

## **The LORD Will Provide**

**04/20/2025**

### **Scripture 1: (Gen. 22:1-18 ESV)**

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!"

And he said, "Here I am."

He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!"

And he said, "Here I am, my son."

He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!"

And he said, "Here I am."

He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

## Sermon:

### Sacrifice.

It is something that people intrinsically know we ought to do, yet humanity has never quite understood really why or, know what it is that we really should be sacrificing. Ancient peoples were just basically guessing; hoping that they were doing the right thing to please their “gods”. Meanwhile, 21<sup>st</sup> Century people understand sacrifice even less than the ancients did.

- Once upon a time, some ancient peoples offered sacrifices to provide necessary “food for the gods” (ANE-Mesopotamian religion) because they believed that humanity was created to be the gods' servants; to do the worldly work which they did not want to do, so that the gods' time could be freed up for their own pleasure.
- Once upon a time, some ancient people offered sacrifices as a means of “divine bribery” (Ancient Greco-Roman), to try and influence their capricious gods; to gain their favor as a kind of cosmic “I'll scratch your back, if you'll scratch mine”.
- But then also, once upon a time, some ancient people offered their sacrifices as a form of pure worship (Adam's priestly line), born out of their love and devotion to the LORD, and made them in thanksgiving for God's good providence.

So, what does it actually mean to “sacrifice”?

{Although it also begins with two very specific, Christian focused definitions} Old Webster's provides the most plain and simple definition, “To devote with loss”<sup>1</sup>, while the modern Webster's definition is more greatly expanded as the “destruction or surrender of something for the sake of something else”<sup>2</sup>.

Christians interpret sacrifice as specifically being the {giving up (or destruction) of something of significant personal value, for some perceived spiritual benefit}; an idea which explains the Roman Catholic practice of “giving up something for Lent” where, through this personal (but temporary) intentional sacrifice, a person might draw closer to Christ.

Along with the Jews, we understand that there are also proper things and improper things to sacrifice (clean and unclean animals; things that are close to your heart versus things that are frivolous or things which you ought not to do or have anyways), and that there are proper and improper ways to sacrifice, such as regarding the attitude of our heart, when doing so; but most emphatically, we **reject** and **deny** the idea or suggestion that sacrifice is a transactional means to positively influence the LORD or obligate and compel His favor or blessing, but rather is a kind of rightful obedience to His sovereign commands (Hebrews 13:15) in holy living.

Scripture demonstrates the clear difference between the right and the wrong attitude of sacrifice in the example given by the story of Cain and Abel.

- Both men brought a sacrifice to the LORD.
  - Cain brought “*an offering of the fruit of the ground*”. (Genesis 4:3);
  - Abel brought an offering “*of the firstborn of the flock and of their fat portions*” (Genesis 4:4)
- Yet the LORD had a good regard for Abel's sacrifice, but not for Cain's; why?
  - Abel sacrificed the first and best to God out of thanksgiving for His providence and bounty;

<sup>1</sup><https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/sacrifice>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacrifice>

- Cain sacrificed the produce of his own choice (whatever he thought God might like) from out of his pride's effort.

What Cain failed to understand or appreciate was that, even though he had worked the ground and put in great effort to till and plant and harvest the produce, the LORD was actually the one who gave him the increase (1 Corinthians 3:3-9) and had causally given him everything he had.

- **The LORD provided** the sacrifice for both Cain and Abel, but only Abel acknowledged God's provision.
  - Abel made his offering as a sacrifice of praise; to glorify God, alone; as an act of pure worship offered in love, because it was just the right thing to do.
  - Meanwhile, God provided him with the means and the opportunity to do so.

But simply offering a sacrifice as an act of heart-felt worship (Leviticus 1-3) was not the only reason for sacrifice commanded in Scripture. The other main reason was for the preservation, or maintenance, and the restoration of holiness; for ritual purification and the atonement of sin. That is the principle message of the whole book of Leviticus: to teach and to train God's people how to be holy because the LORD, our God, is holy (Leviticus 11:45); since, because of Adam's (and our) sin, we are not.

Since we are neither holy nor intrinsically righteous, the LORD provided a way for us to become accounted as righteous through the sacrifice of an appropriate substitute (Leviticus 16). However, as the author of Hebrews explains, even by following the defined and prescribed process, “...*there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*” (Heb. 10:3-4 ESV), because no mere animal is worth enough to satisfy the moral debt of a person's sin; a cost which is far greater than just a human life (Genesis 2:17) {as evidenced by the post-life judgment, condemnation, and punishment}. Through the process prescribed in Leviticus, the repentant sinner's guilt was transferred to and removed by the scapegoat, but the actual debt of sin was never truly paid. Thus the prescribed rituals of the Day of Atonement were not meant to be effective in themselves, but instead they directed a person towards faith in the LORD God, who is merciful and gracious to forgive.

Christians understand this rite as a pre-figurement of Christ; with Jesus Christ being the true “scapegoat” who carried away and removed our sin, and also paid our entire deserved penalty: satisfying the whole cost; *tetelestai*, “*It is finished.*” (John 19:30). But we cannot reach that conclusion by simply reading Leviticus 16. It is not clear, nor is it a reasonably obvious leap of theological logic. We need something else before we can reach this Gospel conclusion.

- We need the story of Isaac.

Isaac is a critical figure in the God's story of redemption, but he seems almost unfairly ignored by Moses in Genesis. Isaac seems to be overlooked and ignored because, of the three principal patriarchs (Jacob's sons are sometimes also referenced as patriarchs, but in a slightly different capacity), he does not really do much; certainly not as much as either Abraham or Jacob. Rather, Scripture suggests that more was done to Isaac, rather than was done by him. Although he was not a perfect person: he also sinned and he repeated one his father's big mistakes (he also lied to try and protect himself by calling his wife, Rebekah, his sister); he is frequently portrayed as a victim. Consider all of the different things that the Bible tells us was done to him:

- he was named Isaac: which means “to laugh” in Hebrew; on account of his mother, Sarah's, laughter doubt of God's word when she was told that she would have a child;
- he was used as a pawn by Sarah, as justifying a “power play” against servant, Hagar, and Abraham's older (illegitimate) child;

- he was “almost” sacrificed, as a test of Abraham's, faith;
- he had a wife chosen and procured for him by his father's servant; and,
- he was tricked by his younger son, Jacob, who stole the blessing intended for Isaac's firstborn son, Esau.

Each of these were rather unfortunate events and some were more tragic than others; but both the worst **and** the providentially best one, was the event recounted by our Scripture text today.

Moses tells us that God decided to “test” Abraham. {But, how can the LORD fairly test him when God knows what Abraham will do and when God has decree what will ultimately happen? Even though God knew the he would pass this test, Abraham needed to be afforded the opportunity to pass or fail it; he needed the opportunity to intentionally act out of his faith and trust in God.} So, the LORD said to him, “*Take your son, **your only son** Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a **burnt offering** on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.*” and so, Abraham did.

Now there are three things to particularly note here:

1. This is the only time in Scripture when God commands or seems to require the sacrificial “offering” of a person's life. Human sacrifice is not something that the LORD desires or even accepts {remember, the tale of Jephthah's daughter was not a requirement imposed by the LORD}. However, although some people have tried to twist this story into something that impugns God's character, it is more easily and rightly understood when considering the next point.
2. God commanded Abraham to offer his son “*as a burnt offering*”, leading us to conclude two things, knowing the truth about God:
  - A “burnt offering” was a whole offering; where the entire sacrifice was consumed and not shared with either the priest or the worshiper. The burnt sacrifice belonged solely to God.
  - Yet, while Abraham was commanded and required **to offer** his son, he was not actually commanded to sacrifice Isaac, and God was not required to accept Isaac as a “burnt offering”; only the act of offering was truly necessary.
3. Isaac is called Abraham's “*only son*” here: translating a Hebrew term which is best understood in the sense of being “solitary” or “unique” {a term similar to the one used by Moses for the LORD in Deuteronomy 6:5}; and is an important distinction further expanded upon by the author of Hebrews, in their retelling of this story {“*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*” (Heb. 11:17-19 ESV)} as Isaac being Abraham's *monogenes*, or his “only begotten son” like Jesus is famously described in John 3:16.

So, really the test was to see whether Abraham was willing to sacrifice his beloved and uniquely born son: the person most important and beloved by Abraham; the person in whom all of his hope for God's promises rested; testing whether he would trust God and trust in God's promises, even with what seems the polar opposite.

- Testing to see if Abraham's faith: his *pisteuo*; was consequentially and effectively real?
  - God knew the answer, but Abraham did not yet know.
- The true test of every person's faith is when we are called upon to stand firm and risk severe (negative) consequences; whether our lives, our livelihood, our wealth, our health, or our relationships. Only then

may a person know how real their faith is, and how strong or how weak it is. So, pray that whenever your faith is tested, you will always stand fast and hold firm to Christ and God's promises.

Abraham's faith, his confidence in the LORD was so strong that, not only did he willingly set off to sacrifice his son, but he also handled the preparations, personally.

- “...*he cut the wood for the burnt offering...*”
- “...*he took in his hand the fire and the knife...*”

Except he laid the wooden burden upon Isaac to carry; making him carry the intended means of his destruction. But through it all, Isaac was the dutiful and obedient son. He raised no complaint (at least, Scripture records no complaint), he just merely asked his father, “*Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*”, who confidently answered him, “*God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.*”; fully knowing that since Isaac was his “[*child*] of promise” (Galatians 4:28): his divinely prophesied and provided “miracle baby”; that he had already been truly provided by God. However, when Abraham went to bind his son and place him upon the altar, I cannot imagine that Isaac meekly submitted. Surely he must have struggled and tried to resist before “*Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.*”.

But, we need to take a pause there and consider how this story, so far, relates to our understanding of Jesus Christ.

Believing that the whole of Scripture is about Jesus: either as pointing ahead to Him, telling His express story, or explaining His completed work; we may observe a {typological relationship} a similarity to the crucifixion: with Abraham being analogous to God the Father, and Isaac to God the Son, Jesus.

- The LORD, God the Father, prepared the tree that would eventually become the cross (through Creation and His providence in causing it to grow);
- The LORD, God the Father, sovereignly ordained {decreed} and prophesied the means by which Jesus would unjustly die (Isaiah 53:9-12; Psalm 22; Galatians 3:13-14), at the hands of wicked men.
- Jesus, God the Son, obediently carried the burden of His own cross, the implement of His execution.
- Jesus, God the Son, went to the cross without objection, question, or complaint (Isaiah 53:7; Acts 8:32), merely praying, “*My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.*” (Matt. 26:42 ESV).

Very similar indeed, yet the greatest difference between Isaac and Jesus in this story, is that Isaac was to be an unwilling sacrifice while Jesus was willingly doing what He had been sent {and had agreed to do, in eternity past *vis a vie* the covenant of redemption} to do.

- Isaac had to hope that his father was right, and that the LORD would provide an alternative sacrifice;
- while Jesus knew that He is the LORD's provided sacrifice.

Now that we have identified these similarities, we may return to Abraham and Isaac's narrative.

As Abraham began to thrust the knife into his innocent victim, “...*the **angel of the LORD** called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And [Abraham] said, “Here I am.”*”, preventing him from killing or harming Isaac.

Then Abraham heard, “*Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.*” and, looking up, “...*behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns.*”.

Therefore, immediately upon Abraham's act of offering up Isaac, the LORD stopped him and provided him with a substitute sacrifice. The LORD accepted Abraham's devotional offer of Isaac, but He also refused to accept the sacrifice of Isaac's life. But,

- Abraham made God a promise, which created a moral debt that he needed to keep;
  - yet, the LORD would not allow him to keep it or to pay the debt.
- God's intervention and His refusal effectively told Abraham that “Your money is no good here!”;
  - instead, God allowed/forced Abraham to pay his debt using the LORD's currency.

Regardless, by demonstrating his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the truth of Abraham's faith was proven; his prior, gracious receipt of God's promises (Ephesians 2:8-10) was proven justified by the evidence of this work that was done in faith (James 2:21-24).

The gracious implication of this evidence is why “...*the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."*”; but, these promises were nothing new, since:

- God had already promised to bless him and make his name great in Genesis 12;
- God had already promised to multiply his offspring like the stars of heaven in Genesis 15;
- God had already promised that his offspring would possess the land of Canaan, home of their enemies in Genesis 12, 15, and 17; and,
- God had already promised that all the nations would be blessed through him in Genesis 12;

These promises were not anything new to Abraham, but they were now reaffirmed and more surely confirmed by the LORD's unbreakable oath; an oath made because of Abraham's obedient expression of faith: “*because you have obeyed my voice*”. These absolutely sure and certain promises were being made and received on behalf of the true, ultimate offspring of Abraham, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:29). {And, not only were they being made on behalf of Christ, they were being made by Christ as usually, the appearance of the “*angel of the LORD*” is interpreted as a Christophany (a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ; of God the Son) because, not only was He a messenger from God, but He also spoke as the LORD. More on this idea to follow.}

So, while we can now easily see how the first part of this story relates to the crucifixion, by explaining {through types} what was relationally happening; the latter portion is what helps us to interpret the crucifixion in light of the work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

Without going into all of the details, when making atonement for the people, the High Priest (as their mediator) would transfer the people's sin to a goat; imputing their guilt onto an “innocent” sacrifice who would then be “punished” their substitute. However, since this scapegoat was only cast out, sent away, and exiled from the camp: it figuratively removed their guilt of sin; the people never actually dealt with their sin.

- No matter the calculus used, this process could neither truly satisfy nor cancel their moral debt of sin; yet, because the LORD had prescribed this process for their atonement, they could believe (they could trust and have faith: *pisteuo*) that God would truly forgive their sin.

- It was not their offerings, nor their sacrifices, which mattered in effecting their atonement, but that through their faith in the LORD, alone, they would be forgiven. The operative means for atonement was their expression of faith, made through the offering of this divinely appointed and provided substitute.

Yet, because the LORD is as just as He is merciful, He could not just “hand wave” our sin away and forgive it since sin requires punishment. A moral “crime” is committed:

- therefore, someone must “do the time” so that justice would be done;
- therefore, for God to grant His mercy to sinners by grace alone, a willing and perfectly righteous substitute is logically necessary (because imposing our duly deserved sanctions/penalty onto an unwilling substitute would be a gross act of injustice).

But, since our physical death alone is not enough to satisfy the divine justice required by our transgressions of God's Law and sin (logically understood from Scripture because of the eternal, post life torment and damnation of the wicked; Revelation 20), only God could afford to pay our debt; He alone has enough of the proper currency. Therefore, like Abraham and the ancient Israelites, we must trust and believe that the LORD will provide (and has provided) a substitute sacrifice for us in the perfect life and death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the true scapegoat, “...*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (Jn. 1:29 ESV); the substitute sacrifice provided by the LORD:

- He was the perfect, sinless, and without blemish sacrifice (Exodus 12:5, 29:1; Numbers 19:2; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19; 2 Peter 3:14);
- He had the spiritual burden of our sin guilt lain upon Him (imputed) by the Father as He carried the physical burden of the cross (Isaiah 53:6);
- He thus carried our sins away, removing them from inside the camp and from His people (Leviticus 16:21-22, 27);
- He was made to be accursed (imputation) so that we might be blessed (imputation), by receiving the promises of Abraham (Galatians 3:13);
- He was forsaken (Matthew 27:46), so that we would be adopted (John 1:14);
- He suffered the whole decreed penalty for sin (Genesis 2:15-17), and satisfied the whole requirement of justice by His death on the cross; *tetelestai* (John 19:30).

So, while Jesus is similar to Isaac in this story, He is more better identified with the ram that was provided by God, as a substitute sacrifice. The ram was provided by the LORD as an act of divine mercy to Isaac and, as a act of divine justice to satisfy Abraham's offering of Isaac.

- God did not need to provide Abraham with a ram as a substitute for Isaac, but He did so out of love.
- God did not need to provide the ancient Israelites with a means of hope for the atonement of their sin, but He did so out of love.
- God did not need to provide us with salvation in Christ Jesus.
- God did not need to provide us with redemption, adoption, or forgiveness in Christ Jesus.
- God did not need to bless us mercy or grace (a wonderful act of non-justice), but He did need to impose justice for our sin and wickedness; yet He still did so, out of love

Therefore, before the foundation of the world, {before even creation} God the Son covenanted with God the Father to redeem a definitely predestined people, by personally atoning for their sin on the cross, and to apply this redemption to them through God the Holy Spirit, as the greatest sovereign act of divine mercy and grace in love (John 17:20-26; Romans 8:28-31; Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Peter 1:17-25; Revelation 13:8).

The LORD provided all of creation for us, granting us dominion and authority over it; but we soiled it and corrupted it with our sin. Yet God still, in love, provided for our and its redemption and restoration, for His glory and honor alone.

The LORD sent His *monogenes*, only begotten Son into the world to live and die as our gracious provision of mercy and forgiveness.

Then the LORD raised His Son from the dead, to provide us with a sure and confirmed hope in His promises of blessing, and life, and an eternal home.

So, let us all praise and thank God for Jesus Christ because **He is Risen!** *He is Risen, indeed!* Hallelujah!

**AMEN**