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206 - Whose Sacrifice Is It

1. Introduction

Bible believers recognize Christ as the redeemer and son of God but we don't generally think of him as a symbol or figure. In this lesson we'll explore the question "**Whose Sacrifice Is It.**" As we do that we'll explore Christ as a powerful figure and figurative element representing the ultimate in love and planning.

2. Christ and the image of God

Many believers and critics of the Bible appear to have lost a sense of connection between God the father and Christ. God is viewed as an angry, sometimes violent being who judges and destroys before showing mercy. Christ, on the other hand is seen as gentle, kind and loving and is interpreted as completely different from the wrathful Jehovah of the Old Testament. At the heart of this lies a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between God as revealed in the Old Testament and his son Jesus the Messiah who's at the heart of the New Testament.

The Bible reveals that Christ was hidden in the Old Testament (**1 Cor 2.7-8**) but while he was concealed his presence can be detected by a careful comparison of the both the Old and New Testaments. Christ is represented in a variety of symbolic forms such as types and foreshadows that become evident in a study of the New Testament and the way in which the Gospel is made known. Behind all of this is the mind that created the plan to save mankind and brought it about, revealing and preserving the story in the pages of the scriptures. As we proceed in this lesson we'll take a look at

1. The goodness and blessings of God
2. Sin and the judgment of God
3. God's plan to save mankind and
4. Sacrifice, death and the offering of Christ

Lets' take a look at each of these points to reach a better understanding of God, Christ and his sacrifice.

3. The goodness and blessings of God

As the creation week comes to a close God makes man in his image breathing the breath of life into his nostrils making him a living soul. A virtual paradise is prepared for Adam and Eve and they're given fulfilling tasks to perform and the means to be sustained physically through food that's available. God tells the couple to be fruitful and multiply which indirectly sanctions a pursuit of sexual pleasure in their relationship and the resultant creation of new life in the form of offspring. Although one prohibition was given, the couple was placed in an

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environment of comfort. God is presented as a designer, engineer and guide to the newly created humans.

David speaks of the role and esteem God has given to mankind in his writings. *“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.”* (Psm 8:3-8).

The entire planet was placed in the hands of humans who are the caretakers of creation. As David notes all things are under mankind’s control from the birds of the air to the fish of the sea. As caretakers of the world we understand that we’re to manage the resources God has made available. Examples of this can be found in the scriptures such as the following instructions that were part of the Law of Moses. God made provisions that prevented overworking the land by appointing certain years in which they were not to plant their fields or harvest what grew on its own (Lev 25:1-22) and limitations concerning the treatment of animal life such as those found in Deuteronomy 22:6 and Exodus 23:19.

While its easy to see the Bible, particularly the Old Testament as a series of *“thou shalt nots”* followed by harsh punishment and restrictions, the message is actually quite different. God not only engineered a world that meets our needs and put us in charge of it, he also continually sustains the environment. Christ stated that God causes the *“rain to fall on the just and the unjust”* (Matt 5:45). Paul makes a similar point as he preached the Gospel to the gentile world.

In the city of Lystra, after healing a man who had never been able to walk, the people of the city attempted to sacrifice to Barnabas and Paul who they took to be gods. Paul stated, *“We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”* (Acts 14:15-17). In spite of rejection, idolatry and following their own ways, God continued to bless all nations with good. The Lord hasn’t been the enemy of man waiting for every mistake only to unleash his wrath. He’s provided for us and continues to bless us in spite of neglect and selfishness.

For some, the name of God brings to mind images of a hateful being filled with rage for slight offenses which are dealt with in a drastic fashion. Contemporary interpretations of God and

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His character focus on His judgment against transgression without acknowledging His mercy and love for mankind. God is more than a wrathful being who was created by the Hebrews to explain calamities that befell their nation as some propose. On the contrary, the biblical story shows that it was man, not God, who severed the relationship with the Lord. The biblical record clearly demonstrates that God is patient and has provided for humans in spite of our self destructive tendencies. Let's take a look at the goodness of God as recorded in the scriptures.

First, there are general blessings that God has given to all that live on the earth. From the beginning He provided food (**Genesis 2.16, Genesis 9.3**). God made a provision for meeting sexual and reproductive needs through marriage (**Genesis 2.23-24, Matthew 19.4-6, 1 Corinthians 7.2, Hebrews 13.4**). God also provided the means to address the physical needs and general care for humans on the earth (**Job 25.3, Matthew 5.45, James 1.17**). In spite of this care mankind turned away from the benevolent creator (**Romans 1.25**) who in turn waited patiently until the time when he would reveal His will and require all to repent and obey Him (**Acts 15.16-17, Acts 17.26-30**).

In order to understand the patience of God we need to take a closer look at sin and God's judgment against those who violated his commands.

4. Sin and the judgment of God

I mentioned earlier that God as revealed in the Old Testament is often perceived as an angry being who lashes out at mortals for even the slightest infraction. The Bible is viewed as a rule book that seeks to take the fun out of life and smother individuality. Unfortunately there are a number of religious traditions through the centuries that have done exactly that and subsequently caused the world to look down not only on God but those who teach his word. Throughout history mankind has never liked being told what to do and has a tendency to pursue things that God doesn't approve of. Disapproval by a higher power to many people isn't acceptable and so they reject the very idea of God, sin and being held accountable. When we examine the biblical record we'll find that this attitude isn't realistic in practice or reference to our relationship with God.

The first sin recorded in the Bible is that of Adam and Eve who violated God's prohibition in the garden of Eden and ate the forbidden fruit (**Gen 3**). I'll talk about that in more detail in a future lesson but for now I'll summarize the events that took place. Mankind was created and placed in a perfect environment. All of their needs were met and they had a close relationship with the Lord. God placed only one limitation on their activities which they chose to ignore. Sin wasn't the direct product of the human mind. Satan, a spiritual being and enemy of God, introduced ideas that caused Eve, and later Adam, to disregard God's command. Those ideas triggered the weakness of humans leading to their sin which in turn led to the consequences

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God told them would take place.

If we think about this situation we see that God created mankind and maintained a close relationship with them as his children. When his children were literally stolen by the influence of Satan, two things had to take place. First, God had to impose the sanctions he warned about. No authority is worth anything if they never uphold their own laws. God would have to sever ties with his creation to a degree, driving them from his presence and making sure they couldn't return (**Gen 3.24**). On the other hand God continued to provide for them physically and made a promise that one day the power of the serpent, Satan, would be defeated (**Gen 3.15**). In essence this was a statement that God would one day bring us home where we could be with him.

Some question the story of Adam and Eve and even among believers there are some who view the story as figurative. That's partially based on the idea that God somehow set the couple up for failure knowing that sooner or later they'd be led to violate the Lord's prohibition. Theologians and academics debate and discuss the idea of free will, choice and environmentally controlled circumstance wondering just how fair the consequences were to Adam and Eve and whether God exists at all. In the end too many conclude that the story is just a myth and dismiss the idea of God, sin and evil. The consequences imposed on Adam and Eve were the act of a being who is faithful to himself and true to his word. His promises have unfolded in the pages of the Bible revealing his love for mankind and also his role as judge. God's actions were warranted and within the parameters of what Adam and Eve were told would happen. God wasn't angry with them without reason and continued to bless them. The image of an angry being who desires to punish man however remains in the mind of some and is even taught by some Bible believers.

To think of God as a being who was angry without cause ignores the teachings of the scriptures. God didn't take the life of Cain after the murder of Abel but invoked a sanction against him and provided a protection that no one should kill him (**Genesis 4.9-15**). God didn't condone killing and later voiced a universal sanction against this crime (**Genesis 9.6**). God shows mercy in other situations as well. Abraham bargained with God for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 18.23-33**). Ten righteous souls would have spared these wicked cities but this number couldn't be found and so they were destroyed (**Genesis 19.1-24**).

God intervenes with destruction only as a last resort. Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his household while God waited patiently for the completion of this task (**1 Peter 3.20**). Noah is said to have condemned the world through his own faithfulness to God (**Hebrews 11.7**). God doesn't desire the death of the wicked (**Ezekiel 18.23,32, Ezekiel 33.11**). When the nations of Judah and Israel sinned He sent messengers and prophets to call them to repent but finally allowed them to be destroyed when they refused to correct their ways and there was no remedy (**2 Chronicles 36.15-17**). As God warned the erring nation of Judah to repent he told the people "*ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it*" (**Ezek 14.23**). The

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actions of man directed against God are recorded with the Lord's reaction to those in the form of various judgments and consequences. Each time however there's also a demonstration of restraint and pleas for his people and all mankind to change their ways and be reconciled to him. A wrathful being who sought only the destruction of those who didn't obey Him wouldn't have manifested this type of attitude.

5. God's plan to save mankind

A passage frequently quoted by believers emphasizes the nature of God and his regard for mankind. "***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.***" (John 3.16). A being bent on destruction and filled with fiery indignation against helpless man doesn't fit these characteristics noted by John. The key phrase in this passage is, "***For God so loved the world...***". While Christ is the manifestation of the love of God, He didn't act alone. Christ came into the world as part of God's plan to reconcile man (Titus 1.2). It was God's power through the Holy Spirit that created the body inhabited by Christ (Luke 1.35), and it was the power of God that raised Him from the dead (Acts 13.30, Rom 4.24). While Christ is the open symbol of God's glory, power and love, the Father also possesses these characteristics.

The sacrifice made by Christ was the sacrifice of God. As a son Christ humbled Himself and did the Father's will (Philippians 2.5-8) giving us an example of what our relationship to the Father should be. The sacrifice of Christ was an act of faithfulness on the part of God, carried out as an expression of His concern for the spiritual welfare of mankind. God went to great measures and suffered a terrible loss in giving His son. God's role as the loving Father of all living things can be seen in the careful planning and execution of the scheme of redemption that lies at the heart of the biblical narrative. This plan, as I've already noted, was in place before the world began and when sin became a reality God implemented His plan to save His creation. We also see that God was aware of the character of humanity and continued to work for the salvation of humans in spite of that fact.

God veiled His plan through prophecy and specific representations that prevented intrusion and tampering by the Devil who worked against God from the very beginning. Christ, rebuking those in the Temple who demonstrated a lack of belief, describes the nature of Satan, when he told them, "***Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.***" (John 8.44). God hid His plan from the eyes of the Devil, and mankind, thus paving the way for Christ, providing a foundation upon which His Son would firmly stand.

Paul further explains the reasons for this concealment in his writing to the Corinthians.

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“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Corinthians 2.7-8). The mystery of which Paul speaks was revealed fully through Christ as God’s plan for salvation (Colossians 1.26-27). Christ stated that he came to fulfill the Law and the prophets (Matthew 5.17) and not one part of the word would pass until it had all been completed (Matthew 5.18, Luke 16.17). The mechanisms God employed shows us a wisdom that surpasses earthly understanding (Isaiah 55.8).

6. Sacrifice, death & the offering of Christ

Giving Christ as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is the ultimate expression of God’s love toward mankind. Paul states, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5.8 NKJV). God’s offering of his son is an expression of such power that it touches the heart of all but the most callous. The physical experience and reality of death coupled with the idea of sacrifice touches on vulnerabilities that we all have as humans. Loss of loved ones and the grief associated with those losses brings to mind the idea of an afterlife, God and preservation. Its this universal aspect of being human that creates a link that helps us understand the depth of Christ’s sacrifice.

While its easy to focus on death as simply a part of life, or something that will happen to us all, the spiritual reality is even greater. Death represents not just the end of a physical existence but it ushers a soul into eternity. The Bible reveals that to enter eternity unprepared for it is to suffer the consequences of that ignorance. In response to that there are a multitude of doctrines, practices and belief systems that attempt to explain the disposition of the departed. Many times this is done in ways intended to bring comfort. The thought of anyone being lost eternally is terrifying at best but this is the reality the Bible teaches. This is also the appeal that God makes to all humanity to be reconciled to him through his son. Like humans, God has also suffered loss and this fact can help us understand his call to anyone that will listen to him.

We can focus on the terrible nature of death and the emotional impact it has and as we do so we realize that there isn’t anything that effects us like the loss of loved ones. The fear of death and its finality is a motivator that reminds us to appreciate every day, take note of those around us and try to live the best life we can. To think that someone would give their lives to save someone else isn’t something foreign to us. From military families that have suffered loss, first responders who have saved lives and strangers who put themselves in harms way to help someone are familiar stories. When we view the entire biblical narrative, death and the idea that someone would be willing to lay down their lives for others is precisely what the book is about. We sometimes get lost in the detail of the various stories in the Bible but the reality is that it’s the story of mankind being stolen from God, the need to sacrifice a life to save everyone, and the

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way that was done. If we hold onto that thought we can begin to understand what the sacrifices meant and why making them was critical.

Let's simplify the scheme of redemption a bit more so we can deepen our perspective. God determined to save mankind but chose a point in time when the conditions would be right to execute his plan. God's determination is that he'll allow his son to be killed and those who then honor his son through obedience will be saved from eternal destruction. Now, God is a planner and as such he realizes that Christ won't be offering himself repeatedly. There will be one final sacrifice that will be acceptable but since that won't occur until a considerable amount of time has passed, a proxy is needed. Something that will represent the sacrifice of his son and embody certain characteristics but not tell the full story, until the time comes to reveal all. This proxy will be one that is innocent, allow itself to be killed violently and be harmless from a human perspective. It would be sacrificed as a stand-in for the son of God who would come into the world. When God's instructions were kept in regard to the sacrifices, he would treat those offering them as if Christ had already been killed. Now we can take a look at the biblical narrative with the realization that the sacrifices weren't just animals being killed as a religious rite.

From the earliest point in the biblical narrative we see the faithful engaging in sacrifice to God. Some note that the practice of sacrifice appears in other cultures and so believe that the Hebrews were simply copying this practice. In some cultures this was done to appease their deities who might be angry with them. In other cultures sacrifices meant other things and many of the ancients believed their offerings were to be consumed by their gods and would result in better favor in the future. When we look at the Hebrew culture we find a completely different way of thinking.

The God of the Bible stands apart from the deities of ancient pagan cultures. Myths, such as those from the ancient Greeks and Romans ascribe human attributes, desires and needs to their gods. Disfavor could result for offering a sacrifice that wasn't good enough or failing to offer one at set times. God however lacks these attributes as we see in the Psalms. Speaking of God the psalmist writes "***If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?***" (Psm 50.12-13). Throughout the scriptures we find statements that set God far above and beyond the realm or needs of humanity. God isn't dependent on mankind, nor does he rely on his own servants to bring about the fulfillment of his work. God is independent of anything that any human could perform. So then why were sacrifices needed and what were they for?

We might think that the sacrifices were for God but the biblical narrative doesn't support that. I've offered a general perspective on God's plan to save mankind and the use of sacrifices as a proxy of Christ but we need to add another factor; time. The following points will help us put

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God's plan into perspective.

1. God created the world and time
2. God had a plan to save mankind
3. The means of being saved would occur far in the future in human terms
4. Because sin God realized that we would be lost forever without something in place
5. Animal sacrifices were commanded and recognized by God
6. Those who offered the sacrifices commanded were considered saved by the Lord
7. When Christ died on the cross his sacrifice paid the ultimate price for sin of all time
8. Christ offered himself because this was the father's plan and his will
9. Prior to Christ's appearance the sacrifices were for the benefit of humans

Christ offered himself as the only sacrifice God would accept as good enough to avoid the Lord's wrath in the last day. When we look at like this we see that God offered up an innocent spirit for the sake of rebellious, uncaring humans, with the intent of saving those who will listen. The offering of Christ was made by God and while Christ was in complete agreement with the Father's will, we have to acknowledge Jehovah as the one who desired to save us, created the plan and implemented it to his own hurt and that of his son for the sake of the uncaring masses in an effort to save the few. The sacrifice therefore was offered up by God, on our behalf and was done so out of love for all mankind.

From this perspective we see that Christ, the coexistent spirit with God the father, left Heaven as commanded. Jesus, the body housing the spirit of the son of God, represented the knowledge, care, love and willingness to suffer loss to save mankind. Christ stands as a figure that represents all that God is and can be. He represents the willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice to save and will do so even if it goes largely ignored. Christ stands as a figure, a figurative element and even a type of the Father himself.

Now that we have this perspective we can take a closer look at the language concerning the sacrifices and how it confirms the idea that God is the one who offered Christ as a sacrifice.

7. My Sacrifice

The sacrifices were ordained and commanded by God with a more significant spiritual purpose. A study of the manner in which these sacrifices were to be offered, the duties of the priests and the requirements of the animals to be used clarify the essential aspects of purity and sanctification. God gave specific instructions regarding the nature of the animals that were to be offered. God defined these clearly when He told Moses, "***Those that are blind or broken or maimed, or have an ulcer or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the Lord, nor make an offering by fire of them on the altar to the Lord. You shall not offer to the Lord what is***

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bruised or crushed, or torn or cut; nor shall you make any offering of them in your land.” (Leviticus 22.22,24 NKJV). In short God states, *“Whatever has a defect you shall not offer.”* (Leviticus 22.20 NKJV). The sacrifices were to be of the best quality as indicated in just a few of the references that can be found which include: **Leviticus 1.3,10, 3.1,6, 4.3,23,28, 5.14,18, 6.6.**

The characteristics of the animals, the manner in which they were to be offered and the need of the priest to offer for his own sins first (**Hebrews 7.27**) defines limits and demands attention to detail, or memory, as was noted earlier in the study. The attitude which eventually manifested itself among God’s people was one of corruption. Their failure to maintain the sanctity of the sacrifices by offering that which was unacceptable brought about a rebuke by God (**Malachi 1.8,13-14**).

The spiritual nature of the sacrifices can be seen in some of the statements which indicate their ownership. God states through Moses, *“Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread; neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning.”* (**Exodus 23.18**). Speaking of the Passover God told Moses, *“Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven; neither shall the sacrifice of the Passover be left until morning.”* (**Exodus 34.25**). This latter statement provides a link to Christ.

There are two senses in which the phrase **“my sacrifice”** can be viewed. The first is that the sacrifices were commanded by God and thus were to be offered to Him as directed. They were to be God’s by virtue of His command and thus were holy because of the purpose for the animals. Another sense in which this phrase can be understood is that of the actual ownership of the sacrifices. God had given the Hebrews all of their possessions including their herds and cattle. While the priests and people were to reserve certain animals to be offered to God they were ultimately owned by the Lord as the provider. This sense provides a link with Christ who is God’s gift as a sacrifice to the world.

God being the provider of the animals for the sacrifices, incorporates a prophetic element into the sacrificial law. The sacrificing of animals could not take away sins (**Hebrews 10.11**) and only represented a remembrance of sin in such a way as to point to a better sacrifice (**Hebrews 10.1-4**). God’s commands to the Hebrews however provided a foundation for the sacrifice of Christ who would be brought into the world during the fullness of time (**Galatians 4.4**). The Law was put in place by God to prepare the way for Jesus and would direct the people to Christ at the proper time (**Galatians 3.24**). Paul stated that the things that were written *“aforetime”* (**Romans 15.4**) are for our learning and through a careful study we can understand the link between Christ and the sacrifices.

The similarities between Christ and the animal sacrifices clarifies the idea that those

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sacrifices were a “shadow” of things to come (**Hebrews 8.5**). First is the requirement that the sacrifices were to be without blemish. This phrase occurs repeatedly throughout the early portion of the book of Leviticus (**Leviticus 1-7**) which details the offering of the various sacrifices. Likewise, Christ is described as being without blemish (**Hebrews 9.14, 1 Peter 1.19**) and is referred to as the lamb of God (**John 1.29,36, Isaiah 53.7**). Christ was sanctified, or set apart, to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world in accordance with the will of God (**Isaiah 53.4**) which creates a contrast between Christ’s nature and the nature of the animal sacrifices.

The sacrifices the Hebrews were commanded to offer were a means of appeasing God spiritually until Christ would come into the world. Christ was made flesh by God for the specific purpose of being offered as a sacrifice for sins. The writer of Hebrews states, *“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all.”* (**Hebrews 10.5,9-10**). Thus Christ was brought into the world in physical form to be offered up by God for the sins of the world (**Hebrews 1.6**).

God’s determination that Christ was to be the acceptable sacrifice for sin was made before the world began (**Titus 1.2, Ephesians 1.4**). He died according to the will of God (**Isaiah 53**) for the sins of all of mankind (**Hebrews 9.28, 1 John 2.2**). To demonstrate his more excellent nature over the animal sacrifices, Christ was raised from the dead by God (**Ephesians 1.20, Acts 2.24,32, Hebrews 13.20**) and was given glory by receiving all power and authority from the Father (**Matthew 28.18, Ephesians 1.20-21, 1 Peter 3.22**) for the completion of God’s work. The only exception to this power which Christ received is that God Himself is not subject to Christ (**1 Corinthians 15.27**).

The keeping of the sacrifices by the Hebrews represented their faithful service to God and pointed to a time of complete reconciliation. This fullness of time would not only be for the Hebrews or Jews but for all nations (**Isaiah 2.1-2, Micah 4.1-3**). The sacrifices themselves spiritually represented the sacrifice of Christ as the lamb of God. For this reason the purity of the sacrifices, making them acceptable to God, had to be maintained. Failure to do this corrupted the offering, polluted the temple of God, and created a barrier between themselves and God’s salvation.

The sacrificial system instituted by God is a demonstration of how God used physical means to represent spiritual figures. The physical means employed were temporary indicating that something more permanent was coming. In each of these situations God respected the sacrifices of the faithful since these were instrumental in linking them with the blood of Christ to be offered at a future date. God speaks of redemption at times in the Old Testament as in the future, while at other times He refers to it as being already accomplished. For the faithful, God

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speaks and acts in such a way that indicates the surety of the promises He's made. God many times speaks in the present as though things yet in the future are already in the past. This is the faithfulness of God. If God has promised something it's a sure thing that can be relied on.

8. Next

In the next lesson we'll examine a figure that's not often included when we think of figures or symbolic elements. Join me in the next video for a discussion of The Figure Of Fire and its implications in the scriptures.