

Jesus & the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22: 1-18)

Hello, I'm Stephen Sizer. Please open your Bible and turn with me to Genesis 22. When our son Michael was born, he was five weeks premature. As I held that little bundle of life in my hands for the first time, I didn't know whether the Lord, who had given us a son, would take him back again.

Although I wasn't quite as old as Abraham, it was the first time I could really identify with him in this passage. Twenty years later, Mike is taller, more intelligent and more attractive than me. But every time I read Genesis 22, I come to understand a little more of what God was doing to and through Abraham that day.

1. The Necessity of Atonement: The Father's Sacrifice

"Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.." (Genesis 22:1-3)

Abraham understood the need for sacrifice to atone for his sin. But on this day, God would teach Abraham (and us) the true cost of sin.

God would show Abraham the necessity of substitutionary atonement. Someone must take his place to die for his sin. Like Abraham, our faith is not really tested until God asks us to consider what seems unbearable, to do what seems unreasonable, and to expect what seems impossible. Consider how unreasonable God's request was. Isaac was Abraham's only son, and the future of the covenant rested in him. Isaac was a miracle child, the gift of God to Abraham and Sarah in response to their faith. Abraham and Sarah loved Isaac very much and had built their whole future around him. When God asked Abraham to offer his son, He was testing Abraham's faith, hope, and love. It seemed like God was wiping out everything Abraham and Sarah had lived for. But faith does not demand explanations; faith rests on promises. Abraham believed God and obeyed Him even though he did not know where, he did not know when, he did not know how and he didn't know why, God was asking him to sacrifice his son.

The necessity of atonement – the Father's sacrifice.

2. The Means of Atonement: The Son's Submission

I want us to see how the sacrifice of Isaac, points us to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

“Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together,⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. (Genesis 22:6-8)

There is a moving phrase tucked into verse 6 and verse 8. It is easy to overlook it but the fact that it is repeated suggests we should take note. “and the two of them went on together” (22:6, 8). When we tell people about Jesus we often emphasize the Father’s love for lost people (John 3:16) and the sacrifice of Jesus to save us (1 John 3:16), but we don’t always mention that in the gospel we see the Son voluntarily submitting to his Father’s will. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, “not my will, but your will be done.” (Luke 22:42). The son’s voluntary submission.

“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.” (Genesis 22:9-10)

Abraham carried a knife and a torch, both instruments of death. The knife would end Isaac’s physical life.

And the fire would burn the wood on the altar where his body lay. In Isaac's case, a substitute died for him; but nobody could take the place of Jesus on the cross. He was the only sacrifice that could finally and completely take away the sins of the world. The answer to the question Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb?" was given by John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). At Calvary, Jesus experienced much more than death. He experienced the judgment of God for the sins of the world. Isaac felt neither the knife nor the fire, but Jesus felt both. Isaac's loving father was right there, but Jesus was forsaken.

"But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. (Genesis 22:11-13)

It is interesting that the wood is mentioned five times in the narrative and that Isaac did not start carrying the wood until he arrived at Mount Moriah. Moriah is an interesting place. It is only mentioned twice in the Bible.

Once here and once in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the place where Solomon built his temple. So, the place where Abraham met God and offered a sacrifice was the place that later God's people met with God and offered their sacrifices, until the day when, not far from Mount Moriah, Jesus carried his own wood on which he would lay. Abraham took the wood and "placed it on his son Isaac." (Gen. 22:6), and Isaiah predicted, "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Abraham had offered Isaac back to God and God gave him back to Abraham, back from the dead.

This points us not only of the death but also the resurrection of God's Son. How do we know that Abraham was trusting in God's promise to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky? Because when Isaac asked where the animal sacrifice was, Abraham replied, "God will provide the lamb." (Gen. 22:8). That word 'provide' is the Hebrew word where the word Jireh comes from. It actually means 'to see'. Abraham was saying 'God will see the lamb'.

What Abraham means is that God will see what we need and will provide for us. He is God after all, he sees everything, he foresees everything, he knows everything and foreknows everything and therefore as God he will provide. As he climbed Mount Moriah with his son,

Abraham was confident that God would meet every need. On what could Abraham depend? Abraham had already experienced the power of God in his own body in giving him a son in old age (Rom. 4:19-21), so he knew that God could raise Isaac from the dead if that was His plan.

The necessity of atonement: The Father's sacrifice.

The means of atonement: The Son's submission.

2 The Wonder of Atonement: The World's Salvation

God did indeed provide the sacrifice that was needed, and a ram took Isaac's place on the altar (Gen. 22:13). God blessed Abraham because he trusted God to provide.

2.1 A New Approval from God

"Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (Gen. 22:12).

He obeyed God's will and sought to please God's heart, and God commended him.

3.2 A New Name for God

"So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." (Genesis 22:14). The place where God provided a substitute for Isaac, Abraham called "The LORD Will Provide" - Jehovah-jireh.

Centuries later, at Calvary “It was provided” and provided for all generations. We don’t need to offer sacrifices ever again, because Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God died in our place. A new approval from God. A new name for God.

3.3 A New Assurance from God

“The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring (or seed) all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” (Genesis 22:15-18)

Abraham had heard these promises before, but now they took on fresh meaning. Jesus said “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” (John 8:56). I wonder if, as Abraham saw the ram caught in the bush, or heard the angel’s assurances, God gave him an insight into how this promise would ultimately be fulfilled. The Apostle Paul writes,

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ... There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ

Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:16, 28-29)

The Lord Jesus Christ is the 'seed' – Abraham's offspring referred to in Genesis 22. And through Jesus, all who trust in him literally become the children of Abraham. The promise has and is being fulfilled in and through the Lord Jesus Christ and his people made up of every language, every tribe and nation, the universal church, living and departed. In Genesis 22, we see how the Lord Jesus is central to all of Scripture. From the very beginning, God had a plan to redeem this world from sin, death and judgement.

The necessity of atonement: The Father's sacrifice.

The means of atonement: The Son's submission.

The wonder of atonement: The World's salvation.

Abraham came to know the Lord as Jehovah Jireh. Have you? Do you trust him to provide just what you need, when and where you need it? Do you trust in his provision enough to worship him now whatever your circumstances? And are you willing, if necessary, to give up what you cherish, to gain what he wants to give you? May you be able to say with confidence, like Abraham, through the Lord Jesus Christ, God is "my provider." May God bless you!