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

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I discuss the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22.

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Transcript

Welcome back to this, the twelfth in my series on The Family of Abraham. Today we arrive at chapter 22, the story of the binding of Isaac, the Achaeta 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, I know that you fear me. 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. 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 are the 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. 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. There are ways in which there's key terms that play throughout the story.

One of them is this expression, hineni, here I am. This answer that is given on a number of various occasions, 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.

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. That conversation, as we'll see, 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.

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, 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, in 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.

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.

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 Eleazar 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. 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 where he's going to, 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, 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. And that's a devastating conversation. Isaac suddenly realises 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 realises that something is wrong. And he realises 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, goes off at a bow shot away so she 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 her 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, 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. 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.

I mean, Ishmael's gone. Ishmael has gone. Lot has gone.

Eleazar is not going to be the one who inherits. And Eleazar 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 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. 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 all together 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. 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. Now 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.

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, 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. 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 was 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's 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 asked 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. And that's a powerful thing to recognise.

The tense relationship between the father and the son here is important to recognise though, 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. 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 is 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'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.

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 verse 8. And then we see it's repeated at various other occasions. Then Eli 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. 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. Opening the doors of the house 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 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 and at this point in his 30s, 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.

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 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 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. 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 ram that is caught in a thicket by his 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 son 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'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. That's not in fact what he said.

It said now that I'm 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 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 is referring to 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. 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 the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where the Lord had appeared to his father David at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

So 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.

Well 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. 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 test 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. 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 on that in that way. And on other occasions you're just telling them what to do and they must obey you unquestioningly knowing that as their good parent you have 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 they were good reason and unless it were for our good.

And this is part I believe of the confidence that Abraham brings here. 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'd 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.

The promise that the future is given. And so Hannah and giving up the son that has been given to her. I mean her womb has been open.

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.

We see these sorts of sacrificial themes in the story of the Exodus as well. God says let my people go. And he says let my firstborn Israel is my firstborn son.

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 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. 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 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 So God claims all of Abraham's descendants as his own. 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. When we read this story then I think we are reading something that has deep implications for 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's will and the son going along with that will and the tension at that point.

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. 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. 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 with this. 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. It's a truth that we see in Christ. It'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 have 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.

Sacrificial language. It's language that you prepare yourself as a living sacrifice. It's as if your body has been cut into different pieces.

And now these various parts of your body. Your hand. Your feet.

Your ear. Your eyes. Your mouth.

All these things no longer belong to you primarily. 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.

You must run with his truth and with your feet. And all these different things that conscript our body for his purpose. And the meaning of sacrifice is found ultimately in human sacrifice.

If you look at the temple. If you look at the tabernacle. They are humaniform.

They're shaped according to the human body. You have the great trunk of the human body with the holy place and with the table of showbread and the lampstands related to the hands. And then we also have things like the feet related to the great pillars outside the house.

And the altar. The ground that you're standing upon. The head that contains the ark of the covenant with the mysteries and the word of the covenant.

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 if this is a presentation of ourselves to God.

And all these different parts of the body are playing out. So you have the mind that contains like the ark these treasures within it. And meditates upon them.

Meditating upon the law contained within the ark. We have like the table of like the altar

of incense. This sweet aroma that's going up.

This prayer that ascends into God's presence. We have the way in which our works are offered to God. We offer we present ourselves in ways that give light like the lamp.

And we and the consuming of food. And all these things that are part of the human body. These are part of the ways in which we present ourselves to God as a people.

Not just as a building and a set of rituals but the meaning of these things ultimately finds its root within persons. 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. Thank you very much for listening. And if you would like to support this and other videos like it please do so using my Patreon or PayPal accounts.

And if you would like to ask any questions on this and any other issues please do so using my Curious Cat. God bless and see you again tomorrow.