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## *Chapter 9*

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### **30 YEARS LATER**

#### **MY FIRST TRIP TO IRAN UNDER ISLAMIC REPUBLIC**

**M**y Mom and Dad came to see us several times over the years. But as they aged, they were not able to travel as often, especially trips outside of Iran. In addition, I missed my sisters and had never even met their families. My youngest sister was only seven years old when I left. Now she was married and had had three children! The oldest one was the only one who was married when I left. Now they were all married with families of their own. I had been hearing that my dad's health was not very good. He was losing his eyesight, his legs were giving out, and with his heart attack a few years back, it made me realize the need to go back to Iran and see my family before his health deteriorated any further.

So, after thirty years I made plans to go back to Iran. My wife was concerned for my safety since there was still fear of what might happen to me when I re-entered the country subsequent to staying in the USA after graduation. I reassured her that I had not done anything wrong against this new government. The old government was gone and based on the advertisements that I had seen regarding this new government, Iranians who lived abroad, were being

encouraged to come back to their homeland. They claimed that they were willing to forgive and give amnesty to all those who left the country during the Shah's reign or under the old government.

The early part of the revolution was very hard for many Iranians who lived abroad in the USA or Europe, and who commuted to Iran to see their family and relatives. They faced all sorts of hardships such as being kept beyond their vacation time or their passports purposefully being misplaced. However, as the time passed, Mr. Khatami, a reforming president, was elected, and those hardships began to calm down and pressures were eased on the commuters. Many of my friends informed me that things had improved and for me not to be concerned about facing any problems.

At first, my brother Hamid and I had made plans to travel together in the month of September of 2003, but due to some demonstrations in Tehran and the surrounding area I changed my plans. For more than a week, university students in Iran had been staging nightly protests. They were chanting for democratic reform. Some clashed with riot police. Some called for the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme religious leader. Still others denounced Iran's elected president, Mohammad Khatami. I did not want to have any delays in my return back to the United States so I decided to delay my trip, but Hamid continued with his plans and made his trip to Iran with a friend whose name is Muhammad and who lives also in Charlotte NC.

The following March, which also corresponds with the Iranian New Year, one of my dear friends, Mohsen (also a converted Christian) and I traveled to Iran together. Mohsen

came to the United States the same time I did and we were classmates at the Citadel. This was his first return trip to Iran as well.

*“I was hesitant, concerned, but at the same time excited for my husband when he started talking about going back home to see his family. It had been almost 30 years since he had been back to Iran, but from the first time he mentioned it, I knew I could not discourage him. Deep down I wanted to say “No, don’t go” but in my heart I knew I couldn’t. After all, he knew the risks as well or better than I did. He had made the decision to stay here and marry me all those years ago, knowing it could be a very long time before he could go back again to see his family. He had sacrificed for me which was something I know I could not have done; to leave my family indefinitely not knowing when I would see them again. So I could not take that away from him. He had intentionally waited until our girls had grown up and had a life of their own so that if something ever did happen, they were taken care of. Besides, one of the reasons he was so excited about his decision was that he felt strongly that the time was right to go and share Jesus Christ with his family. And believing that certainly helped me to accept and support his decision and to commit to pray for him.”*

Ursa

Mohsen and I were very excited about our trip, but uneasy as well. As the plane approached Mehrabad airport in Tehran, suddenly almost everyone in the plane started talking, moving around and changing clothes, especially the women. The dress code had to be Islamic for all who lived in or visited Iran, whether you were Muslim or not. You were required to change your attire to match the expectation of the country and its ruling.

When the plane landed, silence and stillness took over the atmosphere. You could hear a pin drop. The air was so tense and stressful. My stomach was curled up like a knot! Once the plane stopped, we exited the plane, moved down the steps and boarded the buses that were lined up close by. The bus took us toward the gates to customs. It was late and dark, but you could still spot the airport police who were standing at every corner, watching people as they came in. They guided us toward the booths where our visa or passports were being checked. As I was standing in line, I could see a man on the other side trying to get someone's attention waving his hands. I did not realize that it was me he was waving at until I got through customs, and then I learned that he was the husband of one of my nieces!

There were at least four booths there that we could approach to show our passport or visa for the entry stamp. Each booth had a door about four feet tall and was three feet away from a booth with an officer inside. They kept the doors locked except to let passengers through one at a time by pushing a button to open it. When my turn came, I went in and showed my Iranian and American passports, but the officer only reached for my Iranian passport, not even acknowledging my American one. He then checked for the

originality of the passport, asked a couple of questions, and stamped my entry to Iran. The people who worked at the Mehrabad Airport in Tehran seemed to be nice and eager to welcome us, but at the same time, their demeanor appeared serious and questionable. I was praying to be able to answer their questions without any hesitation, and not to run in to any problems at all. I held my breath and waited patiently until we were outside of the terminal and on the streets of Tehran.

A couple of my relatives were there to greet and help me with my luggage before we left the restricted area. After I picked up my luggage and left the inspection area, we went outside of the terminal where all of my family had been waiting patiently. They showered me with kisses, hugs and flowers. I was so excited that I started dancing on the street as we walked toward our cars. I cannot describe my enthusiasm and feelings at that moment. To be in my homeland after all these years was awesome! I was very happy to be able to come back to my homeland and see the faces of my mom and dad, and my four sisters and their children. It did cross my mind that I may have missed many opportunities by not going home sooner since everything was going so well, but at the same time I was trusting God's timing more than my own.

My vacation lasted three weeks and I did not encounter any problems with anyone. I thanked God for the opportunity He gave me to go home and see my family. We had so much to talk about and so little time. We all listened to each other very carefully and with much excitement. I had never told my sisters firsthand exactly what happened to me so many years ago and why I made my decision to stay in

the USA. As a result, we were up until one or two o'clock in the morning most nights trying to catch up with the past thirty years of our lives. Since it was during the Iranian New Year, schools and most offices were closed for the holidays and as a result they did not have to rush back to their homes so quickly.

I am sure all of my siblings wanted to know who I had become, what I thought of everything, and what I liked or disliked. It was interesting to them as well as for me to get to know each one of them after all these years. One of the major changes in my life was that I no longer embraced my old religion and faith in Islam as they did. God opened my eyes to a new horizon and to a new light, which we call "the way, the truth and the life" or Christianity, and it was the desire of my heart to share that truth with my family there.

Contrary to Muslim belief, that family members disowned each other for leaving their faith, I was loved and respected by all my family and extended family members alike. They agreed with most everything I shared with them even though they could not talk about it openly. They often reminded me to be careful when we were around strangers as to what I said about my faith.

I must admit that it was not as easy as it sounds to openly talk about another religion other than Islam in a country where the majority (95%) of the people "eat and breath" Islam. Most of the people have a hard time understanding "freedom of choice" in a closed society where people are being told what to do, how to think, what to eat, what to say or not to say all of their lives. We are so fortunate to live in the USA, a country where we can choose for ourselves without being told what to say or what not to

say, what to believe or what not to believe, praise be to God! Anyway, the following day my Dad purchased a lamb and sacrificed it in my honor. We all “walked over its blood”, and thanked God for my safe and long awaited journey to my homeland.

*It is customary to sacrifice or ‘ghorbani’ a lamb and give some of the meat to the poor and neighbors in the name of Allah for a few reasons:*

- 1) Every parent is to sacrifice a lamb (other animals if the means is not there) after the example of Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his older son Ishmael, according to the Islamic tradition. (Note: There was not any covenant with Ishmael, only blessings. See Genesis 17:19-21)
- 2) They also sacrifice for prosperity and good health. When someone who just returned from making a long trip, had a baby or other similar occasions.
- 3) When someone who pilgrimages or travels to Mecca once in their lifetime, which is one of the five obligatory pillars of Islam.

After the sacrifice, the participants step over the shed blood of the animal and thank Allah for his blessings. Although I hated to see the act of the sacrifice with my eyes, it reminded me of the shed blood of my Savior Jesus Christ who paid for my sin and sins of the whole world, so we might be free from the penalty of sin through Him. For the scripture says: *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”* (Ephesians 1:7)

**Now, “sacrifice” according to the Bible:**

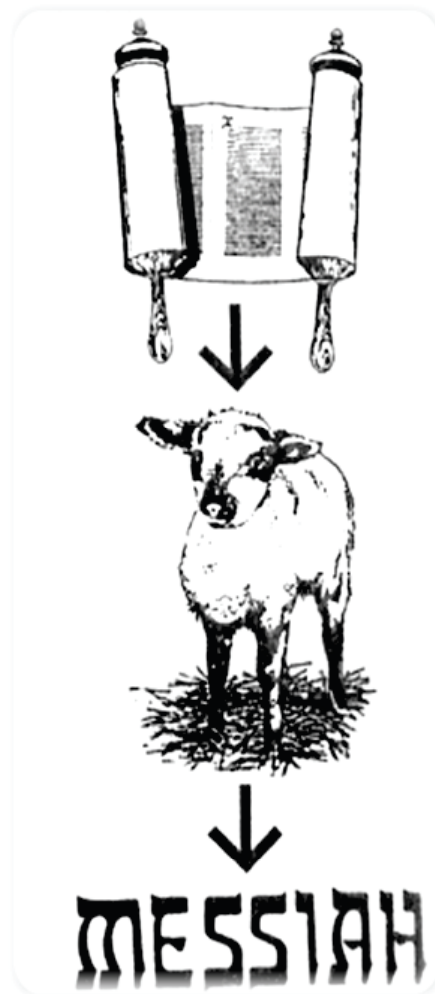
The holiest day in the year for Jewish people is called “Yom Kippur” (Day of Atonement). This is the day, when Jews ask the Lord to forgive them for their sins of the year gone by.

What does the Lord want from us for the forgiveness of sins according to the Old Testament?

*“For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD” (Leviticus 16:30)*

*“ And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people.” (Leviticus 16:24)*

*“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” (Leviticus 17:11)*





The veil in the Jewish temple concealed God. The high priest went in once a year to make reconciliation. No one else was allowed in the Holy of Holies. The way to God was barred. They could not be perfect through the blood of bulls and of goats. These were provisionary and figurative ordinances until God took up the real work itself, in order to accomplish it fully and forever.

**JESUS THE MESSIAH IS THE ‘LAMB’ OF GOD AND HOW YOU CAN FOLLOW JESUS TO HEAVEN AS WRITTEN IN THE QURAN**

“Allah or God loves you and wants you to join Him in heaven after you die. But to go to heaven, your sins must be totally removed from you. To fix this problem, God developed a way that we could be totally forgiven and the curse of sin removed from us.

Starting with Adam, man could be forgiven of his sins if he followed the sacrifice system called “Ghorbani.” With his sins forgiven and removed, he could join God in heaven directly after death.

The Ghorbani is a picture of the punishment that we deserve for our sins. Think of a courtroom where you stand before the judge. The judge is fair and just. Because of your sin, the judge sentences you to be killed. Even though you are guilty, God allows another person, one who is innocent, to receive your punishment. For God to throw away your punishment would mean that he is not a just judge.

**Every crime must be paid for, this is justice. You deserve to die for your guilt of sin.**

Think about the practice of Ghorbani. First, we are to find a pure animal. A sick or low quality animal cannot be

used for the sacrifice. Immediately before the sacrifice, we are to pray to God saying, “God, I am guilty of committing sin against you. I deserve to have my blood poured out of me until I die. So Allah, please have mercy on me and instead of taking my blood, take the blood of this innocent animal.”

From the time of Adam until the time of Jesus, Ghorbani was practiced. God did not always require the blood of animals to be used for the Ghorbani. Abraham was told to do the Ghorbani with his promised son. At the last moment, God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son. God was only testing Abraham’s love and devotion to Him.

Since the death of Christ, followers of Jesus have stopped practicing the Ghorbani. Why?

Complete Muslims or the followers of Jesus know that the Ghorbani (sacrifice) was only a shadow of the ultimate sacrifice that God would do for all the people of the world: past, present, and future. For God to do Ghorbani for all of mankind shows us how much He loves us and gives us confidence that we can be totally cleared of the curse of sin.

But what would God use for His sacrifice for all the people of the world?

The Quran says that the birth of ‘Isa (Jesus) would be a sign for the world. In order for God to do sacrifice for all mankind, he needed the most pure, holy, and powerful sacrifice available.

***We have seen from the Quran that the purest, holiest, and most powerful blood in the world was that of ‘Isa (Jesus). God performed a sacrifice by using the blood of the innocent ‘Isa (Jesus).***

What God did not allow Abraham to do to his promised son, God did with ‘Isa (Jesus). This was an act of love unlike any act we have ever seen, the innocent giving his blood for the guilty. ‘Isa took the punishment that we deserve. Now you know why Complete Muslims and followers of Christ are such grateful people. They understand that God did not give us what we deserve. The Injil says in John 15:13, ***“Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends.”***

Today, you can become a Complete Muslim. All you have to do is to believe that God did a great sacrifice for you. He used the blood of ‘Isa (Jesus) instead of your blood! Stop now, hold your hands up before you, and humbly tell God that you receive His sacrifice and thank Him for placing the punishment of your guilt upon ‘Isa (Jesus). In this way, God will forgive you of your sins and remove the curse of sin. When you are cleansed of your sins, then you can go to be with God after you die. You can now live your life in peace knowing that after death, you can go directly to be with God.”

(A complete Muslim by Kevin Greeson and Quran)