

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“The Binding of Isaac, the Liberation of Us All”

Genesis 22:1-14

I. Introduction: Morally Twisted?

A few days ago I was reading a book review of The God Delusion by atheist Richard Jenkins. The review is posted on beliefnet.com if you want to see it.

Alongside the review are comments from other readers. One person cites today’s Old Testament lesson as a reason why he doesn’t like religion. He says that asking someone to offer his son as a sacrifice is so morally twisted that no one but brainwashed fanatic could see it as an act of faith.

Of course this person is coming from a very different perspective than that of a well-informed Christian. Yet I know that there are people sitting out there today agreeing with this idea. How can you say that it is right to offer a human sacrifice? Even to God?

In this sermon, I will answer that question.

II. God Gives Life

James tells us:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights....¹

Every good gift comes from God, including Abraham's son. Abraham could not have a son by his own power (no one can). God had to open the womb of his wife Sarah.

Because God is the author of life, he has the authority to take life. He gives us the command not to murder because that is taking God's authority into human hands. When God commands to kill, it is not murder.

In short, God gives life and he can (rightfully) take it away.

III. Abraham's Temptation

A second reason why Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son is that there is a spiritual dimension to all of this. Satan and God are fighting over Abraham just like they are fighting over each one of us. Abraham is being tempted in these verses.

Most of you know that Abraham and Sarah could not have a son when they were young. Abraham's other son, Ishmael, has been sent away at this point. So there is nothing in this world he loves more than Isaac. Abraham loves his son so much that he is being tempted to make an idol out of him.

Remember that anything we put above God in our lives has become an idol for us, even if it seems good. Many people think they are Christians when in fact they worship their children, their job or their spouse. The devil seldom tempts us with what is ugly or repugnant. He tempts us with what is beautiful, honorable and good. It is good to value career and family but not if they are put

¹ James 1:17

above God. In this case, Abraham is tempted to put his son above his relationship with God.

Because Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, he shows that he has not given in to idolatry. Of course, God knew what Abraham would do all along so there was no chance that Isaac would die. God would not tempt Abraham beyond what he could withstand. (1 Cor. 10:13) So Abraham grows spiritually from going through this temptation and Isaac is not hurt – a good ending for all.

IV. The Promise of the Resurrection

The third reason that Abraham is asked to kill Isaac is to test his faith in the resurrection.

This is also a test of *Isaac's* faith. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Isaac was 25 when Abraham was asked to sacrifice him. Other Jewish scholars hold that Isaac was 37 years old at this time. The Hebrew word translated here as “boy” means youth, not necessarily a pre-pubescent boy.

Abraham would have been between 125 and 137 years old because he was 100 when Isaac was born.² So Abraham would have been relatively frail and Isaac would have been relatively strong. Isaac had to voluntarily lie down on that altar. Abraham could not have forced him against his will. Isaac probably even helped carry the wood up to the altar after he learned that he would be the sacrifice.

We get a lot of insight into this account in the New Testament book of Hebrews. Here we learn that Abraham was willing to go through the sacrifice because he believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead (presumably Isaac believed this too). Hebrews 11:17-19 says:

² Gen. 21:5

Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received 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 raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

V. Prefiguring Christ

The fourth reason that Abraham is asked to kill Isaac is that God wanted to give a hint about what would happen to Jesus. While Scripture has many human authors, it only has one, divine author. God is the constant force behind its inspiration.

God gives hints about the life of Jesus throughout the Old Testament. In today's text, God commands that Isaac be sacrificed on *one* of the mountains in the land of Moriah. Where is the land of Moriah? Second Chronicles 3:1 tells us.

2 Chronicles 3:1 Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David...

We know that the land of Moriah is the same as the area around Jerusalem. We know that the binding of Isaac happened on *one* of the mountains in Moriah but Genesis doesn't tell us exactly which mountain it was. It could be that it occurred on the same mountain where they later built the Temple, that is, Mount Zion. This is the traditional Jewish interpretation. The traditional Christian interpretation is that it occurred on another nearby mountain, Mount Calvary, the place where our Lord was crucified.

God prefigured what he would do with his son through Abraham and his son. Nearly 2,000 years separated these two sacrifices but God knew what he was doing all along.

The similarities in the two sacrifices are obvious. First, Jesus submitted to his Father's will just as Isaac submitted to his father's will. Second, God provided a ram as a sacrifice so that Isaac's life could be spared. Then God provided his son as a sacrifice so that our lives could be spared.

VI. Conclusion

There is no reason to be afraid of this text if you have atheist friends. There is much more to it than a violence-crazed God who likes blood. Instead, this text teaches us many truths about God and points us to the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. The motivation for that sacrifice is love, not hate. Abraham loved God and his son so much that he obeyed God. God loved the world so much that he offered his only Son as a sacrifice for us. Far from teaching hatred or twisted morals, the binding of Isaac is a love story.

May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.