

The Family of Abraham - Part 12—The Binding of Isaac

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[0 : 00] Welcome back to this, the 12th in my series on the family of Abraham. Today we arrive at chapter 22, the story of the binding of Isaac, the Akedah story. This is perhaps the most famous and troubling story within the book of Genesis and in the story of Abraham's life.

It's an event that has provoked deep ethical reflection, a lot of outrage and scandal from various people. How could God ask Abraham to do this? And how could Abraham be praised for going through to the extent that he does with God's command?

These are questions that should trouble us to some degree, at least. Maybe they should not lead us to the points that they have led many others, but we should be troubled.

These questions are not easily brushed off. That God says at the end, now I know that you fear me. Secondly, that isn't the answer that you would expect if God were just giving a lesson about how human sacrifice is wrong.

God is not giving a lesson about how human sacrifice is wrong. It's far more troubling than that. If it were just a lesson that human sacrifice is wrong, it would be expected that God would say, No, you can't kill a child. That's not what I would ever tell you to do.

[1 : 16] Clearly, this is not what I intended. And I was testing you. And you have failed the test, Abraham. You were just about to kill your son. And therefore, I must set you right.

I am not a God who would ever demand human sacrifice. But that's not what we find. And for that reason, I think we need to look a bit more closely at this text to see what is taking place.

What is God seeking to test Abraham concerning? What exactly is the result of the test? Does anything change? Is this just an averted sacrifice?

Or does something change? And if something changes, what does change? What other texts within the book of Genesis and elsewhere shed light upon this? We've already noted the story of chapter 21, which has a great many similarities as Ishmael is sent out into the wilderness.

It's a story that has all sorts of echoes of the Exodus story, as you have going out into the wilderness, taking bread and water, provision of water in the wilderness, the angel of the Lord, all these sorts of things that occur.

[2 : 23] But there are also very close connections between that and the chapter that follows. And I've noted that, that these two stories probably need to be read alongside each other.

But not just that, they need to be read as part of an integral whole. They belong together. And as they belong together, maybe they can shed light upon things such as the Day of Atonement ritual.

What we're looking at in these stories then is something that is part of the deep structure of Scripture. This is something that sheds light upon a great deal within Scripture.

This story has echoes and resonances throughout the Old Testament narrative, and then in perhaps the most significant events in the New. As we read the story of the cross, we are reading a story that has all sorts of resonances of the events that we see in this event, in this story, in the story of Abraham and Isaac.

Looking at this story then, what do we see? We see an introduction to it that is very, it's ominous in certain respects.

[3 : 33] There are ways in which there's key terms that play throughout the story. One of them is this expression, here I am. This answer that is given on a number of occasions.

God calls to Abraham and Abraham's response, here I am. Then we see Isaac speaking to Abraham, his father, and saying, my father. And he said, here I am, my son.

And then finally, the angel of the Lord calling from heaven and saying, Abraham, Abraham. And Abraham says, here I am. This repeated expression sheds light upon part of what's taking place.

And it also connects that story with other stories that we find elsewhere in Scripture, where the same expression is found. So I mentioned yesterday, for instance, in the story of Jacob sending out his son Joseph in chapter 37, on a mission that is very dangerous, as we'll see when we get to it.

And Israel said to Joseph, are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them. So he said to him, here I am. Again, maybe there's something to that word Shechem that is connected with shoulder elsewhere and that we find within this story and then arising early in the morning.

[4 : 56] These sorts of events may have a connection. There's also a chiasm that Rabbi David Foreman identified that I find interesting because it's a visual one as well.

Because you start off with the son with the wood of the burnt offering on his back, tied to his back, and then you end up with him tied to the wood on the altar.

And so it's a reversal of that. And then you have other things that take place in between that are very similar, that resemble on either side, particularly the fact that they go together.

It says, he took the fire in his hand and a knife and the two of them went together. And then they have this conversation. And then at the other end of it, it says, and the two of them went together.

There's a very pregnant repetition then. What is being said here? That they are still going together after that conversation has occurred.

[6 : 00] That conversation, as we'll see, has some... It could be read in different ways. But it's a conversation that is very troubling. And it maybe sheds light upon what's taking place.

Other things that take place here. The third day. Significant occurrence that we have the third day associated with key turns of events in Scripture.

And in the book of Genesis, for instance, we have the third day associated with the lifting up of the head of the baker and the cupbearer in chapter 40. And here we have the third day lifting up the eyes and seeing afar off the place.

Now, what is the place? The place is somewhere in the land of Moriah. They're sent out from Beersheba, which is where they're living at the time. And they go to this place of Moriah.

Moriah is a significant site, as we'll see. And that they go to this particular location. It's not just a random mountain. It's a very specific mountain.

[7 : 07] And the existence of that mountain and the particular fact that they are sent to that mountain helps us to understand further aspects of this story. The references to the lad.

The lad, again, this is a common reference that you have with the story of Ishmael. The lad in both cases. And the destiny of both lads is in question.

What's going to happen to them? The story here, I think, is one that makes most sense as we understand it against the background of what Abraham has previously been tested concerning.

Abraham, at the very end, the initiation of his call was told to leave his father's house. And what we read at the beginning, go out from your country, from your kindred and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.

I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great, etc. What is happening there? What he's being told to do is he's being told to leave his past behind.

[8 : 17] He's leaving his country, the land, the place where he's rooted. He's leaving his kindred, his community, his family, the place where he grew up.

And he's leaving his roots, his father's house, the place where he belongs, his family origin. All these things are being left behind. And what do we have in chapter 22?

What we have is a very similar command. Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. And that sending out to a land that he will be shown is, and a mountain that he will be shown, is very reminiscent of the original call.

But what he's being asked to give up here is not his past, but his future. In the past, he gave up his country, his land that he had his roots and history in.

He gave up his father's house and the family origins that he once had cut off from those. And he gave up his kindred, his community, all these sorts of things. And now he's being told to give up his son, the son upon whom the destiny of the covenant seems to be riding.

[9 : 28] And as we read through the story of Abraham, we've seen on a number of occasions just how many occasions he had a sort of cul-de-sac, this expectation that there was going to be a promise fulfilled in a particular way through Lot, through Ishmael, through Eliezer at one point.

And all these different expectations came to nothing. Eventually, God said that it would be through Sarah that his promise will be fulfilled, and through Isaac.

And now he's being told to give up that only son, that son of promise. Now, this will involve giving up a lot of other things. It will involve giving up all these things that he's invested his life in.

What does he have to show for it? What does he have to show for all the work that he has done? He has no one to hand it on to if he gives up Isaac. I mean, how is Sarah going to react?

Will he lose his relationship with her? What about his relationship with his people? Will he lose them as well? He's told them all these things about what God is, and he's led them in worship, and then this horrible command that God gives him.

[10 : 43] How will he speak to them? And even more, how will he relate to God after this? How could their relationship survive after this terrible command?

On each of these levels, he's being asked to sacrifice not just his past, as he once was, but to sacrifice his future. To go into this event, not knowing how he can come out from it.

I mean, this is one of those events you can't recover from. There's no way back from this. If he does this, then everything is lost. But yet, throughout the story, his response is, here I am.

And that response is a response that's not given just to God. It's a response that's given to God at the very beginning, when God gives the command, but it's also a response given in that crucial conversation that occurs at this key moment within the text.

That moment that's sandwiched between these various other events. This sandwiched conversation, which says, Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, and said, My father.

[11 : 51] And he said, Look. He said, Here I am, my son. And he said, Look, the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

And the two of them went together. That's a devastating conversation. Isaac suddenly realizes that something is amiss. They don't have the one thing that they need.

They don't have the sacrifice. They have all the other things that will enable them to burn up and prepare the sacrifice. But they do not have the sacrifice itself. And he realizes that something is wrong.

And he realizes also that his father knows something that he doesn't. And his father is bearing a deep burden, probably, that he is not yet privy to. When he talks with his father and makes that question then, what is Abraham's response?

Abraham's response is to say, Here I am, to acknowledge his presence to his son. Now, this is a very interesting contrast with the story of Hagar. Hagar, as she sees her son about to die, distances herself from him.

[12 : 59] Goes off at a bow shot away, says he does not have to see him die. Abraham's response to his son is to say, Here I am. Just as he says to God, there's not a departure from his son, an emotional distancing from this sacrifice.

That he sees his son merely as a sacrifice. Rather, he is truly present with his son, even as he's bringing him to sacrifice. And that's a very powerful thing. It's a statement of his faithfulness to God and his loyalty to God, his deep loyalty.

But yet also his loyalty to his son, that he is emotionally present with his son. Whereas Hagar has to be told to pick up a child and to hold the child's hand, Abraham is present with his child.

He does not forsake Isaac. Even in this devastating act, he is present with Isaac within this. He's not rejecting him. He's not cutting himself off emotionally from him.

And that's one of the reasons why we can see just how fraught this is. This is a story that foregrounds throughout the relationship that they have. So if you read the initial command, Take now your son.

[14 : 12] First description. Your only son. Isaac. Second description. Whom you love. Third description. And each one of these lays on the weight of what's being asked even further.

It's calling upon Abraham to give up this one thing that he could never give up. This one thing that it would seem that he could never sacrifice. Later on in the conversation between Isaac and Abraham, we're seeing something similar.

Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, and said, My father. And he said, Here I am, my son. And so throughout this story, we're seeing this charged relationship between Abraham and his son.

It's not just an emotional distance that's created. Rather, this emotional presence, this intense emotional presence, is what gives the story its poignancy and its power.

Remember that Abraham is truly present to his son. And this son that he is truly emotionally present to, that he loves above all else, that is his only son.

[15 : 21] I mean, Ishmael's gone. Ishmael has gone. Lot has gone. Eliezer is not going to be the one who inherits. And Eliezer is just a man from his house, a home-born slave. But Isaac, his only son, that is the one that's required of him.

And this request is a devastating one for precisely that reason, that it has such an emotional power. The son represents not just an emotional relationship.

It involves the father's future. His legacy is bound up with Isaac. All his relationships are entangled with his relationship with Isaac.

How could he relate to Sarah after this? Sarah, where Isaac is the son of her laughter. How could he do such a devastating thing and kill his son?

Her son. How could he do all the, how could he carry out this action in a way that would enable him to go forward? And in this act, what he does is just say, here I am to his son and to God.

[16 : 30] And he carries on with the act and trusting that God, it seems to be, he's trusting that God will prepare a way. That God is, that his responsibility is to do what he has commanded to do.

And he trusts God's character, that God will act and that God will be the just God. Now, earlier on, we've seen that Abraham has negotiated with God or interacted with God.

In chapter 18, we see that God talks to Abraham concerning what he's going to do. I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to me.

And if not, I will know. And Abraham at that point intercedes. There's this expectation that, I mean, why would God tell this to Abraham unless he wanted some input from Abraham?

And so there's this expectation, I think that Abraham will push back, will talk about this with God, that God is a just God, that he trusts. God is the judge of all the earth and he will do right.

[17 : 37] And as he talks with God, he presses that point. And here, I think there is that absolute confidence within this as well, that his loyalty to God is absolute, but that loyalty is not at the expense of a trust in God's goodness.

As we look in the New Testament, we'll see in the book of Hebrews that the author says of Abraham, by faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son.

That's pregnant language within the New Testament of whom it was said in Isaac, your seed shall be called accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Now, that is one suggestion of how to read that text, that he expects that God's telling him to go through with this action.

And even if he goes through with it, he expects that God will, God has promised, God will be faithful. God was symbolized in that burning torch and furnace that went throughout those pieces.

[18 : 47] that symbolic statement that let me be cut off, cut up into these pieces in the same way. If I do not keep my covenant, if I do not keep my promise to you, Abraham, and God had made this promise and God will fulfill it.

And even if that requires him raising Isaac from the dead, that's what God will do. And so Abraham's confidence is one that occurs in deep blindness.

He does not know where God is leading. He cannot see the way that he will go. There's no sense of, there's no easy way to see a route through this.

He's confident rather in God's provision. He says, my son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

And there may be a sort of double entendre there that what may be provided for the burnt offering is the son himself, that Isaac is the provision that God has made for the burnt offering.

[19 : 54] As we read this story alongside other stories, I think we can see further things taking place. We can see, for instance, as we relate it to the story of the Shunammite woman, that there is an occasion where, in that story, the woman who is given a child in her old age, according to the messenger of God, according to the prophet that visits her, and then the child dies, the child conversation, tragic conversation, and the going, saddling the donkey, going out in the morning, seeing the mountain afar off, and then laying the wood, the staff upon the child, and then later on, this joining together of, as it were, the prophet figure and the child, as the prophet lies down upon the child, in a way that's very powerful, that creates some sort of connection between the two.

Now, in that story, the woman asks for her child back. She was given that child by promise. She was given the child, told that in the next year, she would have that child, at the coming, in the time to come, the time of life, that that child would be given to her.

And then, she recognises that for that child to be taken from her, is a cruelty that, God should, in his justice, give that child back.

And in that case, what we're seeing is, a reading of the story of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac, within the narrative of scripture, that shows the power of promise, the power of, a sort of justice, by which Abraham and Sarah, could appeal for their child back, could appeal for Isaac, to be restored to them.

And within the very narrative of scripture, then, we see the basis, for the judgment, that we see in Hebrews chapter 11, of the author of Hebrews, who recognises that, Abraham saw, in that sacrifice, in the events of the promise, and all these sorts of things, that if God did in fact, take the life of his son, God would have to restore that son to him.

[22 : 05] And that's a powerful thing to recognise. The tense relationship, between the father and the son here, is important to recognise though, that this question, that is asked by the son, this devastating question, that there's something, that the father is withholding, some information, that is very grave and serious.

There's a story, that that reminds us of. And it may help us, to understand further things, that are taking place here. The story that that might remind us of, is a story where those roles, in some ways are reversed.

Where it's not, the father telling the son, about some devastating news, concerning the son's fortunes. But rather, it's the son, having to tell the father, about some devastating news.

And what story could that be? Well, if we look in the book of 1 Samuel, in the start of 1 Samuel, we see, the story of the child, that is dedicated to, given up to the Lord.

And there are themes of, we talk about, Abraham having to sacrifice Isaac, as a whole burnt offering. Now, the whole burnt offering, there are some themes of that, within the beginning of 1 Samuel, chapter 1.

[23 : 20] Hannah gives up, her firstborn son, to the Lord. And there are many ways, in which that story of Hannah, and Eli, and these other events, surrounding the birth of Samuel, should recall the story, of the birth of Isaac.

There's a rival wife, there's the opening of the womb, there's the event of the child, that is given to the Lord. This radical gift of a child, and the references, to ascension within the context, going up.

And she will not go up, until the child has been weaned. Now, where else do we see a reference, to weaning of a child? The only other reference, that we have, is in the story of Isaac.

Isaac is the child, who was weaned from his mother, and then given to the Lord. Here we have Isaac, who was weaned, and then later on, he's brought up, to be given to the Lord. We see further things here, in giving up to the Lord, the Lord's house.

We'll get to that, at some point later on. But, in the conversation, between Samuel and Eli, in chapter 3, themes re-emerge. The Lord called Samuel, and he answered, here I am.

[24 : 35] And then, he goes to Eli, and he thinks that Eli, is the one that called. And then again, we say, here I am, in chapter, in verse 8. And then we see it, repeated at various other occasions.

Then Eli said, called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, here I am. And at that point, Samuel has received, the prophecy, concerning the devastation, of Eli's house.

And Eli tells him, to disclose what he knows, to tell him what he knows. This devastating news, that the son holds, about the father. And note that he says, my son.

And here I am, as the response. What is the thing, that the Lord has said to you? Please do not hide it from me. God, do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me, of all the things, that he has said to you.

So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and let none of his words, fall to the ground. But before that, we see Samuel, laying down until morning, opening the doors, of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid, to tell Eli, the vision.

[25 : 42] Opening the doors, of the house. The early in the morning, all these sorts of things. These are, pregnant statements. These are statements, that draw our mind back, to the story, of the relationship, between Abraham and Isaac.

And this is the one occasion, where we really see, Abraham and Isaac talking. Where else do we see it? Nowhere else. This is the one conversation, that occurs between them.

And that conversation, as they go on from there, there's a sense in which, Isaac has now, some knowledge, of what, Abraham has been called to do.

He has a sense of the, the deep, difficulty, of the calling of, his father. That there is something, that has been required, of his father, that is weighing upon him.

He does not know, where it will go to. And the fact that the son is, presumably at this age, at this point in his thirties, he's going along with this, at this point. And, he's not going to be tied, to that altar, without, his own will, being involved.

[26 : 48] He submits to this. He is, a son who, follows with his father, who does not rebel, against his father's, call. Now it's a very powerful story, for this reason.

And it helps us, to understand, what we see in the New Testament. The relationship, between father and son, in the death of Christ. That Christ, is the one, who willingly accepts, the will of his father.

That he, he struggles, with that. The cup, that's given to him. And says, yet not my will, but yours be done. That, submission, to the will of his father.

That loyalty. And trusting, that God will, raise him up, at that point. That God is faithful, and you can trust God, even at that point, of deepest darkness.

When God comes, as if as an enemy. We see this, on a few occasions, in scripture, where God appears, as it were, as an enemy, of his people. Or as, some member, of some leader, or some, patriarchal figure.

[27 : 51] God can come, as an enemy. As he comes to Jacob, wrestling at night. And that, dogged determination, not to let go, until blessing occurs. Abraham's, confidence, that God will provide, is also something, that leads to, the naming of the place, later on, when God does, in fact, provide.

God provides, a, a ram, that is, under, caught in a thicket, by its horns. Abraham goes, and takes the lamb, and offers it, for a burnt offering, instead of his son.

Now, what's happening there? First of all, we see very similar themes, the ram, caught in a thicket, the sun left, under a bush, in chapter 21. We see, lifting up the eyes, and seeing, or eyes being opened, and seeing.

We also see, the intervention, of the angel, speaking from heaven. We don't see, the angel of the Lord, speaking from heaven, elsewhere, in the Old Testament. And, it's at that moment, just as he's about, to slay his son, that God intervenes.

And God, God's intervention, as I mentioned before, is not, an intervention, of the kind, that says, human sacrifice, is wrong. I would never tell you, to do that.

[29 : 05] That's not, in fact, what he said. It said, now that I, now I know, that you fear me. And that, relationship, is, a movement, into a deeper, relationship, between Abraham, and God.

Abraham has, related to God, as a friend. He's marked, by hospitality, by his faithfulness, in building up, the name of others, and elevating, the name of God.

But, there is something here, that is a, a greater fearing, a greater awe, and reverence of God. That submission, to God's will, even in that, deepest darkness, where he does not know, where it will lead him.

And that, I believe, is part of, what we see, in Abraham's test here. That's what's being tested. That's the result, that we see at the end. And, what Abraham says is, Abraham calls, the name of the place, the Lord will provide, or, the Lord, that it's referring to God's, God's seeing, that God will see to it.

And that, and, this might also recall, the statement, concerning God, that Hagar makes, in chapter 16.

[30 : 18] That this mount, again, is a significant place. What is this mount? This mount is the temple mount. It's the mount, upon which, all the sacrifices will occur. Later on, we see in, 2nd Chronicles, chapter 3, verse 1, Now Solomon began to build, it's a significant site, in the story of David, as we see at the end of his, at the end of 2nd Samuel, but it's also a significant place, in the life of Abraham, it's where he sacrifices his son.

And in that sacrifice, I think what we're seeing in part, is the foundation, of the sacrificial system, more generally. Part of its deep meaning, the giving up of the son.

And what happens, in the giving up of the son? Is this just an averted sacrifice? Is it just that God says, whoa there, stop it, I would never require you, to give a human in a sacrifice.

And here's an animal, that's the sort of sacrifice, you should do instead. Or has something changed? I think something changes. At this point, God has called for Abraham, to give up his son.

And as Abraham gives up his son, there is a new relationship, between God and Isaac, and between God and Abraham. God has, as it were, adopted Isaac, has claimed Isaac.

[31 : 56] Isaac has, the whole offering, that's being offered, is an ascension offering. And what we're seeing here, I think, is Isaac does, is given up to the Lord, just as Samuel, was given up to the Lord.

There is an ascension offering, as it were, of Isaac. Now that occurs, through the substitution of Aram. But, there is a genuine sacrifice, that occurs here.

And the blessing that comes, by myself, I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son. In blessing, I will bless you, and in multiplying, I will multiply your descendants, as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand, which is on the seashore.

And your descendants, shall possess the gate, of their enemies. In your seed, all the nations of the earth, shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice. And that, is again, a powerful statement.

It's a statement, that he has obeyed God's voice. This is a, again, this gives a sense, of what is being tested. He has obeyed God's voice. He fears the Lord. And those are the things, that are being tested.

[33 : 05] His loyalty, and his obedience. And, his trust, in these situations. This is not a case, like the case, where he appears, at the Oaks of Mamre, where God is inviting, negotiation.

God calls for him, to obey here. And, this is similar, to the way, that you can speak, to your child differently, in different occasions. Sometimes, you expect, for them to negotiate, with you. And, you talk through an issue, get down on their level, and negotiate, in that way.

And, on other occasions, you're just telling them, what to do. And, they must obey you, unquestioningly. Knowing, that, as your, as their good parent, you have your best, their best wishes, at heart.

Why do we obey, certain people, like our parents? Partly, because we know, their character. We know that, even if we do not understand, what they are telling us to do, that we know them.

And, we know that, they would not tell us, to do something, unless there were good reason, and unless, it were for our good. And, this is part, I believe, of the confidence, that Abraham brings here.

[34 : 16] That God will provide. He does not know how, but he knows God. And, to the extent, that he knows God, he knows that God, would not, just play a sick, joke upon him here.

That God, is a God, that will provide. That God is a God, that will come through. God is a God, who keeps his promises. And that, test, to throw, not just his past, he's given up his past, all his roots, his connection with his father's house, and now, everything, is riding upon his son.

And, to be told, to give up that, is to be told, to put everything, in God's hands. To trust God, completely. Not to, have anything, that is withdrawn, anything that is held back, and to say, I'm trusting, I'm, trusting in this, I also trust in you God, but, I'm, primarily, my hope is riding upon this child.

No, he gives everything over to God. And, in that respect, we see that, Isaac is doubly a child of promise. That he is a child, that is given to God again, after he has been given in the first place.

In many ways, like the story of Samuel. Samuel is received from the Lord, but then given to the Lord. And, that gift is one that, is, a donation of the self.

[35 : 37] The promise, that the future is given. And so, Hannah are giving up, the son that has been given to her. I mean, her womb has been opened, she's been struggling all these years.

And yet, she gives up the son, that she's given. It's a very, remarkable thing to do. You'd expect that, okay, you've got this son, hold on to that son, for all that you're worth.

You don't want to give up that son, because if you give up that son, you stand to lose everything. You gained, and you do not want to lose again. Now, what she does, is she gives up, the son, that God has given to her.

And then she receives many other children. But this, is a similar thing, that's taking place, in the story, of Abraham. That Abraham is called, to give up that one thing, that one child he has.

Everything his hope is riding upon. And then, as that child is given up, God has claimed that child, for himself. And we see these sorts, of sacrificial themes, in the story of the Exodus, as well.

[36 : 37] God says, let my people go. And he says, let my firstborn, Israel is my firstborn son. In chapter, in chapter four, thus you shall say to Pharaoh, thus says the Lord, Israel is my son, my firstborn.

So I say to you, let my son go, that he may serve me. But if you refuse, to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn. Now, what basis, is God declaring Israel, to be his firstborn son?

I think in part, upon the basis, of what happens here, in chapter 22 of Genesis, that Abraham gives up, his only begotten son. He gives up, his only son.

Now, think about that. He's lost, he's lost Lot. He's lost Ishmael. And now he's asked, to give up, his only son. And this, stress upon, only, only begotten, is one that carries on, into the New Testament, in relation to, to Christ.

The giving up, of the only son. Now, Israel, being God's firstborn son, is I think, related to this. That as Abraham, gives up his son, to God, as he puts God's name, and God's claim, upon this child, above his own.

[37 : 56] There is, a way in which, that child, now bears the name, of God, in a way that, he did not before. There's a new, sense of that, child's identity.

The child, has ascended to God. The child, now belongs to God, in a new way. And so, from that moment forward, Abraham, and his descendants, belong to God.

Israel, is his inheritance. They are his people, they belong to him, they are dedicated to him. And in the story, of the Exodus, we're seeing that, playing out, and we also see, the dedication, the dedication, of the firstborn sons, and then later, the Levites to God.

That these are a token, of that ownership, of the nation, more generally. Israel, is God's firstborn son. Israel belongs to God. And so, all the sacrificial system, again, remember this takes place, on the Temple Mount, is playing out, this fundamental meaning, of Israel's life, and of God's relationship, with Israel.

That Israel, is God's firstborn son. That just as Abraham, gave up, his only son, in an ascension offering, to the Lord. So God claims, all of Abraham's descendants, as his own.

[39 : 11] They're his people. They're not just, Abraham's descendants, that God is going, to be good to. They are his people. And so, an ascension offering, takes place here.

Abraham, does sacrifice his son, and his son's status, is changed. I think we're seeing, similar things, in the story of Jephthah, I've mentioned before.

There's again, the mention of the opening, of the door, the door of the house, the womb. These sorts of themes, playing there. The same themes, as we see in the story of Samuel. The same themes, as we see in the story of, playing out in a negative way, in the story of Lot and Sodom, and in a positive way, in the story of Sarah, and the prophecy, of the child being born.

In all of these stories, what I think we're seeing, is, and in the story of the Passover, we're seeing these themes as well. The doors and birth. And, what is happening, is the giving up, of the firstborn child.

And that dedication, of the child to the Lord, is an ownership, of a claiming of the house, more generally. And I've commented, upon the Jephthah story elsewhere, but I think this is, one of the reasons, why there is justification, for seeing that, not as an actual sacrifice, a physical burning up, of the child, but as a true sacrifice, but in the sense, of the child, being dedicated to God, in the same way, as Samuel, was an ascension offering, to the Lord.

[40 : 40] When we read this story then, I think, we are reading something, that has, deep implications, for our understanding, not just, of the story of Abraham's life, but, our lives more generally.

That this is something, that teaches us about, what God does, in Jesus Christ. What it means, for God to, give up, his only begotten son, for us all.

what it means, for the son, to relate to the father, in this, the tragedy, of the father, the father's will, and the son, going along with that will, and the tension, at that point, that you've, the struggle, at that point, but yet, the faithfulness, and in that relationship, between, Abraham and Isaac, so they went together.

What you're seeing there, is I think, a foreshadowing, of what happens, in Christ. In Christ, as he gives himself up, according to the will, of the father.

And that is a, terrifying, but remarkable event. An event, that reveals, part of the beauty, of faith. A beauty, of that loyalty, that is, dogged, and determined.

[41 : 54] Not just, a bare passivity. There is that, confidence, that if that child, is in fact taken, that, they will beat, down the doors, of heaven, to get that child, back according, to the promise.

And that is what we see, in the story, of the Shunammite woman. In the story, of Samuel, I think we're also, seeing another image, of this, from another perspective. And this is what, scripture can often do.

It can tell us, the same story, from a number, of different vantage points. As we see it, from different vantage points, we have a clearer idea, of how it's functioning. We'll see it again, in the story, of Jacob, and Joseph, his son.

We'll get to that, in a few weeks time. But looking at this story then, I think, that we get, near to the, depths, of one of the, fullest mysteries, within scripture.

We see something, about the root, meaning of the, sacrificial system, of what's taking place, on the temple mount. It's the place, where people, present themselves, to the Lord.

[42 : 58] Where they are, Israel is going, to this site, every year, on a number of occasions, to present themselves, to the Lord. To ascend, to God's presence. And as they ascend, to God's presence, they are not coming, empty handed.

They are presenting, themselves and their works, to God. And this is, God's claim upon his people. That they are his people. And the ritual, is playing out, through the sacrifice, of rams, and other creatures, the sacrifice, of Israel.

That Israel, is ascending, to God's presence. And as Israel, ascends to God's presence, in ritualized form, Israel is recognizing, its participation, in the meaning, of what takes place here.

That sons, and fathers, and mothers, all in their different, forms of engagement, within us. And also daughters, as we see in the story, of Jephthah. All involved, within this, in different ways.

And what it means, for Israel, to give itself up, to the Lord. To belong, to God, above all others. It's a remarkable truth. That's a truth, that we see in Christ.

[44 : 02] That's a truth, that should be lived out, in our lives. As Christians, we are called, to present, our bodies, as a living sacrifice. Our bodies, plural, as the people of God, in the church, and as a singular sacrifice.

We are the seed, in Christ, who offered himself up. We are supposed to offer ourselves up. And this is part, of the mystery, of what that means. That we are supposed to walk, in the footsteps, of our father Abraham.

That in Abraham, we have been claimed, that as we, are in Christ, in the seed, we are associated, with those who are given up, to God. We belong to him.

And our identity, is now defined, by that claim, upon our lives. It's something, we see, brought out, in Paul's letters, on various occasions. Present yourself, your members, not just as instruments, to sin, but your members, to righteousness.

[45 : 17] They belong to God. God has claimed you, as his own. And now, you must bear, his word upon your lips. You must, bear his truth, upon your heart. You must, carry his, his business out, with your hands.

All these things, are things that should be images, of the way that we live. And the whole sacrificial system, is playing this out. This is as if, this is a presentation, of ourselves to God.

And what it means for us, to be people, who belong to God. Thank you very much, for listening. Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow, with a lot more to say, upon the story, of the death, of Sarah, and the events, surrounding that.

God bless, and see you again tomorrow.