

# WHY WAS JESUS CALLED THE LAMB OF GOD?

by Calvin Farrell

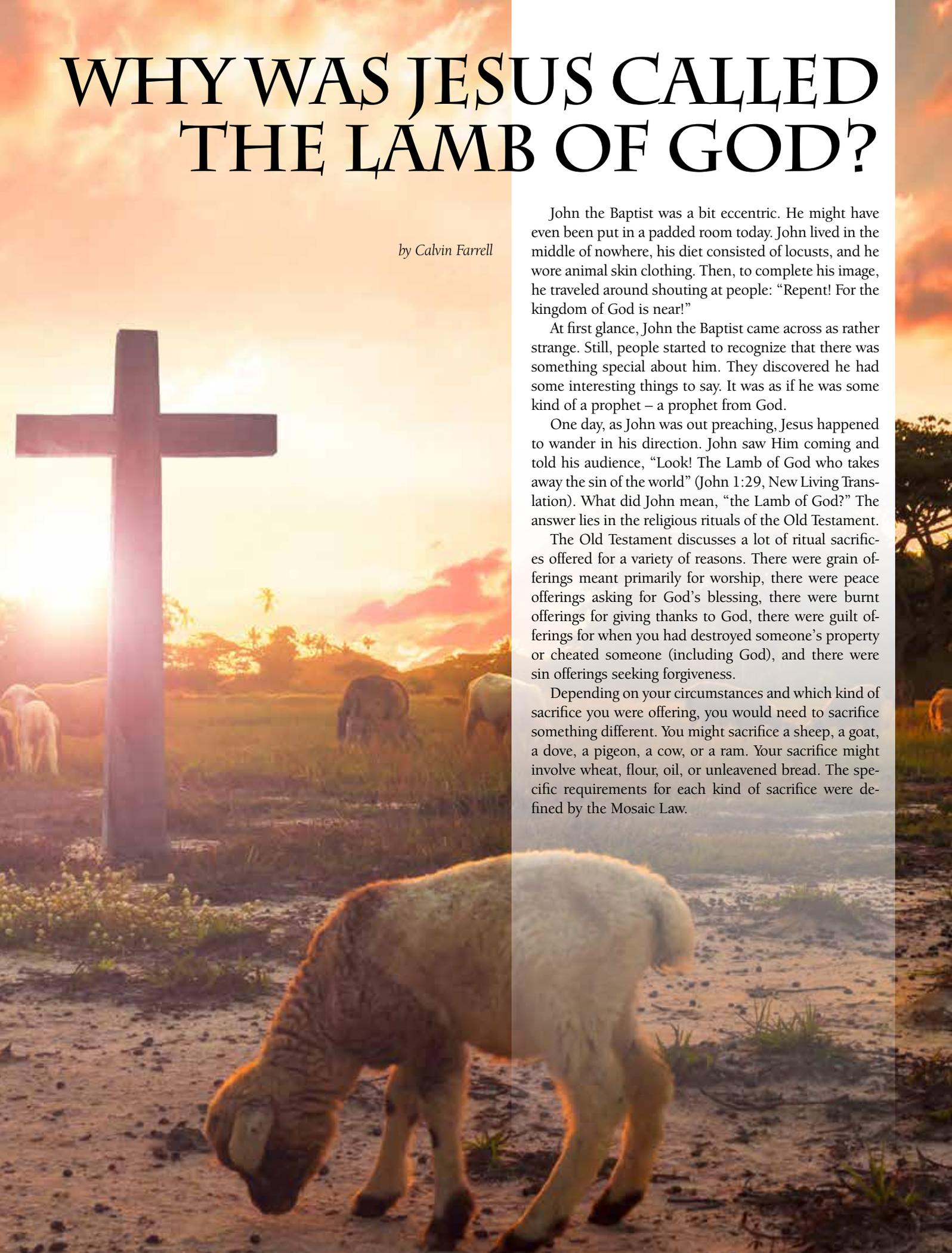
John the Baptist was a bit eccentric. He might have even been put in a padded room today. John lived in the middle of nowhere, his diet consisted of locusts, and he wore animal skin clothing. Then, to complete his image, he traveled around shouting at people: “Repent! For the kingdom of God is near!”

At first glance, John the Baptist came across as rather strange. Still, people started to recognize that there was something special about him. They discovered he had some interesting things to say. It was as if he was some kind of a prophet – a prophet from God.

One day, as John was out preaching, Jesus happened to wander in his direction. John saw Him coming and told his audience, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, New Living Translation). What did John mean, “the Lamb of God?” The answer lies in the religious rituals of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament discusses a lot of ritual sacrifices offered for a variety of reasons. There were grain offerings meant primarily for worship, there were peace offerings asking for God’s blessing, there were burnt offerings for giving thanks to God, there were guilt offerings for when you had destroyed someone’s property or cheated someone (including God), and there were sin offerings seeking forgiveness.

Depending on your circumstances and which kind of sacrifice you were offering, you would need to sacrifice something different. You might sacrifice a sheep, a goat, a dove, a pigeon, a cow, or a ram. Your sacrifice might involve wheat, flour, oil, or unleavened bread. The specific requirements for each kind of sacrifice were defined by the Mosaic Law.





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This sacrificial system was a way of life for the first-century Jews. They routinely brought their sacrifices to the temple, and they were offered there to God. (The sacrificial system continued for the Jews until the year AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. At that time, the Jewish community switched to offering prayer as a sacrifice instead.)

While each family was responsible to provide its own sacrifice, the high priest of Israel was responsible to choose the Passover lamb. Every year, he was to select one perfect, spotless lamb and offer it as a sacrifice on behalf of all Israel. That lamb would be known as “the Lamb of God.”

When John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” the listeners would have immediately known what John meant. They would have been quite familiar with the sacrificial system. To their ears, this declaration by John was one of the most



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profound statements ever uttered. It was powerful!

John the Baptist identified Jesus not just as “a” lamb; He was “the” Lamb. He was not going to cover up sin only for one year (requiring another sacrifice the following year); He would take away the sin of the world for all of time. The writer of the biblical book of Hebrews reinforced this when he wrote, “For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time” (Hebrews 10:10, NLT).

The Bible states that we have all sinned and fallen far short of God’s standard for our lives. Like a huge chasm, this sinfulness separates us from God. But the cross of Christ bridges that chasm. It was on the cross that Jesus offered to take all of our sinfulness upon Himself, paying the penalty for our sinfulness and offering us forgiveness in its place. As the “Lamb of God,” Jesus became the sacrifice for all of humanity. ■



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