He also gives them a spiritual promise in the God-given name, Ishmael – Elohim will hear. Without this the theophany loses its true character.

The fulfilment of the promise that Ishmael's seed would greatly multiply has clearly been fulfilled. Arabia, whose population consists mainly of Ishmaelites, is a living fountain of men and women. Where there has been such a clear fulfilment of the promise of natural increase are there not grounds to believe that God will hear and give spiritual blessing?

Thirteen years after the first promise to Ishmael we hear the promise renewed just after the instruction of circumcision, the sign of the covenant of faith, ***"And Abraham said to God, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before You!' But God said, 'Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for a covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you...' "***

What is the significance of Abraham's prayer for Ishmael? Is it probable that he merely asks for temporal prosperity and length of life? This doesn't explain why the prayer asks that Ishmael may live **before God**. Abraham's prayer arises out of his anxiety in case Ishmael should not have any part in the blessings of the covenant. The fact that the answer of God contains no denial of the prayer of Abraham is in favour of this interpretation. In the prayer Abraham expresses his anticipation of an indefinite neglect of Ishmael that was painful to his parent heart. He asks for him a life from God in the highest sense – if this is not so, what does the circumcision of Ishmael mean? The seal, or ratifying of the covenant of God with Abraham through Isaac's seed, embraces not only the seed of Isaac, but all those who in a wider sense are sharers in the covenant – Ishmael and his descendants. However much the Arabs may have departed from the faith of Abraham for all these centuries, they have remained faithful to the sign of the old covenant by the rite of circumcision.

For the third time we read of a special revelation to prove God's love for the son of a bond slave. In the pathetic story of Hagar's expulsion, Ishmael is the central figure. His mocking was its cause. When the water in the bottle is gone Hagar turns away from seeing the death of the child, it was not her weeping, but the prayer of the lad that brought deliverance from heaven. ***"And the Angel of the Lord called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter with you Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him.' Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water ... and God was with the lad."***

This story shows the repentance of Ishmael. God heard his voice. God forgave his sinful mocking. God confirmed His promise. God saved his life. God was with the lad. Many years later he seems to have visited his father Abraham, for we read that when the patriarch died at a good old age, ***"Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah."***

No mention is made here of the sons of Keturah. Twice in the Bible the generations of Ishmael are recorded in full in order to bind together the prophecies of Genesis with the Messianic promises for the seed of Isaac.

The twelve princes, sons of Ishmael, whose names are recorded, were undoubtedly the patriarchs of so many Arab tribes. Some of the names can be distinctly traced through history and others are easily identified with modern clans in Arabia. Mibsam seems to correspond with the Nejd tribe of Bessam. Mishma is surely the same as the Arabic Beni Misma. Nearly all the commentators agree that Dumah is Dumat el Jendal in Northern Arabia – one of the oldest Arab settlements. Aside from

conjecture two names stand out and are well known in history – **Nebaioth** and **Kedar**. As long ago as Pliny in the second century they are mentioned together in his Natural History as Nabatoi et Cedrei.

Now it is these very two names, whose identity no-one questions, that are the centre of glorious promises. Isaiah 60 is well known as one of the greatest Old Testament passages containing special promises. Many do not realise that much of it contains special promises for Arabia:

"A multitude of camels will cover you, young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba (Yemen) will come, they will bring gold and frankincense, and will bear good news of the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together unto you. The rams of Nebaioth will minister to you. They will go up with acceptance on My altar and I will glorify My glorious house."

These verses read in connection with the many promises that precede them, leave no room for doubt that the sons of Ishmael have a large place in the coming glory of the Lord and the brightness of His rising. This has only been delayed by our neglect in evangelising Arabia, but the Lord will still keep His promise and Christ will see the travail of His soul among the people of Arabia. And then shall be fulfilled the other promise significantly put in Isaiah 42 for this part of the peninsula:

"Sing to the Lord a new song, sing His praise from the end of the earth!Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the towns where Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing aloud, let them shout for joy from the tops of the mountains."

It is all there with geographical accuracy and completely describes the present state – cities in the desert – that is Nejd. Kedar is seen forsaking the nomad tent and becoming town dwellers and the rock-dwellers of Medain Salih!

"And I will lead the blind by a way that they do not know; in paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them and rugged places into plains. These are the things I will do, and I will not leave them undone."

The only proper name and the only geographical centre of the entire chapter is Kedar. In two other prophecies (Is. 21:13-17 and Jer. 49:28-33) which have no Messianic character, Kedar is referred to as synonymous with Arabia.

Another group of special promises for Arabia cluster round the names **Seba** and **Sheba**.

"All they from Sheba will come, they will bring gold and frankincense and will bear good news of the praises of the Lord." (Is. 60:6)

"The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts .... long may He live, may gold of Sheba be given to Him!" (Ps. 72).

The Messianic character of this psalm is generally acknowledged. Where are Seba and Sheba? Three 'Shebas' are referred to in the genealogies in the Bible:

i. A son of Raamah, son of Cush

ii. A son of Joktan, grandson of Ishmael

iii. A son of Jokshan, son of Kebirah

But all of these find their dwelling place in what is now southern Arabia. The Jokanite Sheba is the Kingdom of the Himyarites in Yemen. The Kingdom of Sheba embraced the greater part of Yemen. Its chief cities and probably successive capitals were Seba, Sana Zaphar. Seba, the oldest capital, is identical with the present Marib, east of Sanaa. The Cushite Sheba settled somewhere on the shores of the Gulf.

On the island of Awal (one of the Bahrain's islands) are the ruins of an ancient city called Seba. Sheba has always been a land for gold and incense and we are only beginning to know a little of the opulence and glory of the ancient Himyarite Kingdom of Yemen.

But Arabia, although it has all this wealth of promises, is not a field for feeble faith! Yet, because of these promises, we can learn to look at this barren land with the same reckless, uncalculating, defiant confidence in which Abraham, ***"Without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God."***

The promises are great because the obstacles are great so that the glory of the plan as well as the glory of the work may be to God alone.

Arabia needs men and women who will believe as seeing the One Who is invisible! A lonely worker in North Africa once wrote,

> **"Yes, it is lives poured out that these people need – a sowing in tears – in a measure that perhaps no other lands require; they need a Calvary before they get their Pentecost. Thanks be to God for a field like this! In the light of eternity we could ask no greater blessedness than the chance it gives for fellowship with His Son."**

The spirit of Islam has possessed Arabia from its childhood for 1400 years!

"And He said to them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting. All things are possible to him who believes'." (Mark 9:14-29)

Life for Arabia must come from the Life-Giver. "I believe in the Holy Spirit", so the abundant harvest to come in Arabia will prove the promise of God true in every particular and to its fullest extent:

"Oh that Ishmael might live: ..... As for Ishmael, I have heard you."

Why do our Muslim friends find the Cross so offensive?

- **The Qur'anic testimony to the Lord Jesus is very high.**

  No other prophet was sinless, but a Hadith says that He was. An angel announced His birth. (Sura 3:44 ff) He did mighty miracles. He was the Word from God and the Spirit from God. Only He knows the way to eternal life. If this great prophet died in such an ignominious way, then clearly God was shamed for allowing it. This is a totally unacceptable concept! So in the Qur'an Sura 4:154 ff (al-Nisa'i) we read:

  "So then because they have violated the covenant and have disowned the signs of God, and have killed the prophets wrongly and have said, 'Our hearts are uncircumcised!' (but it is God rather who has sealed their unbelief so that but few of them believe.) And again for the unbelief and for having spoken a horrible slander against Mary, and for having said: 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God!' Whereas they neither killed him nor crucified him, <u>but it appeared so to them</u> (and in truth those whose opinion on this matter differs are certainly in doubt), nor have they any knowledge about this matter, although they follow a conjecture. It is certain that they did not kill him! But God raised him up to Himself. And God is powerful and wise."*

  [*For prophets killed see the Qur'an Sura 5:73 and 2:87.]

  So Muslims are taught that the Lord Jesus did not die on the Cross. The common explanation of what happened is called the **Substitution Theory**. The phrase, *"It appeared so to them"* has been variously translated into English. The above is Yusuf Ali's translation. Arbery has, *"Only a likeness of it was shown to them".* Azad has, *"It was an illusion for them".*

  So various Muslim scholars have said that the Lord Jesus was taken straight to heaven and someone else died in His place. It has been said that Judas died in His place or Simon of Cyrene. A modern Ahmadiya interpretation is that the Lord Jesus was nailed to the cross, but He did not die there. He was taken down alive and lived for 120 years and is buried in Kashmir!

- **Further Qur'anic teaching on the death of the Lord Jesus**

  In Sura 3:55 God declares, *"I am about to cause you* (Jesus) *to die and lift you up to me. I shall take you away from the unbelievers and exalt your followers above them on the Day of*

Resurrection." Here the Qur'an states that the Lord Jesus would die (by implication be resurrected) and ascend to God.

3. The Concept of Redemption Analogies

Redemption analogies are pictures/stories/objects of some aspect of the Gospel message that specifically help a people/culture to understand the Cross in terms of redemption/atonement. The Holy Spirit has embedded these analogies within all cultures including Muslim cultures. They are 'seeds' of the Gospel in human socio-cultural forms. You find them in rites of passage rituals – birth, puberty, wedding rituals, in peace-making ceremonies as well as in myths, stories, traditions etc.

So the discovery and use of redemption analogies can help Muslims begin to understand the Cross through their own cultural expressions of this vital aspect of the Cross and the atonement for our sins. The death of the Lord Jesus is then seen as the fulfilment of their own hopes, expectations and desires, rather than just something imposed from outside.

Whatever is just and good in Islam finds its deepest and final perfection in the Lord Jesus. In Acts 17, the idolatrous Greeks in Athens were worshipping an 'unknown God'. Paul told them that their 'unknown God' was in fact the Creator of all, the Father of the Lord Jesus whom He raised from the dead.

[For more about Redemption Analogies in general, see two books by Don Richardson, **Eternity in their Hearts** and **Peace Child**.]

4. Redemption Analogies in Muslim cultures

Most Islamic cultures are close to the ancient Palestinian culture of Jesus in the early First Century. Muhammad had extensive exposure to this form of Judaism. Islamic Law (Shariat-al-Islam) borrows heavily from Judaic Law.

Some believe that Islam is demonised and has no good in it. But in fact, Islam has a tremendous number of things in common with Christianity. In fact so much so that John of Damascus, who grew up in the court of one of the early Umayyad Caliphs, wrote a book about Christian heresies in his old age in Jerusalem. In this book he classified Islam as a Christian heresy.

There is a danger of syncretism! But Rom. 2:14 says, ***"Gentiles do by nature things contained in the Law"***. So I believe that just as the Lord Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses, He **also** fulfils the **intention** of the 'Shariat-al-Islam' (the intention of making us holy in the sight of God). For the Shariah is largely based on Judaic Law.

Redemption Analogies in the Old Testament are usually called 'types'. These 'types' include the priesthood, the sacrifices and so on and they speak of the Lord Jesus. Many of these 'types' are also found in Muslim culture.

A believer from a Muslim background no longer needs the 'types' (or the Qur'an) as a guide because he now has the real thing – the Lord Jesus Himself and eternal life with Him!

Some Examples

- **Ritual washings and ceremonial uncleanness**
    - Muslims must perform physical washing before praying formally – the salat prayers five times a day. Explain that it is a picture of our need for cleansing in our lives before we can enter into God's presence:
        - √ Washing hands represents **our deeds** that must be washed clean.
        - √ Washing our face/head represents the need of cleansing **our thoughts**.
        - √ Washing our mouth represents cleansing **our speech** of foul talk, lies etc.

√ Washing our feet represents our walk and **general behaviour** that needs to be cleansed.

So the outward physical ritual of washing before formal prayer speaks to us of our need for inward spiritual cleansing.

- Every year before the Hajj begins, the King of Saudi Arabia – the guardian of the two holy mosques – enters the Ka'aba in Mecca and washes the interior of the Ka'aba – this most holy place in all of Islam.

  Again this is a picture of the Lord Jesus, the King of Kings cleansing our hearts, but also cleansing the interior of 'the House of God' – not a building, but a 'people' (Dar) – making holy the "followers of God".

- Muslims don't eat pork because pigs are "unclean" animals. Other foods and practices are 'haram' (unclean). This speaks of abstaining from all spiritual uncleanness – i.e. not getting involved in any sort of sin.

Muslims know that outward rituals have an inner spiritual meaning. Rom. 2:14-16 says,

"For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the Law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the Law. They show that the work of the Law is <u>written on their hearts</u>, to which their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse … them, on that day when … God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

It is up to us to show that, ***"whatever is good and just"*** in Islam finds its deepest meaning and final perfection in the Lord Jesus! Speaking to the Jews, the Lord Jesus said, ***"If you believed Moses, you would believe Me for he wrote of Me."*** (Jn. 5:46)

- **The Hajj**

  There are many redemption analogies in the whole Hajj experience. We will just look at the garments of the Hajji.

- **The garments of the Hajji**

  There are two garments – **the rida** and **the izar**. The rida is a white cloth that covers the shoulders and the heart of the pilgrim – i.e. the upper body above the waist. The rida teaches an important lesson. In entering God's presence we need a spiritual covering – a robe of righteousness. Pilgrims have to take off their clothes and wear the two garments when they enter the sacred area around Mecca. The izar covers the body from the waist to the knees, so it covers the reproductive organs and speaks to pilgrims about the problems we inherited at birth – i.e. being 'touched by Satan'.

  These days the Saudi government provides the two garments. Sura 7:26 (The Heights) says, *"O you children of Adam! We have bestowed new clothing upon you to cover your shame as well as to be an adornment to you. But the garment of righteousness, that is the best. Such are among the signs of Allah"*.

  So we need a spiritual robe of righteousness that will cover us in the presence of God. We can't make our own robe by our own deeds. Sura 96:6-7 (Proclaim) says, *"No, but man does transgress all bounds in that he looks upon himself as self-sufficient"*. Sura 6:122 (The Cattle) says that those who depend upon their own deeds are not people of faith, *"Thus to those without faith their own deeds seem pleasing"*.

  This speaks to us of the robe of righteousness that the Lord Jesus wore and which is also provided for us. Nabi (prophet) Isaiah wrote, ***"He*** (al-Masih) ***was wounded for our evil deeds. He was bruised for our state of unrighteousness. The punishment we deserved was put on Him"*** (Is. 53:5-6) – so His innocence for our guilt. We became eligible to receive His spotless robe of righteousness in place of our 'filthy clothing'.

  This is the spiritual meaning of the clothes change as the pilgrim nears the 'House of God' – the very presence of God Himself. With the robe of righteousness that God Himself provides for us,

we are ready to enter into the presence of God. Therefore, ***"We have peace with God through … Isa al-Masih."*** (Injil Isa – Rom. 5:1) The Feast of Sacrifice – Eid al-Adha/ID Qurbani

In Arabic this is called Eid al-Adha. Other languages have other terms for the Feast of Sacrifice. Muslims know that outward rituals have an inner spiritual meaning. It is up to us to show that, *"Whatever is honourable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable …."* (Phil. 4:8) in Islam finds its deepest meaning and final perfection in the Lord Jesus.

This ritual is performed at the end of the Hajj. The date moves back about 10 days every year on a lunar cycle. Muslims all over the world celebrate the feast at the same time each year. It is a commemoration of the story of Abraham almost sacrificing his son, but being rescued by divine intervention and sacrificing a ram as a substitute for the boy.

The pilgrim walks round the Ka'aba seven times while reciting a special prayer of submission to God. There are other rituals one must observe such as drinking water from the well of Zem Zem. The fourth day of the pilgrimage he/she goes to Mina where the Qur'an is recited and prayers are said. On the ninth day he/she goes to Mount Arafat – the mountain of mercy. These commitments are specified in the Qur'an. Any other pilgrimage activities come from Sunni or Shi'a traditions. Once the pilgrim has fulfilled these obligations he/she is called a Hadji. After walking round the Ka'aba again seven times, he/she returns to Mina and celebrates the Feast of Sacrifice. This indicates the end of the pilgrimage.

Muslims know Abraham as 'Khalil Allah' – the friend of God. *[This is written in the way you might talk to your Muslim friend.]* Khalil means an intimate friend – the kind of friend with whom you share secrets. When Abraham turned to God for guidance, God responded by giving him information and insights into spiritual secrets. One of these secrets concerned the whole issue of righteousness. Abraham knew that all human beings were sinners, but he also believed that God would consider some people to be *"from among the righteous"*. Since all are born into the realm (kingdom) of darkness, Abraham wanted to know how some people became righteous.
He wanted to know how God was going to set mankind free from the penalty of sin and from Satan's power over men.

Sura 37:99-100 (Those Ranged in Ranks) says *"Abraham said, 'I will go to my Lord. He will surely guide me! My Lord, grant me a righteous'* (son)." God gave Abraham a son whom the Qur'an describes as *'halim'* patient and mild tempered. The name of the boy is not given in the Qur'an, but all Muslims assume it was Ishmael. Don't dispute this as it is only a minor issue. When the boy became a young man God spoke to Abraham in a vision, commanding him to offer his son as a sacrifice. (Sura 37:101-113) There is a tradition that Abraham wanted to sacrifice his son, but the angels told him to take the ram instead as a sacrifice. That day was to be a day of festivity for his children and their offspring. So throughout the Muslim World every family sacrifices a ram (or equivalent) on the day of the feast.

When Abraham had bound and prepared his son for sacrifice, God told Abraham to stop. The test was complete. Abraham was obedient, trustworthy and a man of faith. Then and only then did God reveal His great plan to Abraham. In the Tawrat (Genesis 22:13-14) it says, *"Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. And Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, 'the Lord will provide' as it is said to this day, 'on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided' "*.

In the Qur'an God says, (Sura 37:107-108 – Those Ranged in Ranks) *"We ransomed him,* (Abraham's son) *with* ***a momentous sacrifice*** *and we left* (this blessing) *for him among generations to come in later times."* The Arabic word *'fadeema'* (sacrifice) comes from the root *'fadana'*, which means 'to redeem, to ransom, to sacrifice in the place of someone else'.

- **Eid al-Adha today**

  The ram (or male goat) is killed early in the morning in the way proscribed in the Hadith and then the meat is cooked. Usually the TV is on and the family watches the events of the pilgrimage in Mecca. Reports of this are broadcast throughout the day. The killing of the animal is carried out in a ritual way. The head is pointed towards Mecca and the carotid and jugular blood vessels are cut in the upper part of the neck. Then the animal is hung upside down to allow the heart to pump out the blood. The ram should be without any defects, an adult (but not old) and a male. It should not be drugged or stunned before it is killed. It is a day of great activity – the meat is cut off; the fleece is washed, covered with salt and left to dry. Spicy sausages and dried meat (*qdid*) are made and hung along the walls to dry. The bones of the animal must not be broken on that day.

  Traditions differ from country to country. In the Arab World the right shoulder and the right front leg are smoked and stored away for the New Year feast when the family eat it all. It is said that the fortune of the head of the house for the coming year is written on the bones with invisible letters. So if the shoulder and leg bones are accidentally broken during the period before the New Year, bad luck is predicted for the family.

  The feast is a true extended family happening. Together with Eid al-Fitr, this feast emphasises the unity of the family in Islam. There is no regular religious ritual in the world as massive as the pilgrimage to Mecca. Now with TV, all Muslims everywhere are watching the events in Mecca. All families kill a ram if at all possible. In many western countries Muslims are prevented from doing this by animal cruelty laws. All of this produces an enormous alliance that is felt by Muslims eating this feast together. Nearly everyone is hoping that in some way pardon for past sins will be obtained by the sacrifice done.

5. The Lamb/Ram in the Bible

It is easy to see that the lamb/sheep/ram has a central place in successive Bible stories. We see this in Gen. 4:4 to Rev. 21:22 & 22:1-3. The culmination comes in John the Baptist's statement, ***"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world"***. (Jn. 1:29, 36) Here the Lamb represents the Lord Jesus and whenever we read of lambs/rams in the Bible we see something of the character of the Lord Jesus. We see that the Lamb leads his flock and is the shepherd (Rev. 7:17). The Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep (Jn. 10:11) and as the Lamb, he sacrifices Himself for them. Eph. 1:7 says, ***"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins …."*** In both the Tabernacle and the Temple numerous lambs were killed, but their blood never washed away any sin. Those Old Testament sacrifices only pointed in faith to the blood of the Lord Jesus. (Heb. 9:14, 26; 10:1-2 and Rom. 3:21-15) We remember regularly the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It is the only provision for the remission of our sins. Having received pardon for all our sins by the death of the Lord Jesus, there is no need to sacrifice lambs/rams any more. (Heb. 10:11-13)

6. Six possible passages to share with your friends over Eid al-Adha

- The sacrifice of Abraham's son (Gen. 22:1-19 and Heb. 11:17-19)
- The Institution of the Passover and its parallels with Eid al-Adha (Ex. 12:1-14)
- The Day of Atonement (Lev. 16)
- The Concept of Redemption (Ex. 13:1-16 and Is. 52:13-53:13)
- The Lord's Supper (Mt. 26:17-29 and Jn. 6:48-59)
- The Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus in our place opens the way for us to be part of the **Second Creation**.

1st Analogy – The Sacrifice of Abraham's Son – Isaac

In the 2nd millennium BC and into the 1st millennium people in the Fertile Crescent practiced child sacrifice. This only ended with the implementation of Roman rule and law. (The Romans hated the sacrifice of children but had no problem killing adults in the arena!)

So in Abraham's day, in his cultural context, God's command to offer up his son was possible. What made it difficult was that it was through **this son** that God had given to Abraham miraculously in his old age, that God was going to make him a progenitor of many nations. (Gen. 15:3-6) Abraham apparently rationalised the problem by believing God was capable of raising his son from the dead. (Heb. 11:123) This is why Abraham said to the two servants that "they" (Abraham and his son) would return. But this scenario really did happen when God the Father sacrificed His Son, the Lord Jesus.

Isaac (the son) carried the wood on which he was to be sacrificed just as the Lord Jesus carried His Cross. (Jn. 19:17)

While climbing the mountain, Isaac asked a logical question, ***"Where is the lamb to be sacrificed?"*** (Gen. 22:17) Abraham answered him with a very great prophetic statement, ***"God Himself will provide a lamb for sacrifice"***. (Gen. 22:8) The people who lived around Abraham sacrificed their own children in order to appease their gods. Abraham knew that the sacrifice of his son would never be sufficient to appease God's wrath over sin. He knew that God had a solution to this predicament. Abraham was justified (made righteous) by his faith in God's solution. (Rom. 4:23)

In the Qur'anic version, the prophet Abraham was so conscious of his own need for forgiveness that he turned to God in faith and prayed, *"O Our Lord, cover me with your forgiveness"* (Sura 14:41-Ibraheim) Because Abraham trusted God to cover him and forgive his sins, he received what he asked for. So the Injil says, ***"Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."*** (Injil Isa – Rom. 4:3). Rasul Dawud (David) wrote, ***"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity."*** (Az-Zabour – Psalm 32:1)

In the Qur'an, (Sura 37:107-108 – Those Ranged in Ranks) God says, *"We ransomed him* (Abraham's son) *with* ***a momentous sacrifice*** *…"*. So through this test of Abraham's faith, God showed Abraham that the human race would be set free from the power of Satan and the realm of darkness by **a momentous sacrifice**.

Now it is obvious that the ransom price for all mankind must be much greater than a mere ram. How many rams equalled the worth of the life of Abraham's son? Here a ram is just a picture of **a momentous sacrifice** enough not only for Abraham's son but also for the entire human race! So the sacrifice of the ram by Abraham wasn't **the momentous sacrifice**, but a symbol of it. The momentous sacrifice didn't occur in Abraham's lifetime, but it was, *"For generations to come in later times"*.

Why we believe <u>the Momentous Sacrifice</u> was the death of Sayyid Isa al-Masih on the Cross.

Al-Masih, the very Word of God made flesh, (Sura 4:171) was substituted to die for all mankind. This indeed was **a momentous sacrifice**. Did al-Masih fulfil the conditions of a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind – past, present and future?

- ✓ Who is the **only person** never touched by Satan or by the power of Satan?
  Answer: Sayyid Isa al-Masih! The Lord Jesus said, ***"He*** (Satan) ***has no power over me."*** (Injil Isa, Rasul Yohanna 14:30)
- ✓ Who was the only person ever born of a virgin – the seed of a woman only?
  Answer: Sayyid Isa al-Masih! The Torah predicted it. The Injil declares it. The Qur'an confirms it. (Sura 19:19-20)
- ✓ Was Isa al-Masih 'musulama' completely submissive to the will of God?
  Answer: Yes! The prophet Isaiah describes Sayyid Isa's complete submission in a prophecy, (Is. 53:7-10) ***"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his mouth. Like a lamb***

that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth … yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise Him."

The Lord Jesus Himself said, ***"I seek not My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."*** (Injil Isa, Rasul Yohanna 5:30) and again, ***"Here I am. I have come to do Your will."*** (Injil Isa – Heb. 10:9)

✓ Who was the only perfect man – holy and having no burden of sin of his own?

Answer: Isa al-Masih, the Son of Maryam. The Holy Injil says the angel Jibreel told Maryam, ***"Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy"***. (Injil Isa - Rasul Lukan 1:35)

In the Qur'an, the angel Jibreel says, *"He said, 'I am only a messenger from your Lord to give you a sinless son.' "* (Sura 19:19 – Maryam) The Arabic word 'sinless' is *'zakian'*. It means holy, absolutely pure, blameless and guiltless. No other man or prophet is called 'zakian' in the Qur'an. When the Lord Jesus lived on the earth, one of the evil jinn cried out, ***"What have you to do with us Isa? Have you come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God"***. (Injil Isa, Rasul Markan 1:24) For this reason, the Injil says, ***"If the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer purifies the flesh, how much more shall the blood of the Messiah, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the Living God?"*** (Injil Isa – Hebrews 9:13-14)

Two of God's gifts to mankind because of <u>the Momentous Sacrifice</u>

In addition to God's provision of a covering for our sins, here are two other gifts from God as a result of **the momentous sacrifice**.

1. The Messiah's death is **a momentous sacrifice** that ransomed all mankind from the power of Satan that Adam had brought on all his descendants when he disobeyed God. The Injil says, ***"You know that you were ransomed from the futile way inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of al-Masih, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."*** (Injil Isa – 1st Rasul Peter 1:18-19)

2. The Qur'an tells us God looks on all humanity as a whole and therefore, *"If anyone killed a person, it would be as if he killed the whole people."* (Sura 5:35 – The Table Spread) Al-Masih's death is God's means of killing the self-centred disposition of all mankind. The Injil says, ***"We are convinced that One died for all, therefore*** (in God's eyes) ***all have died"***. (Injil Isa - 1 Cor. 5:14)

Just as the ram was substituted for Abraham's son, so al-Masih, the very Word of God made flesh, was substituted to die for the whole of mankind. That is indeed a very **momentous sacrifice**!

So we are justified before God when we believe in the sacrifice of God's Messiah on our behalf. (Rom. 4:24-25; Gal. 3:6-9) The lamb is not meant for people, but **for God**. So from Abraham's day until John the Baptist, the question was, **"Where is the Lamb of God?"** until finally John the Baptist said, ***"Behold the Lamb of God"***. But as a foretaste of this event – **the momentous sacrifice** – God provided a ram for Abraham as a substitute for his son and the ram died in his place.

2nd Analogy – The Institution of the Passover and its parallels with Eid al-Adha (Ex. 12:1-14)

God was going to judge all the people of Egypt and their gods by killing all the firstborn of both people and animals, but God was prepared to save every family who killed a lamb. The conditions were that the lamb should be killed in a proscribed way:

- One lamb per family – as in the Eid
- The lamb must be without defects, healthy – so typifying the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:19) – as in the Eid
- It should be male (Acts 2:22) – as in the Eid

- It must be an adult – at least one year old – In the prime of life as was the Lord Jesus (Lk. 3:23) – as in the Eid
- On the 10th day of the month they had to choose the lamb and keep it until the 14th day in their house/yard so the family became attached to it by looking after it – as in the Eid.
- In the Passover Festival the sheep was killed between the 9th and the 12th hour (in the afternoon). The Lord Jesus died in the 9th hour. (Lk. 23:44-46) In the Eid the sheep is killed in the morning.
- The blood of the lamb/sheep was to be caught and put on the doorposts and above the door. When the Lord saw the blood, He passed over. (Heb. 9:12) In some parts of the Muslim World a hand is dipped in the blood and an imprint is made on the door or on the wall above and beside the door in order to keep jinn and other evil spirits out.
- In the Passover the meat had to be prepared and eaten that same night. (Ex. 12:8-10) It was to be roasted on a fire and it should not be cut up (the bones were not to be broken) – a symbol of the Lord Jesus passing through the fire of the wrath of God. In the Eid the meat is also roasted and eaten although the *'gdid'* may last a year.

The Passover is a great story to tell to explain the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The only drawback - at least in the Arab World - is that freeing the Jews from Egypt and the later invasion of Palestine (~3350 years ago) quickly leads into the Palestinian Issue of today - a very considerable sidetrack!

3rd Analogy – The Day of Atonement

Christians don't celebrate this day except indirectly on Good Friday. But Jews still take it very seriously. There are several parallels between the pilgrimage to Mecca and the Day of Atonement. (Lev. 16)

- Aaron had to purify himself before he was allowed to perform the sacrifice. He had to do this for himself and his family. (Lev. 16:3,4,6) He had to make one sacrifice for himself and **another** one for the whole people. This was an atonement for himself and for the whole People of God. Then a goat was taken and all the sins of the people were placed symbolically on the head of the animal. (Lev. 16:21) This goat was then sent into the desert to die. So the sins of the people were forgiven and taken away.
- When a Muslim goes to Mecca on Hajj he also purifies himself and he receives complete atonement for all his sins up until that point in his life. On the day he leaves Mecca, God will start a new record of his sins. So it is a great thing if you die during the pilgrimage for then you will go straight to heaven. In the killing of the sheep, the more perfect (and so the more expensive) the better. There is some atonement for sin if you do it at home, but it is not complete. But any sacrifice counts.

  Before the sheep is killed at Eid al-Adha, each family member purifies him/herself - a shower, bath etc. The one killing the sheep takes special care in purifying himself. He goes to the mosque at dawn prayers, washes as required and is cleansed by prayer.

  Muslims are not usually aware that the sheep being killed is some kind of sin offering, but it is often there in the background and it is worth asking about.

4th Analogy – The Whole Concept of Redemption

According to Exodus, everything that comes first from the womb must be dedicated to God. This was for all mammals including humans. Firstborn males (man and animal) were to be sacrificed to God. Unclean animals were to be killed. [A donkey typifies all unclean animals in Num. 18:15.] Clean animals were to be ritually sacrificed on the altar in the Tabernacle (or Temple) area.

Unclean animals **could** be redeemed. A male son **must be redeemed**. The Hebrew word is *'padah'* translated as 'to redeem' 'to ransom' 'to save' or 'to be set free'. In Exodus 13 the animal (or son) that is to be killed is redeemed by taking a lamb as a substitute sacrifice. So a "clean" lamb was sacrificed instead of an "unclean" animal. By the criteria used for "clean", man is "unclean". (Rom.

3:10-19) So the Old Testament teaching is that the "unclean" should either be killed or be substituted by a "clean" lamb.

The Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed in our place as our substitute. He was "clean" for He was sinless. (Is. 53:5-7) The moment we believe in the Lord Jesus as our substitute we are "born again" from above. We are now "clean" – i.e. a second birth – and so blameless before God. (Heb. 10:14; Jn. 1:12-13) The Lord Jesus is our substitute Lamb.

He was mute. (Is. 53:7; Mt. 27:12) He was ritually clean. (Lev. 11:3; 1 Pet. 2:22 and 1:19) He was conscious when he died. (Mt. 27:24) All these are true of the al-Adha sacrifice.

The Lord Jesus is our Redeemer. We have no need of any other, so followers of the Lord Jesus don't sacrifice animals anymore. (Heb. 9:22-28; 10:12) We deserve death because of our sins, but we have been redeemed!

5th Analogy – The Last Supper / The Lord's Supper

The Lord Jesus instituted this the evening before He died. As the Passover looked forward to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, so the Lord's Supper looks back to this perfect sacrifice before God. The Lord Jesus took bread as a symbol of His body that would be sacrificed and He took wine as a symbol of his blood to be shed for our redemption. He commands us to remember His sacrifice by having this "feast" regularly as a family of believers.

The most profound way we can physically incorporate something into our lives is to eat and digest it. So symbolically, by eating the bread and drinking the wine, we are inviting the Lord Jesus into all the deepest areas of our existence to make purification there. (Jn. 6)

By this purification and renewing of our entire being, we are allowed to enter boldly into God's presence and to meet God personally in Spirit. (Heb. 10:19-22)

In the past this "supper" was taken as part of a large 'family meal' - the 'family' being all the local believers in the Lord Jesus. It is still celebrated with great rejoicing. (Ex. 12:14; Acts 2:46)

6th Analogy – The Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus in our place opens the way for us to become part of the Second Creation

The consequences of Adam's disobedience were disastrous for all his descendants. Therefore God promised mankind a **Second Creation**! Sura 53:47 (The Star) says, *"That he has promised a Second Creation"*. Again the Qur'an says in Sura 10:4 (Jonah), *"The promise of God is true. It is he who begins the process of creation and repeats it …."*

Adam was the first man of the original/first creation. Sayyid Isa al-Masih is the first man of the Second Creation. The first creation was physical, relating to the physical realm that is explored by science. The Second Creation is spiritual, relating to the higher level of the spirit. The Injil says, ***"The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam*** (Isa al-Masih) ***became a life-giving Spirit ….The first man was from the earth – a man of dust. The second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust and as is the Man of Heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust we will also bear the image of the Man of Heaven."*** (1 Cor. 15:45-49)

So the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, is no longer a man of the earth. He is now the Man of Heaven – the first man to be raised from the dead, having entered bodily into heaven. For this reason the Injil calls Sayyid Isa al-Masih, ***"The Firstborn from among the dead"***. (Injil Isa, Col. 1:18)

Through the resurrection of Isa al-Masih, God has demonstrated to **all mankind that He wants to give them eternal life**. For this reason, the Lord Jesus, the first man of the Second Creation has indeed become a Life-giving Spirit. He said about Himself, ***"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man comes to God except through Me."*** (Injil Isa – Rasul Yohanna 14:6)

So the 'Open Way' is a Person!! He (the Open Way) is the way from hell to paradise, from spiritual uncleanness to purity of heart, from fear of God to intimate friendship with God. All this is now 'open' through Sayyid Isa al-Masih's sacrificial death and resurrection on our behalf. God has promised that through faith and trust in the Lord Jesus we too can become part of the Second Creation.

The Injil says, ***"If anyone is in al-Masih, he is a new creation; the old has passed away. Behold, the new has come."*** (Injil Isa – 1 Cor. 5:17)

The Injil says, ***"No one who believes in Him*** (Sayyid Isa al-Masih) ***will be put to shame"*** .
(Injil Isa - Rom. 10:9-11)

[A possible 7th Analogy – Ashura as celebrated by Shi'a Muslims]

Shi'a have a better understanding of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus than do many Sunni because of Ashura. This word is derived from the Hebrew word *'asor'* plus the Aramaic determinative ending. It is the word used for the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16:29. Like its Jewish counterpart, this day is observed as a day of fasting by some Sunni Muslims, but it has much greater significance for Shi'a Muslims. On this day, the 10th of the month of Muharram, Shiites commemorate the death of Hussain, the grandson of Muhammad. He was killed by Umayyad troops (Sunni) in 680 AD in Kerbela, Iraq – about 60 miles southwest of Baghdad. Ever since, his followers have interpreted his death as a vicarious death for the forgiveness of their sins. In other words, he suffered and sacrificed his life for the salvation of those who adopt Islam.

This has direct parallels with the description of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, ***"With His stripes we are healed."*** (v. 5); ***"He makes Himself an offering for sin."*** (v. 10); ***"He bore the sin of many."*** (v. 12) [See also vs. 4, 6, 8 and 11.] This is how the New Testament interprets the death of the Lord Jesus. (1 Pet. 2:24) Because of His Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, the Lord Jesus is considered a **Mediator** between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5) and He intercedes for us. (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)

In Shi'a passion plays enacting the death of Hussain associated with Ashura, Hussain assumes the role of both redeemer and mediator. [For more details see "Ta'ziya" in the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam.]

Should we take part in Eid al-Adha?

Most of our colleagues do, but some do not. It is true that perhaps the average urbanised Muslim no longer attaches a spiritual value to the rituals observed at Eid al-Adha. They see it rather as **a cultural tradition** – much as the average European views Christmas.

What is tradition? A definition of tradition is: the transference of a spiritual heritage and cultural moral norms/worldview from person to person and from generation to generation. It may be oral transfer through stories or it may be in writing or in images and types through ceremonies and re-enactment plays. Traditions of this sort ensure the continuity of culture.

God uses tradition. (Ex. 12; Deut. 6; Luke 22; Joshua 4:6-8; 1 Cor. 11:24) But as believers in the Lord Jesus, we need to challenge all traditions. Even Christian-based traditions can become mere dead ritual. They may also be filled with God's Spirit – good, living and full of meaning.

What of the tradition of Eid al-Adha? The source of the tradition is clearly in Abraham, God's command to sacrifice his son and God's provision of a substitute. (Gen. 22) This source is developed in both the Old and New Testaments to point clearly to the Lord Jesus. But in the history of Islam is has developed otherwise. Eid al-Adha is celebrated as the climax of the pilgrimage. The Ka'aba – the focus of the pilgrimage – is full of pre-Islamic rituals and traditions.

In Peter Wagner's book, **Breaking Strongholds,** Cindy Jacobs writes:

"The sins of a nation can produce national/spiritual strongholds. These affect many aspects of the culture of the people who live in the nation. These sins can also give the 'principalities and powers' 'legal' rights to demonise their culture."

So the argument goes that these demonic forces use non-biblical rituals and traditions (and even those that have a Biblical basis like Eid al-Adha) to increase the spiritual blindness of a people and their culture. As the spiritual blindness increases, so the people are increasingly in bondage/slavery to the occult powers. And this bondage is transferred from one generation to another through tradition – oral, written and during religious festivals, ceremonies and pilgrimages. So it is 'tradition' that gives the demonic powers their ability to control a people.

So God uses 'tradition' for the purpose of reminding us of the basis of our salvation. Satan uses 'tradition' to keep people in deep bondage. We need to do some careful 'contextualisation' in the issue of Eid al-Adha. There are three alternatives:

- Reject it and refuse to have any part of it.
- Wholeheartedly accept it as it stands in the minds and hearts of Muslims.
- Take the good out of it by pointing out the redemption analogies – i.e. critical contextualisation.

Here are a few thoughts:

1. According to 1 Cor. 8:6 eating the al-Adha meat will do us no harm because there is only one God. So most of us eat the meat with a neighbour family or the neighbour family comes round to our house and presents us with a gift of al-Adha meat. I think this is perfectly acceptable.
2. In some parts of the Muslim World the sacrificed meat is also offered to 'departed saints' (sidis) at their shrines in the hope that their prayers will be more effective for recovering from illness, for 'good luck', for 'baraka' for the future etc. – i.e. the sacrificial meat will somehow enhance the chance of success. Some of our colleagues don't eat this meat when they know it has been presented as a sacrifice to a sidi and they explain why. This may happen at similar feasts such as circumcision, engagement, wedding feasts and other rites of passage where meat may have been offered to a sidi. This is a form of idolatry. Orthodox Muslims also considered this to be idolatry (Folk Islam).
3. According to Paul in 1 Cor. 8, we are allowed to eat al-Adha meat but there is one pre-condition. The reason to eat must **not** be based on **knowledge** – whether the meat has been offered to a sidi or used in some other Folk Islamic practice. It must be based on **love**! Our relationship to God and to our neighbours has priority over our knowledge that al-Adha meat may do us harm in some way.

It is always worth trying to ascertain what your neighbours think of us participating in their sacrificial feast. Is it that we acknowledge that it is a good feast of a superior religion? This is an issue for many believers from a Muslim background who sometimes have a bad conscience by eating al-Adha meat.

I think it is helpful to explain to your friends that you appreciate them being good neighbours and you enjoy eating their meat (either with them or when they have brought it to you as a gift) for the reason of friendship – i.e. love. You also enjoy it because **it reminds you** of the Biblical stories of Abraham, the Passover, the Day of Atonement, Redemption in the Bible, the Lord's Supper – in fact, ***"The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"*** and that really blesses you and fills you with joy!

When your neighbours give you al-Adha meat, if you don't want to eat it (for whatever reason), you can give it away to some poor family. Usually your generous giver will later ask you if you enjoyed the meat. What are you going to say? The fact that you were given meat is a token that you **'belong' in the neighbourhood**. Possibly you could answer in as friendly a way as possible that you appreciate the gift of the meat and especially the symbol of what it means and you are deeply honoured and very pleased. But explain that you gave it away to the poor.

May the Holy Spirit help you explain the true meaning of the Feast of Sacrifice to your neighbourhood friends.

In Summary

- Use the Word of God. Re-walk the Emmaus Road with your friends. (Lk. 24:13-35)
- Be constantly in prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts and points us to the Lord Jesus. Seek His guidance and power as you open the Scriptures and teach the Word.
- Be a genuine friend. Eliminate the word 'contact' from your mind and be the friend the person needs.
- Ask thought provoking questions:
  - Do you expect to go to heaven?
  - How do you expect your sins will be forgiven?
  - Do you have assurance that God will accept you?
- Listen very carefully to the answers given.
- Present your beliefs openly, but never aggressively. Say what you believe showing the Bible passages that support that belief. Make clear that the authority for your beliefs is in the Bible.
- **Reason** quietly. Never argue.
- Never denigrate Muhammad, the Qur'an, the Hadith or any Muslim practice. Try to find out why it is important to them. Never make jokes about praying, fasting etc.
- Respect their customs because you love them as people.
- Persevere! They have so much re-thinking to do, but the Word of God – through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit – will accomplish much more than you think! Salvation will come to these people.