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THE LAW OF THE SACRIFICE

*“It is the blood that makes **atonement** for the soul.”*

— The LORD (Leviticus 17:11)

The first family’s history is recorded in Genesis, chapter four. It is here we first learn that when Adam and Eve were put out of the idyllic Garden of Eden, the entire human race was put out. All their descendants would be born and raised in a cursed world under enemy control.

FIRSTBORN SINNER

*“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore **Cain**, and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the LORD.’” (Genesis 4:1)*

Cain means *acquire*. In the midst of the pain and wonder of the first childbirth, Eve exclaimed, *“I have acquired a man from the LORD!”* Perhaps she thought Cain was the promised Deliverer sent by God to rescue them from sin’s deadly consequences.

Eve was right in believing that the promised Savior would come *“from the LORD.”* She was also right in believing that the Messiah would be *born of a woman*, but if she thought her husband’s offspring was the promised Deliverer, she was wrong.

Any such misconceptions were cleared up all too quickly.

Adam and Eve soon discovered that their darling little firstborn son had an inbred sin nature. Cain sinned *naturally*. He exhibited pride and self-will—like his parents and like Satan. Cain was not the promised Redeemer. He was just another helpless sinner in need of redemption.

By the time Adam and Eve’s second son came along, they had a more realistic perspective of man’s condition.

*“Then she bore again, this time his brother **Abel**.”*

(Genesis 4:2)

Adam and Eve named their second son *Abel*, meaning *vanity* or *nothing*. There was no way they could produce a righteous child. The promised Savior of sinners could not come from Adam’s sinful line. Together, Adam and Eve could only procreate another sinner like themselves. If there was to be a righteous Man to save them from sin’s penalty, He must come from the LORD.

As we learned in Genesis chapter one, the first man and woman were created *in the image and likeness of God*. This amazing privilege included the solemn responsibility of making right choices. God’s will for Adam and Eve and their descendants was that they reflect their Creator’s holy and loving nature. However, when Adam and Eve chose to disobey their Creator-Owner, they stopped reflecting His image. Instantly, they fell from being *God-centered* to being *self-centered*. And they gave birth to children like themselves.

*“Adam...had sons and daughters...**in his own likeness, after his image**.” (Genesis 5:3-4)*

As goes the Wolof proverb: *“Bounding gazelles do not beget burrowing offspring.”* Neither do sinful parents beget righteous offspring. The Scripture says,

*“**Through one man** sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death **spread to all men**, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12)*

SINNERS WORSHIP

*“Now **Abel** was a keeper of sheep, but **Cain** was a tiller of the ground. In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat.”* (Genesis 4:2-4)

Cain became a farmer and Abel a shepherd. Although sin’s effects were around them and in them, they were still surrounded by the glory of God’s creation and sustained by His loving care. Though Cain and Abel were both sinners, God loved them and wanted them to know Him and approach Him in worship. However, for this to happen, they needed a remedy for their sin problem. God is holy and *“those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:24)

Clearly, these boys were well taught by their parents, who had once enjoyed close friendship with their Creator. Both Cain and Abel understood that sin was an offense to God. Like their parents, they were shut out from God’s presence. If they were to have a relationship with Him, it must be on His terms.

The good news was that God had opened a way by which Cain and Abel could have their sins covered if they would trust Him and approach Him in the way He had established.

Let’s listen again to the narrative:

“In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.” (Genesis 4:3-5)

As with any well-told story, not all the details are immediately given. The narrative simply tells *what* Cain and Abel did. *Why* they did what they did is explained elsewhere in Scripture. Both young men wanted to worship the one true God. Each *“brought an offering...to the LORD.”*

Cain came with an impressive selection of fruits and vegetables which he had diligently cultivated.

Abel brought an innocent, unblemished lamb, killed it and burned its body on a simple altar made of stone or earth.¹⁷⁸

By outward appearances, Abel’s bloody offering was brutal and appalling, while Cain’s agricultural offering was beautiful and appealing. Yet the Scripture says:

*“**The LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.** And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.”* (Genesis 4:4-5)

Why did God accept Abel’s offering and reject Cain’s?
Abel trusted God’s plan.
Cain did not.

ABEL’S FAITH AND LAMB

The Scriptures tell us Abel came to God *“by faith,”* indicating that God had revealed to Cain and Abel what He required.

*“**By faith Abel** [who believed God’s plan] **offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain** [who did not believe God’s plan], *through which [Abel] obtained witness that he was **righteous**... But without faith it is impossible to please Him.*”* (Hebrews 11:4,6)

The faith that pleases God is faith that believes and submits to His plan.

When Adam and Eve first sinned, God rejected their self-efforts to fix their sin problem. Instead, God performed the first animal sacrifice and provided Adam and Eve with a covering for their sin and shame. By putting to death some innocent animals, God was teaching them that *“the wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is eternal life....”* (Romans 6:23)

Later, Cain and Abel were taught the same lesson, but only one believed it.

Abel approached God *by faith*, humbly and obediently presenting to the LORD a healthy firstborn lamb.

Visualize Abel laying his hand on the lamb's head and quietly thanking the LORD that though he, Abel, deserved the death penalty, God would accept the lamb's blood as a temporary payment for sin. Next, Abel takes the knife and slits the gentle creature's throat and watches as its life-blood pulsates out.



By killing the lamb, Abel showed respect for God's holy nature and for the law of sin and death. It was because he trusted God's plan that God forgave Abel of his sins and declared him righteous. Abel was set free from the penalty of sin because that penalty had been carried out against the lamb. Abel's sacrifice symbolized and pointed to the perfect Sacrifice God promised to provide one day to take away the sin of the world.

That is why "the LORD respected Abel and his offering."

CAIN'S WORKS AND RELIGION

Then there was Cain. What a religious young man he was! He set before God an admirable array of fruits and vegetables he had worked hard to produce. But God rejected Cain and his offering.

Cain's error was not the worship of a false god, but false worship of the one true God.

Instead of approaching his Creator by faith, Cain came with *his own ideas and efforts*. God had not accepted his parents' self-conceived covering of fig leaves and neither would He accept Cain's self-conceived offering of vegetables.

Some argue, "But Cain brought what he had!"

God did not want what Cain had. He wanted Cain to trust Him and worship Him on the basis of a death payment—the blood of a lamb. If Cain didn't have a lamb, he could have traded some

vegetables for one of Abel's lambs, or he could have humbly approached the LORD at Abel's altar where the blood of the lamb had been shed. But Cain was too proud for that. He chose to "worship" God with the works of his own hands.

That is why God "did not respect Cain and his offering."

THE SIN DEBT

Why was the LORD so categorical? Why did He accept Abel's slain lamb but not Cain's fresh vegetables?

God refused Cain's offering for the simple reason that the penalty for sin is *death*, not self-effort. *The law of sin and death*, which God first made known to Adam, had not changed. All who break God's laws owe a debt that can be paid only with *DEATH*. The Righteous Judge of the universe will not permit an infraction of His laws to be penalized with anything less.

No amount of sincerity, self-effort, or good works can cancel the debt of sin.

To illustrate, imagine a major bank lends me several million dollars. Instead of investing this enormous sum of money wisely, I squander it and default on the loan. The police come to my house and arrest me. In court, I tell the judge, "Never in my lifetime will I be able to pay back the millions of dollars I owe, but I have a plan to erase my financial debt. Here is what I will do: Instead of paying back the debt with money, I will pay it back with good works! Every day I will bring to the president of the bank a bowl of cooked rice. One day each week I will skip a meal and give that food to feed the poor. I will also take a ceremonial bath several times a day to wash away the shame of my debt. This I will do until my debt is paid off."

Would the judge accept such an irrational arrangement as payment for a financial debt? Never! Neither will the Judge of all the earth accept praying, fasting, and good works as payment for a sin debt. There is only one way to pay for sin. It must be paid for with *DEATH—eternal separation from God*.

Is there a way for helpless sinners to be delivered from this unbending *law of sin and death*?

Thank God, there is.

THE LAW OF THE SACRIFICE

I don't play cards, but I do know some cards trump others. Due to a card's assigned value, it wins over cards of lesser value.

The Old Testament books of Daniel and Esther tell of ancient kings making laws that could "*not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which [do] not alter.*" (Daniel 6:8) If a king wanted to overcome a certain law, instead of abolishing it, he established a stronger law that would "trump" the previous one.¹⁷⁹

Similarly, from the beginning, God's righteous way of overcoming "*the law of sin and death,*" was to bring in a stronger law, namely, "***The law of the sin offering,***" (Leviticus 6:25) or, as it is also called: "***The law of the sacrifice.***" (Leviticus 7:11)

God, who upholds all His laws, established the *law of the sacrifice* to trump the still legally binding *law of sin and death*.

The law of the sacrifice offered *mercy* to guilty sinners while at the same time carrying out *justice* against sin. (To review why God must maintain *mercy and justice* in perfect balance, see chapter 13.) The law of the blood sacrifice provided a way for God to punish sin without punishing the sinner. Here is God's explanation of how that could happen:

*"The life of the flesh is in the **blood**, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes **atonement** for the soul."*
(Leviticus 17:11)

This law contained two basic principles:

1. BLOOD PROVIDES LIFE – God said: "***The life of the flesh is in the blood.***" Modern science confirms what the Scriptures have declared for thousands of years: a creature's life is in its blood. Healthy blood transports all the elements necessary to sustain life and to cleanse away impurities. The blood is precious; without it, humans and animals alike die.

2. SIN REQUIRES DEATH – God also said: "***It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.***" The word *atonement* comes from the Hebrew word *kaphar*, which means to "*cover, cancel, cleanse, forgive, and reconcile.*"¹⁸⁰ It was only through the

poured-out blood that sinners could be cleansed and reconciled to their righteous Creator. Since the penalty for sin is death, God was saying He would accept the blood (forfeited life) of an acceptable sacrifice as a payment and covering for man's sin.

A SUBSTITUTE

The underlying principle of *the law of the sacrifice* can be summed up in a word: ***substitution***. An innocent animal would die as the condemned sinner's substitute.

In the generations before the coming of Messiah, the LORD made it known to Adam's descendants that He would temporarily accept the shed blood of a suitable animal, such as a lamb, sheep, goat, or bull. Even pigeons and doves could be offered.¹⁸¹ No matter how rich or poor, good or bad a person was, all were to approach God, recognizing their sinfulness and believing that God would grant them forgiveness based on the shed blood.

The condemned creature had to be "*without blemish.*"¹⁸² It could not have any sickness, broken bones, cuts, or scratches. It had to symbolize perfection. The sinner offering the sacrifice was to "*lay his hand on the head of the [animal], and kill it... It is a **sin offering.***" The fat of the animal would then be burned on the altar.

And what did God say such an offering would accomplish?

*"His sin... shall be **forgiven** him."* (Leviticus 4:23-26)

The person placing his or her hand on the head of a sacrifice symbolized the transfer of sin to the flawless creature. The sinner then perished *in the place of* the sinner.

On the basis of this principle of *substitution*, sin was punished and the sinner was pardoned. The death penalty for sin fell on the "perfect," innocent animal instead of on the guilty man or woman.

The law of the sin offering taught sinners that God is holy and that "*without the shedding of **blood** [a death payment] there is no **forgiveness** [removal of sin's penalty].*" (Hebrews 9:22 NIV)

By means of the animal sacrifice, God was carrying out

His justice against sin and showing His mercy to sinners who trusted in Him. God promised to bless all who came to Him in this way. On the same day God gave His ancient people the Ten Commandments, He reminded them that the only way they could be accepted by Him was to approach Him on the basis of a blood sacrifice presented on an altar.

*“An altar of earth you shall make **for Me**, and **you shall sacrifice on it** your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. **In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.**”* (Exodus 20:24)

The main intent of this blood-for-sin provision was to demonstrate God’s righteous wrath against sin until such time as the promised Savior arrived.

The Messiah’s purpose would be to fulfill *the true meaning* of the law of the sacrifice.

In God’s estimation, the life of one human is worth more than all the animals in the entire world. Animals were not created in the image of God. Animals do not have eternal souls. Consequently, animal blood could *only symbolize* what was necessary to cancel man’s debt of sin.

Abel’s slain lamb is only the first recorded story among scores of Old Testament narratives in which we see believers coming to God in worship with the poured-out blood of innocent, flawless animals. Among these numerous animal-sacrifice stories, one stands above the rest.

It’s the one remembered each year by Muslims around the world.



The family is gathered around. The subdued creature is held to the ground. Old and young alike, each lays a hand on the sheep or on the father bearing the knife.

The cut is swift and onto the sand pulsates the animal’s life.

The sacrifice is over—until next year.

On *Eid al-Adha*, “the Feast of the Sacrifice,” Muslims point back to a four thousand year-old biblical event when God provided a ram to die instead of Abraham’s son.¹⁸³ The Qur’an concludes its brief account of this classic story with these words: “***And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.***” (Sura 37:107)

To understand the full significance of this dramatic story, we must return to the book of Genesis.

ABRAHAM

Abraham¹⁸⁴ was born around 2000 BC in the land of Ur, modern-day Iraq. Like all descendants of Adam, he was born with a sin nature. Although Abraham grew up among pagan idol worshippers, he became a believer in the one true God. Abraham did not share the opinion of many people today who think they must be loyal to the religion of their parents no matter what.

Like Abel, Abraham approached the LORD God in worship with the shed blood of sacrificed animals.

When Abraham was seventy-five years old and his wife was sixty-five, the LORD appeared to him and said:

*“Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. **I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**”*

(Genesis 12:1-3 NIV)

God promised to make of Abraham a “*great nation*” through which He would provide salvation for all people groups on earth. This nation would be “*great*,” not in *size*, but in *significance*. To make this new nation a reality, Abraham and his childless wife Sarah were commanded by God to move to a land He promised to give to their descendants, though they still had none.

How did Abraham react to God’s seemingly impossible promises? He trusted God and obeyed, leaving his father’s household and heading to the land of Canaan, which today is known as Israel and Palestine.

ABRAHAM’S FAITH

Once Abraham arrived in Canaan, the LORD said to him, “***To your descendants I will give this land. And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.***” (Genesis 12:7)

God’s promise was nothing short of amazing. The land of Canaan was populated with many different people groups. How could Abraham and his descendants possess it? He and his wife had no descendants.

Imagine an elderly couple coming from a far away land to visit your country. When they arrive, you tell them, “One day you and your descendants will own this entire country!” The old man laughs and says, “Very funny! I don’t even have any descendants! I am an old man; I have no children and my wife is unable to conceive and you tell me that my descendants are going to multiply and possess this land? Are you ill?”

This is the kind of staggering promise God made to Abraham. And how did Abraham react? The Scripture says he “***believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.***” (Genesis 15:6) Because of Abraham’s childlike faith in God’s promise, God declared him righteous. After he died, Abraham would live forever with the LORD in Paradise.

The word in the original Hebrew text for “*believed*” is *aman*, from which comes the expression, “*Amen*,” which means: “So be it!” or “It is trustworthy and true!”

Don’t miss this. To *believe in the LORD* is to hear what He has declared and to respond with a heart-felt “Amen!” It is such childlike faith that connects with God. Whether or not we have accepted God’s Word as true will be demonstrated by our actions. Abraham’s faith was authenticated by the fact that he chose the hard path, turning his back on his father’s religion in order to follow the LORD.

“‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”
(James 2:23)

Abraham was God’s friend because He believed God’s Word. This does not mean that Abraham always trusted God in every area of life. Judicially, God had declared him perfectly righteous, but in his everyday living, Abraham was less than perfect.

The Scriptures do not hide the sins and shortcomings of the prophets.

ISHMAEL

Abraham and Sarah lived in the land of Canaan as nomads, dwelling in tents, moving from place to place. Over time, Abraham grew extremely wealthy in livestock.

More than ten years had passed since God promised to make of Abraham a great nation. He was now eighty-six years old and his wife was seventy-six, and they still had no children. How could Abraham become a great nation if he had no offspring? Abraham and his wife decided to “help” God fulfill His promise.

Instead of waiting for the LORD to work out His plan in His time, they followed their common sense and the local culture. Sarah gave her Egyptian house girl Hagar to Abraham so he could sleep with her and have a child by her. Hagar bore Abraham a son whom they named *Ishmael*.

Thirteen years later, when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, Almighty God appeared to him and told him that Sarah his wife would have a son.

*“Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for **Ishmael**, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with **Isaac**, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.’”* (Genesis 17:17-21)

ISAAC

God kept His promise. Sarah, in her old age, bore to Abraham a son named *Isaac*.

“So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.” (Genesis 21:8-9)

Ishmael did not appreciate God’s plan to use Isaac to raise up a nation through which the LORD would communicate His truth and offer salvation to the world. Instead, Ishmael ridiculed his half-brother. Tensions increased to the point where Abraham

had to send Ishmael and Hagar away. This was an agonizing experience for Abraham, who loved his son Ishmael.

*“But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad [Ishmael] or because of your bondwoman [Hagar]... for **in Isaac** your seed shall be called. ... So God was with the lad [Ishmael]; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.’”*

(Genesis 21:12,20-21)

As the LORD promised, Ishmael became the father of a great people which God has blessed in many ways. Yet the LORD made it clear to Abraham that it would be “*in Isaac*” that He would fulfill His covenant to provide salvation for the world.

ISRAEL

Later, Isaac would marry and have twin sons, Esau and Jacob. God eventually gave Jacob a new name, telling him, “*Israel shall be your name.*” (Genesis 35:10) Jacob had twelve sons, the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, which in the time of Moses, God organized into a nation. The LORD called these descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *His chosen people*.¹⁸⁵

Why did He choose *them*? Were they better than the other nations? No, in fact God told the Israelites that they were “*the least of all peoples.*” (Deuteronomy 7:7) God chose these weak, despised Hebrew people so that no man could take the credit or praise for what He planned to accomplish.

This is how the LORD God delights to work.

*“God has chosen **the weak things** of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and **the base things** of the world and **the things which are despised** God has chosen, and **the things which are not**, to bring to nothing the things that are, **that no flesh should glory in His presence.**”* (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

A COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

God raised up this new nation as a channel through which He would communicate His message to the ends of the earth. God created this “channel of communication” long before the time of radio and television, but it would be no less effective. The mighty acts of the one true God in the midst of this nation would be heard throughout the world. For example, the Scripture records this testimony of a Canaanite woman: “***We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt... The LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.***” (Joshua 2:10-11)

Furthermore, it would be from this nation that God would select *the prophets* who would write *the Scriptures*.

Most importantly, it would be through this nation that God would provide a *Descendant* who would Himself be the channel of blessing to the world. As we already observed (in chapter 16), this Descendant was none other than *the promised Seed of the woman* who came down from heaven to be born of a poor Jewish maiden who was a virgin.

Whether we approve or not, this ancient nation was the communication channel established *by God* to transmit His truth and eternal blessings to every nation on earth. And it all began with the LORD telling Abraham to leave his father’s house and go to the land of Canaan.

God’s great covenant with Abraham had two major parts:

- 1) “*I will make you into a **great nation** and I will bless you...*”
- 2) “*And **all peoples on earth** will be blessed through you.*”

God’s love is not limited to one special group. He did not want to bless only Abraham or Israel. His heart of compassion yearns after “*all peoples on earth.*” The Old Testament abounds with stories of God using the small and stubborn nation of Israel to offer His grace to all nations and language groups on earth.¹⁸⁶ God’s purpose to bless all nations through this despised nation must be kept in mind whenever the Bible tells of the LORD protecting the Israelites from those who attempted to eradicate them. God was

defending them, *not because they were better* than other nations, but *because they were **the channel*** through which He determined to display His power and glory and provide salvation for the world. By protecting the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God was protecting His blessings for “*all peoples on earth.*”

What’s more, the LORD God’s reputation was at stake. He had sworn by His own great name to bless all nations through this weak and despised nation.¹⁸⁷

God would do precisely what He promised, for the honor of His name. Would we not do the same if our reputation, or the honor of our family, was at stake?

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM

Let us now return to the classic story of Abraham’s momentous sacrifice.

Here is the setting: Abraham was very old. Ishmael had been sent away many years earlier. Only Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, remained at home.

God was about to test Abraham’s faith to the extreme. The LORD God was also about to set before the world some patterns and prophecies about what He Himself planned to do to redeem the children of Adam from sin’s death sentence.

“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’

And he said, ‘Here I am.’

‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’” (Genesis 22:1-2)

God directed Abraham to travel to a specific mountain ridge and there to kill and burn his beloved son on an altar. What a dreadful request! This is something God had never before asked a man to do and would never again ask a man to do. Yet, because Isaac, like all descendants of Adam, had a sin debt, the sentence upon him was a just verdict: death.

“So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.”

(Genesis 22:3)

Abraham trusted God, but it was not easy. For three agonizing days Abraham, his son, and two servants journeyed, each step bringing them closer to the site of execution.

“On the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.’” (Genesis 22:4-5)

Abraham told the servants, *“We will come back to you.”*

How could both Abraham and his son *“come back”* if Isaac was to be killed and burned on an altar? Elsewhere the Scripture provides the answer. Since God had promised to make of Isaac a great nation, Abraham believed that once he had offered up his son, God would raise him back to life.¹⁸⁸ Abraham had learned that the LORD always keeps His promises!

GOD PROVIDES A SUBSTITUTE

“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together.” (Genesis 22:6)

As father and son walked up the mountain, Isaac said,

“My father!”

‘Here I am, my son.’

*Then 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.**’*

Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’

So he said, ‘Here I am.’

And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.’

Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns.” (Genesis 22:7-13a)

The LORD intervened. Abraham’s son was spared the death penalty.

Abraham turned around, and in the distance, on the same mountain ridge, he spotted movement in the undergrowth. What was it...? Could it be...? Yes! Praise God! An unblemished *“ram caught in a thicket by its horns!”*

In keeping with His own *“law of the sacrifice,”* God had provided a substitute.

*“So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering **instead of his son.**”* (Genesis 22:13b)



Why did Abraham's son escape the death sentence that hung over him? The ram had died in his place.

God had provided a substitute.

THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

*“And Abraham called the name of the place, **The–LORD–Will–Provide**; as it is said to this day, ‘**In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided.**’”* (Genesis 22:14)

Why, after Abraham had killed the ram in place of his son, did he name the site, *“The–LORD–Will–Provide”*?

Why did Abraham **not** name it, *The–LORD–Has–Provided*?

In saying, *“the LORD will provide,”* the prophet Abraham was announcing a future event that would take place nearly two thousand years later. For it would be on this same mountain ridge (where Jerusalem was later built) that the LORD would provide another sacrifice, not to deliver just one man from death, but to provide a full and final ransom for the whole world.

Do you recall what Abraham said to his son as they were plodding up the mountain where the sacrifice was to be offered? He told him,

“My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”

What was Abraham talking about? Had God provided a *lamb* to die in the place of Abraham's son? No, He did not provide a lamb. God had provided a *ram*. So what did the prophet Abraham mean when he spoke of God providing *“for Himself the lamb”*?

The amazing answer will soon emerge, but first a few more stories must be told.



Let's be honest. When it comes to spiritual truth, we are slow learners. God knows that.

*“In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the **elementary truths** of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!”*
(Hebrews 5:12 NIV)

Ouch!

Mercifully, God is the most patient of teachers, repeating and restating elementary truths we should have learned long ago. To help us out, He has included in His Book hundreds of stories which graphically illustrate one of the most important truths:

“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”
(Hebrews 9:22 NIV)

Forgiveness of sin has never been a simple matter for our perfectly holy Creator. From the day sin entered the world, God began to teach sinners that only the blood of a suitable sacrifice could atone for (cover) sin. That is how God, the Righteous Judge, would punish sin without punishing the sinner.