

GENESIS
Week 22, chapters 22 and 23

READ GENESIS CHAPTER 22 all

“After these things” is the Hebrew way of saying “eventually”. It describes an undefined period of time having passed; but usually it is a substantial amount of time. In some places in the Bible, the time is so long and circumstances and conditions have evolved sufficiently, that we could say one era has ended, and another era is beginning. So, likely at least a score of years have passed since Abraham’s dealings with Abimelech recorded at the end of the previous chapter.

This chapter, Genesis 22, consisting of only 24 verses, is as though we’ve climbed a huge mountain, starting at its widespread base, winding our way up paths and often breaking new ground; taking a detour now and then, at times pausing and camping out and reflecting on how far we’ve come, and now....finally.....we have reached the narrow and lofty peak. Yet, how much is there to say about arriving at the summit? As with most things in life, it is not the arrival but the journey that carries with it so much historic significance; therefore, the story recounted to us in Genesis 22 of the arrival is to the point and with an economy of words.

Please note this unique style of all Biblical writing. The most time for explanation and eloquence is spent in setting the stage for the eventual seminal event; but the event it has all pointed to is usually told with little emotion or detail. This is so NON-typical of human writing and prose for that era, or any era for that matter, when dealing with those earth-shattering events that have shaped human civilization. The great writings of the past, taken from the 5000 year old tombs of Egyptian royalty, and from the vast cuneiform records of the Assyrians and Babylonians, and from the epic sagas of the Persian, Greek and Roman era writings that are often required reading in college, do exactly the opposite; those stories spend all their time aggrandizing and hallowing the kings and military leaders, and telling an elaborate and exaggerated tale of the day of a great victory or the culmination of a grand vision.

Yet, Biblically, look at all the time spent *leading up to* the Flood, explaining why mankind had turned on God, but what few and precious words ABOUT the Flood itself are recorded. No long diatribe about people screaming for their lives, of the earth awash of bloated corpses, all drowning victims; nor of Noach and his family gloating over their survival and all others’ demise, nor of Yahweh celebrating the death of the wicked.

And, here, with Abraham, we have had chapter after chapter explaining the life and purpose of Abraham, the trials of his journey, his weaknesses revealed along with his strengths, the bad given equal time with the good, his spiritual defeats alongside his spiritual victories; and then, in Genesis 22, we have just a couple of paragraphs quietly, almost introverted-ly, telling us of the crowing achievement.

This event of Genesis 22 is the peak of Abraham's life; it is in some ways the purpose for which all before it was but preparation. This was also a day, which, though so magnificently important in itself, was really but a shadow of things to come.....a type.

So important is this event to Judaism, that the story has been given a title: the Akedah. Akedah means "to bind" or "the binding". And, of course, it refers to the binding of Isaac as he was placed on the altar of burnt offering.

It should be noticed that this chapter is fully intertwined with the previous one. In Chapter 21, we saw Abraham being instructed to give up and send away the son he loved and had put all of his hope in, Ishmael. What seemed to Abraham as his first-born son, the heir to the promise, was suddenly to be sent away to an uncertain future. Then, as Ishmael is out in the desert and near death, Yahweh or His angel calls out from Heaven, and rescues the young man. A water well miraculously appears and Ishmael is saved.

In this chapter, Abraham is now called on to give up his remaining son, Isaac; the son **God** considers to be the first-born, and by now, so does Abraham. The son who Yahweh specifically says is the promised-son is to be removed from Abraham, by Abraham's own hand. Moments before Isaac's death, Yahweh or His angel calls out from Heaven, and rescues the young man. A ram with its horns caught in a thicket miraculously appears and Isaac is saved.

We're told in verse 1, that God was putting Abraham to the test. This is a piece of information that we have, that Abraham didn't. This is important: because the reason for telling us in the initial sentence that "this is a test", is so as we read about it we don't fret and wonder if in some way Yahweh actually sanctions human sacrifice on some level. In other words, we know from the beginning that Isaac is going to survive.

Apparently.....at least it was apparent to the ancient sages and scholars..... God's instructions to Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering came at night, during a dream or a vision. For we're told that "early the next morning" after receiving this devastating command during the night, Abraham arose and set about to obey.

The Hebrew word used here for "burnt offering" is 'Olah. When we get to Leviticus, we'll hear that word a lot. There were 5 primary kinds of sacrificial burnt offerings, and the 'Olah is just one, although it is the chief of them all. For now, just know that every one of the 5 kinds of sacrificial offerings were burned up....they were all burnt offerings; so the title 'Olah doesn't just mean "any kind of offering that is burned up on a fire". Rather, 'Olah is a specific KIND of burnt offering with a specific meaning. And, there are two elements which separate each of the 5 types of sacrifices from each other: 1) WHAT the sacrificial offerings that were to be burned up consisted of, and 2) the divine PURPOSE and FUNCTION of that particular sacrificial offering and associated ritual.

Let's not pass up this opportunity to discuss the PLACE where Abraham was directed to take Isaac for this ceremonial sacrifice. He was told to go to the "land of Moriah", to a

hilltop that God Himself would point out. Therefore, the tradition of Mt. Moriah has been developed.

Today, it is a given that Mt. Moriah is in Jerusalem; the question most traditional scholars argue over has a sharp dividing line depending on whether one is a Hebrew or a gentile Christian. Jews believe that Mt. Moriah is where the Temple used to, and will again someday, exist; that place that today is called the Temple Mount and where that huge golden dome of an Islamic shrine dedicated to Mohammed dominates the skyline.

Most gentile Christian scholars, however, will tell you that Mt. Moriah is the mount of crucifixion; the place where Yahshua was executed by the Romans; and generally speaking, there are two rival locations in Jerusalem as to where that momentous event supposedly occurred. Neither, of course, is in the Temple Mount area.

That said, it needs to be understood that the Temple Mount does NOT cover the whole of Mt. Moriah. Mount Moriah was not even part of the original Jerusalem, known as the City of David. Rather, the City of David was located down the slope of a large hill, and Mt. Moriah represented the uppermost part of that hill. One of the locations chosen as the crucifixion site is, technically, probably a part of Mt. Moriah, whereas the other absolutely is not. We'll not get into exactly where Yahshua was executed, but I will tell you that by well-documented Jewish Law current at that time, and some very strong hints that Paul gave to us, I do not think it likely that EITHER traditional location of the crucifixion is correct.

Now, at the time Abraham was given instructions to journey to Moriah, he and his family were in Be'er-Sheva. Be'er-Sheva was about 50 miles SSW of Jerusalem, bordering the Sinai Peninsula. So, it was a pretty good journey that lies ahead of him.....lots of time to think, and back out of the agonizing purpose of this trip.

We're given a couple of intriguing bits of information in verse 3: 1) that Abraham took 2 servants with him, and 2) that they chopped wood for the fire that would be necessary on the altar, and took it along on the journey.

Last week I gave you several parallels between Isaac and Yahshua; some commentators say that the action of Abraham taking 2 servants with him coincides with the 2 criminals hanging on their respective crosses next to Jesus. Other than the number 2, I'm afraid the similarities end there unless a pretty fair amount of allegory is injected. The fact is that a person of Abraham's stature would never have traveled without servants. And, two was the recognized minimum traditional number of accompanying servants in his day; the entourage of two signified that this was an important person.

However, in verse 6, we are told that upon reaching Mt. Moriah, Abraham put the wood for the altar fire on the back of Isaac....the very wood that become the means of his death and burning up...and, that he would haul it up the hill to the place of the altar. This is a perfect parallel to Yahshua being required to bear upon his back the wooden cross that would become the means of his death...a sacrificial death.

This action of Abraham bringing the wood along with him from Be'er-Sheva is also quite interesting, because there is no discernable reason why they needed to transport heavy wood with them all that 50 miles. In fact, they were starting their journey from a place where wood was sparse, and going to a place where it was relatively plentiful; there was no shortage of heavy shrubs and small trees in the mountains surrounding Jerusalem.

We're told it was a 3-day journey, which is about right for that 50-mile distance they would have traveled. When they arrived, Abraham told the servants that they could not go with he and Isaac up to the altar, but that they would return to them shortly. Was Abraham telling a little white lie? Trying not to panic Isaac OR the servants with what appeared to lay ahead, the human sacrifice of Isaac? I think this prefigures Christ telling his servants, the disciples, that He was leaving and where He was going no one could follow...yet. But, that He WAS going to return to them; which is known to us as the 2nd coming.

I also don't want us to miss the amazing symbolism of the Father and the Son going together to the sacrificial altar; obviously, both were necessary. The Father couldn't perform a sacrifice without a sacrificial offering, his Son, and the Son couldn't be sacrificed without the impetus of his Father.

A few weeks ago we looked at the essence and nature of God.....which is what the doctrine of the Trinity is all about..... and saw that we cannot so easily rip God into 3 identifiable pieces or persons; taking Him apart and putting Him back together at our will. We also saw that many of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.....the ones which Jesus came to fulfill..... plainly say that Y-H-W-H will be pierced, and Y-H-W-H will return on the Mt. of Olives. Well, with the God in 3 pieces doctrine, Yahweh is one person and Yahshua is another. So, is it Yahweh or Jesus that is going to touch down on the Mt. of Olives? I say that the unity of the Godhead is so complete that we cannot separate it into 3 pieces, but we can, of course, SPEAK of His many attributes..... one of those attributes being salvation. And, the salvation attribute was to take place within the context of a yet larger attribute of God that we call the Son.

What I'm getting at is that because God is ONE, the Father attribute and the Son attribute act together, in fullest unity, at all times. Yahweh hung on that cross just as surely as Yahshua did. And, here we see in Abraham and Isaac, the Father and the Son.... these two attributes arriving together at the altar of sacrifice, each with their necessary roles. The Son attribute, Isaac, was to *be* the sacrifice, and the Father attribute, Abraham, was to initiate and accept the sacrifice. When Yahshua died, it was the human aspect of him that died; the divine lived on. When Yahshua died, it was the son attribute that was the sacrifice.....it was the Father attribute that initiated and accepted that sacrifice.

In verse 7, what was likely a very uneasy silence was broken when Isaac finally asked the obvious: "Father, where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" This was no naive question from an innocent child; the ancient Jewish writings say that Isaac was 37 years old at this time; Josephus, who lived at the time of Christ, says that Isaac was something over 25 years old

at this point in the scriptures. Isaac was a fully mature man. So, somewhere in between the ages of 25-37 likely lies the reality.30 ish is probably the best we can do. But, for sure, Isaac was no child! The idea that a grade school aged boy was who Isaac was at this time is strictly a modern gentile Christian invention that makes for cute pictures and the idea of a pitiful, helpless child being forced into something from which there was no escape.

As we see Abraham being instructed to offer up his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering, a sacrifice, we can only wonder what was going through Abraham's mind. Yet, this command of God to sacrifice Isaac would not have seemed strange; because human sacrifice to a god was part of the normal worship practices of his Canaanite neighbors. As Isaac was being bound, he became silent; he knew full well what was about to happen to him. He didn't fight the situation, he didn't demand his rights or an explanation or wonder out loud: "why me?"

And, of course, neither did the one that Isaac prefigured, the Messiah, offer up resistance or attempt to bypass the sacrificial death that only the promised son could accomplish.

Yet, Isaac was no Messiah. The appointed time for the Messiah, the time that Yahweh alone knew because Yahweh alone had set that time, had not yet come. As we now know, that time would be 18 centuries later. Isaac was to be a lesson and demonstration of a spiritual principle, not the anointed one. Isaac was just a man, and therefore could never qualify as the price God required for eternal redemption.

Therefore, to have Isaac die in the manner that seemed about to happen WOULD have been human sacrifice; so Yahweh stopped it once the vivid picture of what the cost TO GOD was going to be. Because it was going to be God Himself, who would sacrifice Himself, for men.

This chapter is just dripping with significance, and overwhelming in presenting a type of Messiah and His crucifixion, is it not? We could easily spend 2 weeks here alone. But, I will try to only hit the high points so as not to get bogged down.

As the means to get to the meat, allow me to list the "types" represented in this story, and then give you the parallel as it applied to Yahshua:

- 1) V2: Abraham is to sacrifice his only son. God sacrificed His only son.
- 2) V3: Three days after Isaac was "condemned" to death, he arose from the altar, alive. Christ arose from the dead 3 days after he was condemned.
- 3) V6: Isaac was required to carry the wood up to the hilltop that would be the very device used for his own death. Christ was required to carry his own wooden Cross, the instrument of His own death, up to the hilltop where He would be fastened to it and die.
- 4) V8: Isaac wanted to know where the lamb was for the sacrifice, and Abraham told him that God would provide it. God provided the sacrificial lamb, His very own son, for the sacrifice for all mankind.

- 5) V13: A Ram, a **male** sheep, was provided to Abraham (replacing Isaac) as the sacrifice. Christ, a **male** sacrificial lamb was the provision who replaced our rightful place of judgment at Calvary.
- 6) V14: The place where the sacrifice was to occur was commemorated as Yahweh Jireh, or as our ears are more used to hearing, Jehovah Jireh...meaning, Yahweh provides. Yahweh provided the sacrifice, for no other would do. This sacrifice was Jesus.....God in the flesh.

This is most certainly not allegory. What Isaac was subjected to was a shadow of what was going to happen to Christ about 1800 years into the future.

Toward the end of this ordeal, we are told that twice the “the angel of the Lord” called out to Abraham from Heaven; first to stop the sacrifice, and the second time to embellish the covenants previously given to Abraham. Since we’ve done a word study on the phrase “angel of the Lord”, let me point out to you that THIS time, it’s a little different Hebrew phrase than what we’ve previously seen. First, though, notice that this angel of the Lord is IN HEAVEN. I wonder why this angel isn’t on Earth, or appearing before Abraham, instead of just speaking to him from Heaven? Maybe we do have a clue for this, though, if we look a little closer. Remember that the Hebrew for “angel of the Lord” is Mal’ach (meaning messenger) Adonai, meaning Lord. But, this time the wording is Mal’ach Yahweh. Yahweh being God Almighty’s personal name. So this translates literally to Angel of Yahweh. Now, interestingly we see this Angel of Yahweh, who is speaking from Heaven, say “**I** have sworn by myself.....” Typically when something is identified as AN, or THE, Angel of the Lord, this being says the Lord told me to say this, or God told me to do that.... obviously making a definite distinction between God and the Angel. But, that is certainly NOT the case here. This Angel of Yahweh speaks with the same authority and person as Yahweh, God almighty.....that is “I” say this. From my perspective, this is quite mysterious. Even so, when I see a Mal’ach Adonai speak, as one who is doing God’s will, versus a Mal’ach Yahweh speaking of His OWN will, then I have to consider the probability that we are talking about two different beings. Exactly what’s the significance of that? Again, I’m not sure. But, you can bet your boots that it IS significant or God’s personal name wouldn’t be invoked.

We have to be very cautious, I think, in accepting the rather rigid Christian doctrines that have been developed beginning with the edicts of the Council of Nicea in the early 4th century AD, concerning how the God of the Universe manifests Himself. Doctrines were created, and continue to be created, that are NOWHERE present in Scripture or Tradition or even practice up to that point; doctrines that the first 200 years of the early church knew nothing of. I’ve commented on numerous occasions that for us to intellectually **force** all possible dimensions of God...or even just the ones alluded to in Holy Scripture..... into one of 3 separate boxes that we call Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is a dangerous undertaking. It compels us to limit He who is without limits. Who or what is this Messenger of Yahweh that twice shows up in conjunction with this climactic story of Abraham and Isaac, and speaks of Yahweh in the first person? Of that, we cannot know. But, perhaps this is our opportunity to once again acknowledge that it is simply not possible for mankind to know God’s mind, or imagine all of who He is. Perhaps we need

to grow more comfortable in knowing that God is not a human being, nor even a superhuman being. He is a whole other being and our duty, in some cases, is simply to accept that which we cannot experience or explain. Is that not really the definition of faith, in the first place?

In any case, Abraham and Isaac return home, and then we're given some genealogy concerning Abraham's brother, Nahor, who is still living back up in Mesopotamia. The first thing that ought to strike us is that 12 sons are listed for Nahor.....just as Ishmael was to have 12 sons, and eventually Jacob was to have 12 sons. However, unlike the 12 sons of Jacob who will form the nation of Israel, each playing an important role, several of the sons of Nahor we will never encounter again in the Bible. We only know they even existed because of this listing at the end of Genesis 22.

READ GEN 23 all

Just as Genesis 22 was the climax of Abraham's life and divine purpose, so Chapter 23 pulls some loose ends together and transitions us from Abraham to Isaac.

The first loose end is to bring closure to the life of the very first Hebrew matriarch, Sarah; she was 127 years old when she died. Hebrew tradition is that the trauma she suffered over her only son, Isaac's, experience on Mt. Moriah destroyed the health of this aged woman. I think it is not too hard for the mothers here to identify with Sarah's experience. Imagine, unable to have children, God finally gives you one in your old age. But, now, your husband informs you that God has asked for your child's life. All Sarah could do was sit and grieve as the days went by waiting for her husband to return, but without her only son. Hebrew tradition also says Abraham was 138 years old when his beloved Sarah died.

From a scholarly viewpoint, Sarah's death is important because it provides some details of the very first death and burial of a Hebrew. And, we find that Abraham and Sarah were living in Hebron when she expired, so it is natural that Abraham would want to entomb her there. It is key to remember, that as of this point in time, God's promise of a land set aside for Abraham had not come to fruition, nor would it for another 5-6 centuries. Abraham used the land of others.....lived in a land governed by others.....and didn't possess any territory at all. It is ironic that the only piece of real estate Abraham would ever be able to call his own was a cave to use as a tomb for his beloved wife, later himself, and eventually his children and a grandchild, Jacob, as well.

All three of the great Patriarchs of the Bible are buried in Hebron.....now a territory given over to Israel's enemy, the Palestinians. I strongly suspect that David's choice of Hebron as his first capital city when he became King of Judah had much to do with the awesome reverence associated with the burial place of the founders of the nation of Israel.

While the bargaining session we have read between Abraham and Ephron seems quaint if not humorous.....Ephron obviously being a leader among the people called Hittites who ruled over this area..... ancient records reveal very good legal reasons that the deal Abraham was pursuing for this Cave of Machpelah as a tomb for he and his wife, took the course it did.

The issue was this: in modern terms, Abraham and his clan were resident aliens in Canaan. It was typical of that day that foreigners could NOT purchase land. Land was everything; for a family to lose its land was a catastrophe. For a family to sell its land to a foreigner was an abomination. Yet, it did occur and it was legal.

However, HOW the land was acquired was very important. For instance, had Abraham accepted it as a gift, not only would that have been insulting to the Hittites that he would do such a thing, but it likely would have been challenged in the years to come by someone claiming that it was wrong to sell land to a resident alien in the first place. So, Abraham could not accept Ephron's offer of the cave as a gift. Yet, Abraham also had to be very careful in his bargaining for it; because if he bought it at a price that did not seem fair to later generations, that was reason enough to take the land back.

Therefore, Abraham dickered around until Ephron set the price before Abraham was forced to make an offer. The price.....400 shekels of silver.....was high. But, by Abraham graciously insisting that he is happy to pay full price, he took away most legal challenges that could have led to having that land taken away from him or his descendants sometime in the future.

Burial spots were terribly important to the ancients; and, I dare say, burial sites still bear enormous significance even among our own modern societies. So, this entire process took place before many of the town's citizens....Hittite citizens..... so they could be witnesses to the transfer of ownership of that cave from Ephron to Abraham.