



## Not All the Blood of Beasts

**Text: Isaac Watts (1674-1748)**

**Tune: William Daman (c. 1580)**

After man's fall into sin, God instituted the sacrificial system. In that system, certain sacrifices were to be made to cancel the guilt of sin. But these sacrifices were only a temporary atonement for sin; one needed to make continual sacrifices to be forgiven. The system was to reveal its own futility. No matter how many animals one sacrificed, they were never fully cleansed from sin. Only the Sacrifice of the Messiah would cover all sin forever. We sing of this Sacrifice in the Lenten hymn, "Not All the Blood of Beasts."



Isaac Watts

This hymn was written by Isaac Watts. Watts was born July 17, 1674, to a "non-denominational" preacher in Southampton, England. The Pastor of All Saints Church in Southampton taught Watts Greek, Latin, and Hebrew at an early age. After his formal education, a Southampton physician offered to fund Watts' education at the seminary of the Church of England, but he refused and instead attended a non-denominational Seminary at Stoke Newington. At the age of

twenty, Watts left the Seminary and returned to live with his parents. In the next two years he wrote the bulk of his greatest hymn collection, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. He wrote these because of the poor quality of Psalm paraphrases available in his day. By 1702 Watts was ordained and became the Pastor of a very large Independent church in Mark Lane. But because of his poor health he was given an assistant. In 1712 Watts became very sick and was taken in by a local family. However, they enjoyed him so much, and his health never greatly improved, so he lived with them until his death. Although he never married, Watts always

loved children and wrote many things especially for the youth. For his vast contributions to the Church's song Watts was given an honorary Doctor of Divinity by University of Edinburgh in 1728. Watts eventually died in 1748 and is buried in Bunhill Fields, and has a monument erected to his honor in Westminster Abbey.

Though Watts made a great contribution to hymnody, especially in his paraphrases of the Psalms, his thoughts on the Psalms and the Old Testament are a bit unsettling. In his introduction to *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* he said that many of the Psalms are "opposite to the spirit of the Gospel," "foreign to the state of the New Testament," and "widely different from the present circumstances of Christians." Because of his views on the Psalms, especially that they are "extremely Jewish and cloudy, that darkens our sight of God the Savior," his paraphrases really ought not be called paraphrases, but hymns which attempt to interpret the Psalms in light of the New Testament. If anything, Louis Benson, in his *English Hymn*, says it best: "[Watts' hymns] are hardly more than a dislodgement of the Calvinistic settlement in favor of a reaffirmation of Luther's, which was the original evangelical settlement of hymnody." (Though Watts' view of the Psalms couldn't be farther from Luther's!)

As for the tune, little is known of its composer. William Daman was likely Italian, but a court musician for the Queen of England. He was the first to write tunes for the Psalm paraphrases of his day, and popularized the Common Meter tune (four lines of 8, 6, 8, and 6 syllables).

Watts first stanza highlights the futility of the sacrificial system, that no amount of animals' blood could bring peace or the full removal of sin. "But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, takes all our sins away!" (st. 2) His Sacrifice is the only one that can forgive our sin and calm our conscience. Because of that, our faith, when confessing sin, lays its hand on Christ like the scapegoat of old (Lev. 16:6-10) (st. 3). Because our sin is on Christ, we look at the Cross and know that there He put our sin to death (st. 4). But we do not mourn his death. We rejoice instead, for there our curse is removed! (st. 5) "We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice" because His death guarantees our life!