

The Sacrifice of Isaac

Rich Nathan

March 30, 2014

Shadows of the Cross Series

Genesis 22:1-14

In preparation for Holy Week – Good Friday and Easter Sunday – I thought we might look together at a few passages from the Old Testament which prefigure for us the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. One of the most challenging things for new readers of the Bible, and even some more experienced readers, is to figure out what the overall storyline is of the Bible. Have you even tried? The Bible is a really daunting book to read. My thinline Bible which has really tiny print contains 1140 double column pages. The Bible is really not one book; it is a library of books, 66 in all, written over the course of 1500 years from places as far apart as Rome and Persia. It is written in three different languages – Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic by people whose professions range from kings and judges to doctors, fishermen, shepherds, and tax collectors.

So when a person begins to read this book called The Bible, it can be really overwhelming. There are great individual stories about the creation of the world, Noah and the movie coming out about Noah, the enslavement and emancipation of the Jews from Egypt, the conquest of the land, the establishment of the kingdom under David and his descendents, Israel's exile into Babylon, and so on – great, inspiring and challenging individual stories. But they can be like a thousand beautiful pearls tossed onto a table. Is there anything that strings the pearls together? Any overall theme? Or to change the metaphor, do the individual jigsaw puzzle story pieces fit together in one big beautiful picture?

Christians are people who believe that God designs all the events of history for one central purpose, to bring people to his Son, Jesus Christ. History is literally his story, the story about how God reaches out to a world far from him to bring people into relationship with his Son, Jesus. And the Bible is one of the main tools God uses to accomplish his goal of bringing people into relationship with Christ.

Now, the way to read the Old Testament, what Jews call the Hebrew Bible, is to see the Old Testament as a rough-draft, or model of what God was planning to do in the coming of his Son, Jesus, and especially in the death of his Son, Jesus, on the cross. This is the way Jesus taught his disciples to read the Bible. Here is what we read in Luke 24:44-47:

Luke 24:44–47 (NIV)

44 He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

All of the Old Testament is designed to point to something beyond itself. The Old Testament is a sign post meant to lead us to Christ. Here’s the idea. If you were on the highway and you saw a sign that said, “Columbus 70 miles” and you live here in Columbus and dinner or a nice hot bath, and a warm bed was waiting for you at home, would you park at the sign and say, “We’ve made it! Look, there’s the sign – Columbus 70 miles. Honey, let’s stop here and take pictures of me and the kids in front of the sign. And then I will take one of you and the kids. Then we can take photos of each of us.”

Jesus told the Pharisees of his day that that’s basically what they were doing. John 5:39-40:

John 5:39–40 (NIV)

39 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

See, what the Pharisees were doing was stopping with the Old Testament, taking photos of themselves by the sign, but they never followed who the sign was pointing to – namely, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

So, today, in preparation for Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter, I’m going to do a brief series called “Shadows of the Cross.” Today’s message is titled “The Sacrifice of Isaac.” Let’s pray.

Genesis 22:1–14 (NIV)

22 Some time 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. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

6 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?”

8 Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

9 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. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

12 “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.”

13 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. 14 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.”

This story regarding the sacrifice of Isaac has been the subject of dozens of Christian paintings, probably the most famous of which is a powerful painting by the Italian artist, Caravaggio.

Painting of the Sacrifice of Isaac by Caravaggio

And the story of the sacrifice of Isaac has been the subject of numerous books. The best known is probably that by the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard titled “Fear and Trembling.” Now, this story of the sacrifice of Isaac can be read at two levels. One is that the story is a test of Abraham. The other level is that the story is a type of Christ, a pointer to Christ. But, first, let’s look at a test of Abraham.

A test of Abraham

We read in v. 1,

Genesis 22:1 (NIV)

22 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

Why does God test people? What are God’s tests all about? Why does God test you and test me?

The purpose of tests

Now, it is important to immediately note that there is a great difference between the temptations sent our way by Satan and tests sent by God. It says in verse 1, “Sometime later God tested Abraham.” God didn’t tempt Abraham, He tested him. God doesn’t tempt us, nor does He send temptations our way. He tests us. See, the purpose of a test is to bring out of us what is best. To bring to the surface qualities that may, at this moment, be under-developed or undeveloped. That is what tests in school do, isn’t that right? Tests will motivate us to learn material that laziness and our inertia would otherwise cause us not to learn.

See, God is not just testing Abraham to check out what is inside of him, as if God doesn’t know. “I am going to test you and see how you do, Abraham, because I obviously don’t know the future.”

The test in this case was not designed for God to learn something about Abraham. And I don’t believe it was simply designed to show Abraham what was inside of him. Some people say, “Well, God’s tests are designed to show you where you are at, what is inside of your life.” Tests certainly have that component to them, but tests from God are primarily designed to put into us what is not currently in us. To call forth a response of patience, or love, or obedience, or faith – to bring out a virtue and a quality that may not yet be in your life in its mature form.

Let me put it this way. Because of inertia, you know what inertia is – 8th grade science – “A body at rests tends to remain at rest.” Inertia. A body sitting in front of a TV for too long eating Cheez Whiz and pork rinds tends to remain at rest. Inertia. Our pattern of prayerlessness; our pattern of general laziness; the pattern in our lives of everything just heading toward dissolution – whether we are talking about our eating habits, our spending habits, or spending hours watching TV or social media, sex outside of marriage, it is incredibly difficult to overcome human inertia without God’s tests. Will power just doesn’t do it, does it? Will power won’t get you off the sofa and get a bunch of disciplines into our lives? Will power won’t get us exercising and eating right and spending right and praying right and getting off of FaceBook right? But tests do. Put a major crisis in our lives, one of these unexpected break-ins, unanticipated challenges, a child with autism, a sick spouse, a dying parent, a heart-attack, a marital crisis, a broken relationship, a lay-off from work, a failed pregnancy test – put a crisis in our lives and suddenly we have all the motivation we need to change.

Let me illustrate how this works. I have a friend, who is an alcoholic. He has recently been cycling down and dropped out of church and small group when he suddenly got a wake up call. A few Sundays ago his wife was getting ready to go to church and their little boy said, “I want to stay home from church like Daddy does. I want to stay home and watch the computer like Daddy. I don’t want to go to church.” When my friend

heard his son say this, “I want to stay home from church like Daddy,” he said it was like a slap in the face. So he got up off the sofa, got himself dressed, and came to church. That’s what tests do. They shake us up. They motivate us. They put their finger on something in our lives that needs to change.

The truth is most of us are propelled forward not because we are such great people. We change because of pain. As C.S. Lewis said, “Pain is God’s megaphone, designed to awaken a sleeping world.”

Again, tests are very different than temptations. Temptations from Satan are designed to make us do something bad, to bring forth a bad response, to lead us away from God, to cause us to doubt God’s goodness. But tests are designed from God to bring forth a quality of maturity, of faith, of love, of hope, of obedience, that may not be present or fully developed in our lives yet.

Obviously, the same situation, the same ball of circumstances, can have a demonic design to it, designed to cause you to doubt God. To say, “Oh, I just knew this whole Christianity thing was just nothing that God wouldn’t come through for me. I just knew that it was all just wishful thinking, if I became a Christian. Now my deepest fears are realized. My philosophy professor was right. Christianity is just a psychological projection of my need for a father figure in the sky who benevolently smiles on me.”

The same situation can have a demonic purpose and also a soul-strengthening purpose to it to call forth from you a resolute “No. Even though this is difficult now, I will trust in the Lord. I have never hung in there for anything before. I have never walked steadily. My live has been like a roller-coaster. I have never had any perseverance in my life. I have always given up and quit. But this is the opportunity for me from God to see something through to the end, to hold on and to hold fast. Because I believe God can be counted on.”

So the ultimate purpose of God’s tests is not for God to figure out what we’re going to do. he already knows the outcome. The purpose of God’s tests is to lift his people up to a new spiritual level. The tests are designed for our benefit. Testing is designed to be soul-building, to make us stronger, more obedient, and more internally consistent with our stated beliefs.

What kinds of tests did Abraham face? What kind of tests do we face?

The kinds of tests

First of all, we see in Abraham’s life there was a test of suddenness.

A test of returning the gift

Here is what we read in v. 1:

Genesis 22:1–2 (NIV)

22 Some time 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.”

You know, it is particularly challenging if the test is in an area where you’ve been tested before and you felt that you passed the test. In Abraham’s case, he waited and waited for his miracle baby. And finally, as a very old man he and Sarah conceived and Isaac was born. After waiting for decades for a child, God now says he’s going to take Isaac from Abraham. The gift he gave Abraham is going to have to be returned.

Think about this with me and how hard that must have been. It is one thing to pray and pray for something that you don’t yet have and you do not get. It is another thing to pray and pray and then receive the blessing from God and then have God come along and say, “I’m going to take that blessing back from you.” When we receive an answer to prayer we often think this is it. I’ve gotten to the top of the mountain. Now I can rest. I’ve secured what I’ve been seeking from the Lord. Surely, God’s not going to take me back down into the valley again.

I think it is harder to get something and then to lose it, than to never have it at all – whether we’re talking about a great ministry, a great marriage, a child, a foster child, success in business, or a great healing. Abraham had the gift in his hand. The test was having to open his hand and to give the gift back.

There is the test of returning the gift. And then there is the test of delay.

A test of delay

Genesis 22:3–4 (NIV)

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. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

The great father of the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin, observed that the delay made Abraham’s ordeal even more painful. Calvin writes:

God does not require him to put his son immediately to death, but compels him to contemplate this execution in his mind during three whole days, that in preparing to sacrifice his son, his suffering would be increased.

The test of delay. Just having something go on and on and on. It is one thing, friend, for you and me to rally in facing some acute challenge. Almost all of us can rally to deal with some immediate challenge. But tests that go on and on and on, day after day after day, and for some month after month after, and year after year after year – chronic lingering illnesses, long-term mental illness, long-term disability, long-term unemployment, long-term difficulty in marriage, long-term addiction for a loved one. It is hard to keep walking with God, left foot, right foot, left foot; delay in God’s answering prayer, that’s a real test in faith.

How about in your life, friend, have you ever seen delays to answers as a test of whether you will continue to pray? Will you continue to trust that God loves you even in the dark? Will you continue to worship God? And to thank him for the blessings you do have in your life? Or when something just goes on and on and on, will you give up and throw in the towel? Will you say, “Well, I knew this was all wishful thinking. I knew I would be forced back to my own resources. I knew I was basically alone in life and that I had to deal with life apart from God.”

When we are tested, friends, by something that is really hard and chronic, something that just is going on and on and it doesn’t appear that at this point we’re going to have a miraculous breakthrough; we might, we never know what God is going to do – but it doesn’t appear that our child’s learning disability is going to disappear, or mom’s dementia is going to go away, or whatever the chronic family, mental health, job, or relational issue that we’re facing might be – that’s a time in our lives, brothers and sisters, where we really need the support of other Christians.

Listen, I talk about getting involved in small groups a lot here. But I’m regularly asked by many of you, “Pastor, will you pray for me about such and such situation? I’m going through a really hard time.” Almost always I ask the person, “Are you in a small group here at Vineyard? Are you connected with the kind of fellowship that you need in order to walk through this difficult situation without collapsing?” Almost always, the answer is no.

Friends, do you understand that isolation is one of the major things that Satan uses to bring us down? If you are struggling with an addiction, you will never be free in isolation. Isolation is the enemy’s tool in your life to keep you enslaved. If you are being tested, isolation will increase the pain of that test ten times over in your life. When we are tempted to run from fellowship and just close in on ourselves that is precisely the time that God wants to help us through our brothers and sisters here in the church. One of the major purposes of our small groups and Christian fellowship is to be a lifeline to us as we walk through or walk out of tests in our lives.

There is a test of returning the gift in Abraham’s life, a test of delay; and, then there is a test of love.

A test of love

Genesis 22:2 (NIV)

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.”

Your son, your only son, whom you love. Tests that make the biggest impression on us are those that touch us at our most tender points. God knows what will break through even the most callous heart. So a test, especially an ultimate test, a supreme test, will often touch the apple of your eye. If you want to get to me, send a test by way of my wife or my daughter or my son, or my grandchildren, or this church that I love.

Isaac was more than just a precious son to Abraham. Isaac was the son of the promise. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had waited years, decades to conceive. I have watched this in couples that have conceived in later life. Maybe they had a period of infertility or gone through miscarriages or got married later in life. But after such a long wait, there is a special affection, a special preciousness in this child that comes along later in life. Of course, in Abraham’s case, this is all part of God’s promise, God’s covenant promise, was all wrapped up in Isaac. So, if Isaac died all of Abraham’s dreams, all of his hopes, his future, and his reason for following God in the beginning out from his homeland is all extinguished.

There is a real test of love here. On one side of the balance pan you put this precious child, conceived later in life, that late born children bring and you put on that side of the balance pan all of your hopes and dreams. You put there the promises, the covenant, and everything else. On the other side you put God alone. The test of love always comes down to one simple question, which is the question which side will weigh heavier? God or your Isaac? Which side weighs in heavier in your heart? God or your spouse? God or your boyfriend? God or your girlfriend? God or your live-in lover? God or your son? God or your daughter? God or your job? God or your dreams? God or your ministry? God or your school? God or your fiancée? God or your money? God or your addiction? God or your health? What comes first? Who comes first? Which weighs the most?

Here is Abraham being asked to take a knife to his only son, Isaac. Can you make a test any plainer or more poignant than this? How could Abraham ever gone back to Sarah again and say, “Here’s what I have done”? Three days wrestling with a hundred questions and having to trust the Lord with the results.

I don’t know about you, but if I’m honest with myself, I know that what I really want is my treasure on earth, and I also want treasure in heaven. I want the people that I

treasure to be with me, healthy and whole. I want my wife, my kids, my grandkids, my friends, my coworkers, my colleagues – I want all of those folks to stay with me, healthy and whole, and the things that I value – the health of this church, my own health, reasonable prosperity, visible signs of God’s blessing – I want all of that. And I also want a warm, loving relationship with God. I want it all.

The scary question posed to me is what if, as in all lives, God won’t let me have it all. What if part of my treasure on earth is taken from me and all I have left is God? What then? What if I’m asked to release from my hand from someone or something that I treasure most? What if I’m tested at my most tender point? Will God be enough for me then?

I’ve got to admit, as a pastor, that preaching this text scares me. The reason that this text scares me is I ask myself as a pastor, how do I teach people coming from thousands of different places emotionally, mentally, thousands of different levels of spiritual maturity, how do I teach people to risk, to radically obey God, to step out like Abraham? When some of the people who are listening to me, Lord, will mistake their own crazy ideas, and crazy thoughts for your voice, God? I just know that God is calling me to sell everything and move my family to Somalia. Or, as I’ve heard on a number of occasions from people: God told me to quit my job. I have no vision for how I’m going to take care of my spouse and children, much less meet my own needs. But I know that God has told me to do it and I’m going to step out and do it, like Abraham.

How do we sort through all the crazy claims that people make regarding what God is asking of them and the instances where we are called to be an Abraham, to radically obey, to take the road less traveled, to not simply conform to the lukewarm, conventional Christianity of 21st century America.

Here are the things we need to ask of anyone who says that God is calling me to something that is way out of the box and seems to violate basic principles of wisdom. I would want to know, first of all, does this person have a track record of clearly hearing from God where they stepped out and it proved really fruitful. Can they point to multiple instances in their life where God spoke with them, called them to take a risk, and here was the fruit of that particular risk? I want to know about the person’s track record.

I want to know is this person a stable, mature, consistent Christian. If an individual’s Christian life is basically a roller-coaster with lots of instances of glaring disobedience, the struggle with various addictions, they’ve blown hot and cold, I would have absolutely no confidence that the crazy thing that they say God wants them to risk is really from God. Does this person display a mature Christian character?

And has the person been tested before? Abraham was tested at least ten times before God called him to the supreme test of offering up his son. He was called to reject the

idolatry of his father, Terah, to leave that old idolatrous religion. He was tested by being called out of his homeland to go to a place that he didn't know. He was tested by famine in the promised land. He was tested by his wife's abduction. He was tested by the abduction of his nephew, Lot. And the infertility of Sarah, and his own old age. And having to send away his son, Ishmael. Test after test after test.

God didn't give Abraham a bar exam without sending him first to law school. He didn't ask Abraham to pass his medical boards without giving him course after course after course of medical studies. He didn't ask Abraham to offer up his son, Isaac, without preparing him for decades with at least ten major tests. So, when someone comes up and says that God is calling them to some crazy thing, I think an appropriate question would be, "Friend, tell me where you've been tested in the past by God. What tests have you been given that you passed?"

Let's turn, then, to the second track that this story runs on. Why was this story that occurs way back in the Hebrew Bible in Genesis 22 so popular in the early church where church fathers so regularly preached on it? Why is the story of the sacrifice of Isaac been the subject of so many Christian paintings and Christian sculptures and Christian sermons and books? Because Christians following the lead of the New Testament writers saw in this story,

A type of Christ

Typology is the major way to read the Bible, to make sense of all the various stories in the Old Testament and to connect them with what we read in the New Testament. In typology, a reader of the Bible discovers a correspondence between a person, an event, or a thing in the Old Testament and a person, an event, or a thing in the New Testament. And the reason why there is a correspondence between a person, a thing, or an event in the Old Testament, then something in the New Testament, particularly a correspondence with Jesus in the New Testament is because God controls history. It is God who causes this earlier individual, this earlier experience, this earlier ritual to have the characteristics which he'll later cause to reappear in full form. It is God who creates the rough draft, the rough model in the Old Testament that he ultimately wants to perfect in the New Testament, particularly in Jesus.

Now, we're not just being fanciful and doing some leap of imagination when we see Old Testament people and events and institutions pointing beyond themselves to Christ. As I pointed out in the intro today, God designed the Old Testament to be a sign post pointing ahead to Jesus, so that when Jesus came it wouldn't be a complete shock. He prepared his chosen people, the Jews, for 2000 years for the coming of his Son, Jesus, into the world.

So what do we see first of all in this story which is a pointer, a shadow of the later coming of Christ and his death on the cross? We see, first of all, a type of

The person sacrificed

Genesis 22:2 (NIV)

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."

Do you know that the very first occurrence of the word "love" in the Bible is right here in Genesis 22 referring to Abraham's passion for his son, Isaac? Isaac was the long-awaited heir. Isaac was Abraham and Sarah's miracle baby, the only child of Abraham's beloved wife, Sarah. God himself gave Isaac his name in Hebrew. It is Yitzchak which means laughter.

God was telling Abraham and Sarah that this miracle baby would bring laughter and joy to their home. And all the desires, all the dreams, all the aspirations of Abraham were tied up in this miracle baby, Isaac. So the first mention of the word "love" in the Bible is the love of father Abraham for his miracle child, Isaac, who he was asked to sacrifice.

And in the New Testament the first occurrence of the word "love" concerns God the Father's love for his miracle Son, Jesus. Here's what we read in Matthew 3:17:

Matthew 3:17 (NIV)

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

The New Testament repeatedly tells us how much the Father loves his Son, who was also named by God. Isaac means "he laughs", Jesus means "Savior." But the New Testament frequently underlines God the Father's love for his Son. We read verses like:

John 10:17 (NIV)

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.

You know, in Jewish tradition the sacrifice of Abraham's beloved son is called the "akedah".

Akedah - Binding

The akedah, the binding of Isaac, is so important to Jews that it is read every single morning as a prelude to the morning service. It is read during Rosh Hashanah since Jewish tradition says that Abraham sacrificed his son during this time. And in the blowing of the shofar which is a ram's horn, Jews are reminded of the ram that was caught in the thicket. Rabbis say that the broken notes that are played through the

shofar, through this ram's horn, remind us of the broken cries of Sarah, Isaac's mother, who had to give up her son to the will of God.

We not only see a typological link between the person sacrificed, Father Abraham's beloved son, Isaac, in the Old Testament and Father God's beloved Son, Jesus in the New Testament, but there is a link in the place of sacrifice.

The place of sacrifice

Genesis 22:2 (NIV)

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."

Chronicles tells us that Moriah was the place that King David chose to build the Temple where sacrifices were made. Mt. Moriah is none other than Mt. Zion which is not only the site of the future Temple, but the site of the crucifixion of Jesus. The place in the Old Testament corresponds to the place of sacrifice in the New.

And there is a correspondence regarding:

The return from sacrifice

Here is what we read in Genesis 22:4-5:

Genesis 22:4–5 (NIV)

4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Abraham takes a 3-day journey to the place of sacrifice. And, of course, Jesus was three days in the grave. Notice that Abraham told his servants, "We will return to you." Jewish interpreters say that this is a prophecy of Isaac's resurrection. And the New Testament agrees and says this was evidence that Abraham believed that God would resurrect Isaac from the dead since God had promised that all these promises would come through Isaac. That even death could not hold the promise of God back. Here is what we read in Hebrews 11:17-19:

Hebrews 11:17–19 (NIV)

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

And we know that God made so many promises of what he would accomplish through Messiah Jesus. It was impossible for Jesus to stay dead and have God's promises fulfilled. So as Isaac was symbolically raised from the dead, Jesus was literally raised from the dead.

Now, let's consider the correspondence between the means of sacrifice.

The means of sacrifice

VIDEO CLIP

In the story in Genesis 22, Isaac carries the wood that he will be sacrificed on.

Genesis 22:6 (NIV)

6 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,

What a picture of Jesus, who carried the cross beam on his shoulders on which he would be crucified. And there is a correspondence regarding the reason for the sacrifice.

The reason for the sacrifice

In the sacrifice of Isaac we see two agents at work – one is father Abraham, who picks up the knife to kill his son; but, the second agent is Isaac. I think this video has it exactly right that Isaac, at the time of his sacrifice, was not a child. He wasn't physically held down by Abraham and tied up against his will. Isaac was a grown man. Jewish tradition says that Isaac was 37 when he was offered up as a sacrifice. Isaac voluntarily laid down on the altar, so convinced was he that this was the will of God.

Who put Jesus to death? According to the New Testament, we know that Jesus was crucified because of the envy of the religious leaders. He was crucified because of the greed of Judas Iscariot. He was crucified because of the corruption of Pontius Pilate and the threat he was to the Roman government of his day. But behind the human agents, we see the points of correspondence with the Genesis 22 sacrifice of Isaac. God the Father was sacrificing his Son, just as father Abraham sacrificed his son. Here's what we read in John 3:16:

John 3:16 (NIV)

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

But just like in the case of Isaac, Jesus' sacrifice was not simply the result of his Father putting him to death. Jesus' death on the cross was a voluntary act of self-sacrifice. Jesus voluntarily gave himself up for us. Here is what we read in John 10:17-18:

John 10:17–18 (NIV)

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

And the final point of correspondence concerns:

The substitute for the sacrifice

Genesis 22:11–14 (NIV)

11 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

12 “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.”

13 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. 14 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.”

As Abraham raised the knife to sacrifice his son, the Angel of the Lord stops him. Isaac was spared, a substitute was provided by God. Here's the difference in the story between Isaac and Jesus. In the coming of Jesus, no Angel stopped the knife from coming down into the chest of Jesus Christ. There was no substitute for Jesus; Jesus was the substitute. Romans 8:32 says this:

Romans 8:32 (NIV)

32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Jesus was offered up for my sins and for your sins. God never demanded a sacrifice from someone else. God never asked anyone in the history of the world to sacrifice up their child for him. But what he asks of no one else, he himself did. God in Christ was sacrificed. He was the ram caught in the thicket, who God provided to take away the sins of the world. We see in the story of Abraham and Isaac a clear type, a signpost, a rough draft, a shadow of the way that God was going to deal with his very own Son, who faced the supreme test of the cross, and who triumphed in that test by achieving salvation for you and for me. Let's pray.

The Sacrifice of Isaac

Rich Nathan

March 30, 2014

Shadows of the Cross Series

Genesis 22:1-14

- I. **A test of Abraham**
 - A. A test of suddenness
 - B. A test of delay
 - C. A test of love

- II. **A type of Christ**
 - A. The person sacrificed
 - B. The place of sacrifice
 - C. The return from sacrifice
 - D. The means of sacrifice
 - E. The reason for sacrifice
 - F. The demand for sacrifice