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Let's resume our study now in Genesis 22 via Isaiah chapter 7. And I'm sure I managed to muddle the issue there when I was describing the history, but the divided kingdom of Israel, you have the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. In the north, they are already under the influence of the surrounding nations, specifically Syria. So in chapter 7 verse 1, you have Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah.

He is king of Judah. He's king down in the south in Jerusalem. And you specifically have Judah and Benjamin as the two tribes down there.

You have Rezan, who is the king of Syria. He's over there in Damascus, probably, as his headquarters. And you have Pekah, who is the son of Ramaliah.

Ramaliah is notoriously evil, if you read the earlier accounts in Kings. Ramaliah was just viciously evil, and Pekah is the son of Ramaliah. He's king of the northern ten tribes.

So Pekah, the ten tribes in the north, they get together with the Syrians, and they're going to come down and conquer Judah. They're going to conquer Jerusalem. They're going to burn it with fire.

They're going to batter a hole in the wall and take it over and divide it up amongst themselves. And Pekah chooses to side with the enemy rather than his own brethren in the southern kingdom. So this is told in verse 2 to the house of David, saying, Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim.

Ephraim is like when you call the southern kingdom Judah. It's actually Judah and Benjamin. Ephraim, who was one of the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh.

Ephraim is often a synonym for the whole ten northern tribes, northern kingdom of Israel. So Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim. So his heart, this is the heart of Ahaz, his heart and the heart of his people were moved like the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.

It kind of puts us in mind of what the New Testament says, that you are blown about with every wind of doctrine. Well, this just completely destabilizes their thinking. They're terrified that they're going to be overrun.

You could imagine if in the days of the Civil War, you're living there south of the Mason-Dixon line and you find out that France and England have chimed together to join up with the north and here's all the British and the French troops. They've massed on the border along with the whole army of the Union and they're about to come across the Mason-Dixon line and invade your homeland. This is basically what's happening and you think, what chance do we have? It was bad enough when we were facing somebody that's five times bigger than we are to begin with, but now they've got outside help.

They've allied themselves with Syria. Syria's got this long list of conquests and devouring and brutality and vicious enslavement and slaughter and raping and pillaging and so forth. The Syrians were just notorious.

They were like the worst Mongol hordes you can think of. They think, what hope do we have with this tiny little kingdom down here in the south? We don't have an army anywhere near their size. So their hearts are being moved like the trees of the woods.

So into this crisis situation, God sends Isaiah. The Lord said to Isaiah, please go out now to meet Ahaz. Please go deliver this impossible word of deliverance that I'm about to give you.

I'm asking you to go put yourself on the line. Half the time people could say, I don't like the message of the messenger. I don't believe you and off with their heads and we'll make your family homestead a dung heap and burn it to the ground and so forth.

But God says to Isaiah, please go out now to meet Ahaz. This is our fifth occasion where God uses this language. And as he did over in Exodus with Moses, he's saying, please go to my people and deliver this message of impossible grace.

When it doesn't look like it can possibly happen, it's going to happen. So please go deliver this message. And it's a marker.

It links this to the other four occasions that we've seen before. He says, go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shir Yeshuv, your son. If you have a Bible with footnotes or anything there, it may tell you that Shir Yeshuv means a remnant shall return.

And if you go back to when Isaiah had this son and was told to name him and so forth, his son, Shir Yeshuv, is a walking, living symbol of God's promise. God says, you're going to go out into captivity, but a remnant shall return. Just like the promises to Abraham, your descendants are going to be like the stars of the heavens.

Look around you, all the land you see, I'm going to give you. I'm going to sacrifice Isaac. And yet God has promised that Isaac, through him and his seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

Moses telling Israel, there's going to be deliverance under the blood of the Passover lamb, and 400 years of bondage will end tonight. The impossible promise, the seemingly impossible outcome that God is going to bring about is in view. And even the name, the reason Isaiah is told to take his son, his son is a walking symbol.

Oh, who's this you have with you? This is my son. A remnant shall return. What do you mean a remnant shall return? It's the promise of God that even in the midst of defeat and even in the midst of judgment from God for disobedience and lack of faithfulness, there is a remnant that will be preserved.

No matter what is going on around you, if you're faithful to God, God will preserve you. And that preserved remnant will return. There's going to be ultimate deliverance.

There's going to be ultimate vindication. And even in this life, a lot of times living the life of faith and sticking to the principles that God has outlined for our lives and looking to gain the eternal fruit in our life often means that you're overlooked or you're set aside or you don't have maybe the monetary success or the social success or whatever other measure people use in this life. What is the consolation? God will honor those who honor him.

The Bible is replete with promises that if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness all these things will be added to us. Not necessarily in this life, but to live like Abraham did. You go to Hebrews chapter 11 where it says, Abraham dwelt in tents waiting for the city whose founder and builder is God.

Abraham purposely, you look at all the other old patriarchs, you go back to the early chapters of Genesis where they went and they established this city and that city and they built this town and that town and named it after their sons and so forth. Abraham, the patriarch of Israel, never built a city. Never built the city of Isaac.

Never built a place for himself to live. He dwelt in tents his whole life. Hebrews chapter 11 says he did that because he knew that God would build him a city with permanent and eternal foundations.

It was real to him and he lived his whole life in a mobile home. He lived his whole life itinerant. Never settling down on the land that God promised him.

Never establishing a city with foundations because he wanted the one that God promised. Well, here God is calling the remnant in Judah to believe that whatever happens in history, God will deliver. God will justify those who place their faith in Him.

Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and sheer Yeshuv, you and a remnant shall return, your son. At the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, and if you went with our study of the life of David in 1 and 2 Samuel, you remember the important events that have occurred at this aqueduct of the upper pool. I don't have time to review that, but it's fascinating to go back and see the other great events that have happened in this location.

Location, it's like the rule of real estate. You remember when they say, well, the first rule of real estate is, the first three rules are location, location, location. Every place that's mentioned in the word of God has significance.

Its name will be significant. Other things that have happened there will be significant. If you want an exercise and you don't remember from 2 Samuel, why go and check out this aqueduct of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field.

But go there, talk to Ahaz, and say to him, in verse 4, take heed and be quiet. Here's Ahaz and all the people blowing like trees in the wind, just quaking in their boots, afraid to death. He says, take heed, listen, be quiet.

You know how this is. People start talking, what shall we do? Maybe we can run down to Egypt. Maybe we can do this, that, and the other and get an ally.

He says, listen to what I'm saying. Be quiet. Do not fear.

Do not be fainthearted. These two stubs of smoking firebrands, God says, these are just little burning log ends here. These are little firebrands.

This is something you use to light a fire and then you throw it away. God is allowing them this brief moment of existence. But what do you use a firebrand for? You light a fire with it.

But the person who's lighting the fire is in control. And what happens to the firebrand after the fire's lit? It's tossed into the fire and it's consumed. And God says, these two nations that look so powerful and so overwhelming and you think that all is lost, they're just firebrands in my hands.

These two smoking stubs of firebrands, the fierce anger of Resin and Syria, the son of Ramaliah, don't be fainthearted. Don't fear them. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Ramaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, let us go up against Judah and trouble it.

Let us make a gap in its wall. God is giving voice and definition to all of these fears, all of this blowing in the wind. By the way, the answer, my friend, is not blowing in the wind.

That is not the answer contrary to Peter, Paul, and Mary. The answer is in the Word of God. Thus says the Lord God in verse 7, It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass.

The head of Syria is Damascus. The head of Damascus is Resin. Within 65 years, Ephraim will be broken so that it will not even be a people.

This seemingly all-powerful, all-omnipresent, omnipotent force will be gone in the space of a generation and a half. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Ramaliah's son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.

Now this is another strong link back to our passage in Genesis 22, as we'll see when we finish the chapter. Because God tells Abraham, because you have believed, you are established. Because you have obeyed my word, because you've acted in faith, all of these promises are confirmed.

So you might just make a note there to go back to Genesis chapter 22 and verse 16. Genesis 22, 16 is a strong link back here to verse 9. You either believe God or you don't. You either treat what he says as reality or you don't.

It either colors and affects everything that you do. It affects your priorities, your decisions, your actions. Is what I am doing pleasing in God's sight? Or we do it to please ourselves.

Is what I am doing to the best benefit of my economic, social, or professional future? Then look at verse 10 of Isaiah chapter 7. Moreover, the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God. Ask it either in the depth or in the height above. God's basically saying, anything you want to ask.

If you want me to make a volcano in the middle of the land and spew out some lava from the center of the earth, ask it. If you want to see a meteorite or a big sign in heaven, you want to see a big comet go by, ask it. Ask anything from the depth of the earth to the highest heaven as a sign and I will confirm that what I am telling you is true.

Boy, wouldn't I like to get this invitation from God. For God to say, ask a sign for yourself. God doesn't even wait for him to express doubt.

God knows he is going to be doubtful. Zacharias doubted and he struck mute for nine months. And God says, name any sign and I will confirm that the words I am speaking to you are true.

In 65 years, this whole northern confederation is going to be vaporized. It is going to be long gone. Ask anything.

Can you imagine? The God of the universe says, ask anything you want, I will do it. I would like to see Haley's comet pass within 60 miles of the earth. I want to see the thing go right by and do no damage.

I mean, anything you can think of. But look at this. This opportunity is wasted.

Because look at verse 12. Ahaz says, I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord. Ahaz weasels out.

So then he said, hear now, O house of David, is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? He wearies the remnant, the faithful who are trying to trust in God. He's wearying men on earth, but he's also wearying God in heaven with his lack of faith. He won't even seize on the promise of God.

He won't even believe that God will do a sign, much less that God will deliver. He says, oh no. He doesn't think it would happen.

He thinks, well, I'll ask for a sign and it won't happen. And then I'm going to be even more fearful. So he says, I'm not going to test the Lord my God.

I don't want to see a sign. So look at verse 14. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel. Emmanuel is God with us. Curds and honey he shall eat that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.

For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. Pica and resin are going to be off the face of the earth from the time that this child is born. And this is a literal child from a literal young woman.

Batula is the word in Hebrew. This, of course, we know the relationship that this has to the birth of Jesus Christ as a fulfillment of prophecy. But this is one of those resonant prophecies.

This is a sign to Ahaz. This is something Ahaz is going to see. God says, ask any sign you want that what I say is going to come to pass.

Ahaz says, I don't want to ask for anything. So Isaiah says, look, God's going to give you a sign. There's going to be a virgin, and this is a woman right there in the vicinity.

They're going to see this woman give birth to a son. He's going to be called Emmanuel. And before he reaches the age of accountability, before he is responsible for refusing the evil and choosing the good, this means he's only going to be, what, five, six, seven years old.

Within that span of time, before this child can even be mature enough to be held accountable for right and wrong, these two kings are going to be out of the picture, God says. So we know that this has an immediate fulfillment. Ahaz doesn't have to wait for the birth of Christ to find out whether or not Pekah and Reznor are going to be around.

The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house, days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah. It shall come to pass in that day the Lord will whistle for the fly that is farthest part of the rivers of Egypt, the bee that is in the land of Assyria. They will come.

They will rest in the desolate valleys and so forth. Verse 20, in that same day the Lord will shave with a hired razor with those from beyond the river and so forth. And it goes on.

And this prophecy goes on all the way through chapter 8, but basically what God says is God is going to deliver you and you're going to see it within the space of six or seven years. And the sign is going to be that this child is going to be born. But this sign that God speaks of through Isaiah has overtones and it's a resonant prophecy.

And in terms of the immediate deliverance of Israel, of Judah specifically, from their oppressors here, this is going to be an immediate sign. But in a larger sense, deliverance

of the people of God overall is going to come through Emmanuel who is going to be born of a virgin and so forth. There's a lot you could say about this passage.

But isn't it interesting that all of this, look to the future, trust in the promise of God, believe that when God speaks the impossible, he is the God of the impossible. That it's what you believe and who you believe in that counts, not what you see in circumstances. And that sooner or later, push comes to shove, and we have to choose between the invisible reality of God's promise and the seeming reality of what we see in the world around us.

And that's why this fifth and final time in the Old Testament, this language is used by God to speak to Isaiah and say, go deliver this word. In the same way that God used it with Moses, and it included all of the information about Passover and the deliverance of God out of the bondage in Egypt, here is another word of deliverance. And God says, please go speak this word in the hearing of the people.

The idea is, present this to them. I fervently want them to hear this, to believe it, to trust in it, and in so doing, to be in the people of God and to glorify God. So it's fascinating that we have this language used in Genesis chapter 22, actually in Genesis three times with Abraham, the third time here in Genesis 22.

And in both this last episode with Abraham and the last episode in the Old Testament, you have the promise of a son. And this son is going to be the vehicle or the means of God's deliverance or the means of God's blessing on his people. So I didn't want to pass by chapter 22 without pointing that out.

In chapter 22, verse 2, when he says, please take now your son, it doesn't even show up in most English translations, but it should be take, I beseech you, or take, I beg you, or please take. And it's a marker that this is something very important and it's going to require faith in the impossible. Abraham rose early in the morning.

We've been through the details of the journey, the three-day journey. And on the third day, he sees the mountain afar off. He says to the young men in verse 5, stay here with the donkey.

The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you. And the author of Hebrews, as we've seen, states that Abraham believed that the God who had given him this son to begin with was able to raise him up if he should sacrifice him. This, once again, is powerful evidence of Abraham's faith.

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. We're reminded of Christ who also, in a sense, bore the wood of the sacrifice on his back. John, in particular, makes note of the fact during the Via Dolorosa that Jesus carried his cross on his back.

He took the fire in his hand and a knife, and the two of them went together. This knife, by the way, is also interesting. The word for knife here is only used two other places in the Old Testament.

And the primary parallel is in Judges chapter 19 and verse 29. We were in Judges 19 not long ago when we were looking at Sodom and the visit of the angels in Sodom and how the Sodomites were all around the house wanting to get the two angels and have their way with them and so forth. Lot went out and tried to plead with them.

They had to yank him back inside so that he wasn't torn apart by the crowd. Lot at one point offers his daughters in lieu of the visitors and says, Take my daughters and have your way with them. We thought, Gosh, what an awful thing to say.

We went over to Judges 19 and we saw the traveler who's passing through and winds up in Gibeah of Benjamin. And his concubine, he stays with a fellow tribesman in Gibeah. They're both sojourners.

They're just as Lot is a sojourner in Sodom. And the crowd comes out and they want this traveler. They want the man who's hosting to put the traveler out there so they can have their way with him.

And the man comes out and says, No, take the concubine. And they actually do take the concubine out and the people have their way with her all night and it kills her. She dies on the doorstep of the host and they find her there the next morning.

So the man then takes a knife and chops her into 12 pieces and sends the pieces, one to each tribe in Israel. And they gather together to go fight the Benjamites and revenge the death of this concubine. And the whole thing, we went through it in detail when we were back in the earlier chapter of Genesis.

But anyway, the knife that the man uses to cut the concubine into 12 pieces, this rare word for knife is used in that chapter. And it reminds us of the violence that is represented by this knife. It's not a small thing that Abraham is going to have to use this knife on his son.

And it's a reminder of that used over in Judges 19.29. You also find the word over in Proverbs 30.14. It's used twice in this passage. Abraham takes the knife, he takes the fire in his hand, and then you have Isaac speaking up, my father, and he says, Here I am, my son. He said, Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham said, My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

And it has been pointed out, it's quite interesting here, that Isaac's question in Hebrew only takes six words, beginning with my father. Abraham's response in Hebrew takes only six words, and it ends with my son. And you have here encapsulated a wonderful

picture of the love and the faith that are involved, the love between father and son, the faith not only of Abraham but also of Isaac.

Isaac is satisfied with the explanation that Abraham gives. And he asks no more questions. He says, I'm not taking another step until I find out what's going on with this sacrifice.

He's obviously old enough to carry wood. He's not a babe. He's not unwilling to go with his father.

They come together to the place of which God had told him. Abraham builds the altar, puts the wood in order. Then he bound Isaac, his son.

This is the only place in the whole Old Testament where this word is used. And the word itself, Akeda, in Jewish scholarship, in Jewish literature, came to be used as the title for this whole passage, literally the binding or binding, Akeda. 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. And that's the second use of that word for knife. And literally, in Hebrew, it says Abraham sent out his hand.

He reached forth his hand. We saw last time that this implies, creates some dramatic intensity here because in most passages, if you say someone looked up and saw or someone reached out and took, that expansion. Why doesn't it just say he saw or he took? But it says he lifted up his eyes and saw or he reached out his hand and took.

It slows down and dramatically intensifies what it is that's about to take place. And here, you almost get a slow motion view and a very detailed view of Isaac bound on the altar, laying on the same wood that he carried up there himself. You have Abraham in what had to be the most powerful moment of his life, emotionally, stretching forth his hand.

Literally, in Hebrew, it says he sent forth his hand to slay his son. But, and then in verse 11, the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham. It's very interesting to me that you have the doubling of Abraham's name here because you have some other parallel accounts in Scripture where the doubling of a name is used at a high point in what's going on.

You have, for example, God saying, Moses, Moses, in Exodus chapter 3. Remember the burning bush episode? He calls out two times and then he says, put off your shoes from off your feet. The place whereon you stand is holy ground. You have God calling twice to Samuel.

Remember Eli, and Samuel comes in and says, Eli, did you call me? And he says, no, and he finally figures out it's the Lord. And God calls out Samuel's name twice in 1 Samuel

chapter 3 and verse 4. And then you remember Saul on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul. There's a big bolt of lightning and thunder and so forth.

And then the Lord Jesus Christ calls out and says, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? So this doubling of the name often signifies that something of great import is about to take place. And this doubling of Abraham's name is thus especially significant. He says, 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. The fascinating thing about this statement in verse 12 is we know that God is omniscient. God already knows the level of Abraham's faith before this demonstration, doesn't he? God knew that Abraham would make it this far.

And that left to himself, he would have completed the sacrifice. So why does he say, now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me? As though God really didn't know for sure until Abraham actually got to the point of doing the act. There are a couple of different observations you can make here.

First of all, a lot of times God says, so that I will know, but it's really so that we will know. You can think back to the rainbow. God says, I put my bow in the cloud so that I will be reminded of the promise that I have made to never again destroy the earth by a flood.

Well, who sees the rainbow? Does God really need a string around his finger to remember not to destroy us with a flood? It impresses us, or should, when we look at the rainbow that God has promised and that God remembers his promise. God says, I put my bow in the cloud to remind me not to destroy you with a flood, in so many words. But really, it's a reminder to us.

You have the blood on the doorposts, as we saw over in Exodus. And God says, when I see the blood, I will pass over your house. I won't destroy the firstborn in that house.

Well, does God really need to see the blood or not see the blood to know who is faithful and who is not? Who believes him and who doesn't? Who is an Israelite and who is an Egyptian? God knows all of those things already. What's the deal with the blood? It's the people who apply the blood in confidence that God will see it and that God will acknowledge it. It's our perspective of what God sees and what God remembers that is the issue with the rainbow and with the blood.

And here, for Abraham and for all of us who look at Abraham, it would be one thing if God says, you know, Abraham was really a man of great faith. Abraham would have given his own son for me if God just said that. But it's something else to see it demonstrated.

Abraham now knows the strength of his own faith and the strength of God's sustaining grace that enables him to make the application of the promises of God and to actually

act in the light of it. And we need practice in our faith. It is not only knowing the truth of God, but living in the light of it and actually making the decisions.

It's like they say, you know, it's one thing to look at a coil of rope at the base of a tree up on a high mountaintop and say, you know, this rope, that's an 800-pound test. 800 pounds of weight won't break that rope. You look at the rope and you say, yeah, it looks like a brand spanking new nylon rope.

I believe it's nice and thick. Look at the way they braided that thing. I believe that could hold at least 800 pounds, probably more.

That would probably hold a half a ton. And then somebody says, well, tie that around your waist and just dangle off of this cliff over here. And let's just put that to the test.

These guys, you know, I work on the 19th floor of a skyscraper in downtown Dallas. These guys that wash the windows, they got a little pulley and ropes that come down. And our guys don't use the little platform that raises and lowers.

They have a seat and they have a main rope and then I think they have a little safety rope. But they swing out there in the breeze and they go from side to side with a little window wiper thing and they splash the water on and they're dangling up there. And it's a long, long ways down to some mighty thick solid concrete down there in the bottom.

And I don't care how many times you tell me how strong that rope is, for me to go over the edge and stake my life on that rope that there's not a single inch of it that has a bad spot, that the machine didn't fail or I got a new shirt the other day and in the process of it being ironed, we noticed that there was a flaw in the fabric where a piece of plastic had fallen down into the loom that was weaving the cloth and this piece of plastic was actually woven right in and it was right on the collar where it shows. And trying to separate the threads and pick that out of there was a trick. But, you know, things happen in manufacturing and all of these doubts are going to go through your mind.

You think, oh, well, you know, they say I'm sure most of the rope is 800-pound test, but it only takes one quarter of an inch for it not to be 800-pound test and they're going to be scraping me up with a putty knife. So for Abraham to actually live out the truth and the reality of the unseen promise of God in this way, it's not so much that God says, well, now I know for sure that your faith is real. Now Abraham knows for sure that his faith is real.

Now all of the descendants of Abraham who read the account of their father, all of us who are children of Abraham by faith know the power of faith and know the power of the promise of God to be our reality. None of us are called on to live out our faith to this level. Very seldom do we die for our faith, are we martyred for our faith, or do we have to sacrifice everything in our future.

And even then we know that it's only this life, it's only circumstances, it's the short term where there may be a sacrifice or a loss involved if the future is real, if the promise of God is real. But when God says, now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me, it's really Abraham who knows and it's Abraham's descendants who know and it's we who know the power of faith, the power of the promise of God, the power of the grace of God to sustain us. And we think how little we are called on, what small sacrifices we ever have to make in this life to live in a way that pleases God.

And yet sometimes they can loom so large. But then in verse 13, Abraham lifted his eyes and looked and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. Our scripture reading this morning, we looked at the role of the double ram offering and the consecration of Aaron's sons and Aaron himself as priests.

Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for burnt offering instead of his son. And there are so many things going on here, it's difficult to do it all justice, but we have first of all the idea of substitution, which is also found in the Passover that we read about over in Exodus, where the blood on the doorposts that Passover lamb gave its life and its blood stands in the stead of the firstborn. And it was a perpetual statute in Israel that the firstborn in every family had to be redeemed.

An animal was offered because the firstborn belongs to God. That's the principle. The firstborn belongs to God.

And if you want to keep your firstborn, then you have to redeem him. Something has to be put in his place because he belongs to God, just like all the firstfruits of the land. And so it was a requirement of the law of Moses that the firstborn be redeemed.

And you can look that up and read about it. There had to be an offering made and a substitution. And this is what happens with the sake of Isaac.

And Abraham here is impressed with and believes and understands the fact that Isaac belongs to God. It's really God's plan that is in view. We tend to think, oh, Abraham's putting his whole future on the line here.

This is the future of the plan of God. God says, I will bless all of the nations of the world. I will glorify myself in you and in your descendants.

I will glorify myself by giving you a land and a perpetual heritage and descendants as innumerable as the stars in the sand. We tend to look at it from our human perspective and say, well, this is my future. This is my life.

This is my... But it all belongs to God. And that's the ultimate demonstration of it here. Isaac belongs to God, not to Abraham.

And at the last moment, God says, I see your faith and will redeem Isaac. And there will be a substitution. And God provides the ram.

Interestingly, when the question was asked earlier, Isaac says, we've got the wood and the fire, where's the sheep? It's a different word. Etzel is the word for sheep in Hebrew. And that's the word that Isaac uses.

And Abraham says, God will provide himself an etzel. When you get here, this is not an etzel. This is an ayil.

This is a ram. What is the difference in a sheep and a ram? When you think about the sacrifices in Israel, the Passover is not done with a ram. It's done with a lamb.

Why does God sometimes specify a lamb and other times a ram? What is the significance? There's a lot you can say about that. But one of the primary things to remember is, as we saw over in Leviticus chapter 9, and you can also see this in Exodus chapter 29, the ram represents consecration, dedication. Because the ram is mature.

You have a contrast. A lamb, when you have the idea of a lamb, it's young, it's innocent. You have the idea of innocence and guiltlessness.

It hasn't lived long enough to go out and do bad things. Your ram may have butted his way through the fence or done a lot of other things. He's been around for a while.

A mature ram is three years old. And so the idea of the lamb is more innocence. And to sacrifice a lamb, you have to believe that you're putting your future on the line, so to speak, because he hasn't grown up.

You haven't gotten new offspring in the flock because the lamb is the best of the flock and you're sacrificing him right away. The ram you've had for a while. He may have been out there and he may have sired some sheep and so forth.

But the ram is maturity and strength. And in one sense, you have Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world. But here, as the substitute, it's not a lamb that is up there at the top of the mountain.

It is a ram. And the ram, even the way that Abraham finds it, you would think, well, if the idea is a voluntary substitution, a voluntary offering of oneself as Jesus did, why isn't the ram just standing there? And Abraham walks up to it and leads it over to the altar and slaughters it and gives a whole burnt offering. Why does the ram have to be caught in a thicket? What does that say about Jesus Christ? Well, one thing it says is the same thing Jesus says in the garden.

Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. And the ram is caught in the thicket.

How do you get your horns caught in a thicket? Well, the ram, he's a symbol of strength. He pushed his way into that thicket. He's got those curly horns, and he pushed in there.

He's strong. He's mature. And he's a symbol of strength.

And Jesus Christ is the strength of God. It's like your mature firstborn son. That's your future and your strength.

And yet that is what is offered by way of consecration to God. I dedicate everything to God. So it's a ram and not a lamb.

The other thing that's interesting here is that this ram is offered up for a burnt offering instead of his son. Why didn't God just let Abraham sacrifice Isaac and raise him from the dead like Abraham figured he must have to do? Why didn't God just go ahead and do that? God could have done anything he wanted. That could have been the first resurrection in the Bible.

Why didn't He let him go ahead and do it? And of course, it doesn't exactly spell this out in the passage, but I believe that the point here is substitution because Isaac is, after all, a human son of Abraham, and God makes provision. God does provide Himself a sacrifice. It's not by putting our all on the altar, as the hymn says, that we are saved.

God provides the ram. And there isn't any sacrifice we can make that's going to provide for our salvation. There isn't any sacrifice that we can make in our own strength that's going to please God.

It's the faith behind the sacrifice that counts. And once Abraham has demonstrated that faith, God then demonstrates that His grace goes more than halfway toward us. Abraham doesn't have to actually draw the knife across his son's throat.

God provides the ram, and God will ultimately provide His own son as our sacrifice. And so Abraham offers this ram up instead of his son. Very interesting as well.

We don't have time to look at it, but if you go over to Exodus chapter 29, you look at Leviticus chapter 8 and 9, the priests, you remember, they were to eat and partake of the flesh of this ram of consecration, this ram of sanctification. And when you think about the Christological overtones, the symbolism that the ram involves with reference to Christ, and you think about the Lord's table and the Lord's supper, partaking of the bread and the cup, Jesus says, this is my body which is broken for you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Take and consume this. The sacrifice that sanctifies us, the sacrifice that cleanses us and consecrates us to God, in the same way that the priests partook of that, they ate of the flesh of the ram, we symbolically in the Lord's table partake of that sacrifice. This is my body which is broken.

This is the new covenant in my blood. And it's a fascinating link that God has made between those things because you have to be identified with, you have to essentially be one with the sacrifice. It is a substitution.

It is a standing in for. And even the act of partaking is an act of faith that this sacrifice is pleasing in God's sight, that this sacrifice has done everything God said it would do and that you now have standing before God. What would happen to an unqualified priest who came into the presence of God? He would be incinerated.

Look at what happened to those who rebelled, Korah, Dathan, and Abihu and that crowd. They were consumed. The earth swallowed them up.

There were those who were consumed with fire. There were those who were bitten with serpents that God was unhappy with. If you as a priest go in there and you're not, you have to have faith that the sacrifice is efficacious.

And this sacrifice that they offer and consume, they have to believe that that has qualified them to stand before God as priests and worship. We have to believe the same thing. We have to believe that we are cleansed, that we are pure, that God has separated our sins as far as the east is from the west.

And it is an act of dedication. By partaking, we say, we are not our own. We are bought with a price.

We are going to glorify God in our bodies. We have partaken of the sacrifice that consecrates us, that cleanses us, that dedicates us to God. And we'll stake our lives on it.

We'll stake our future on it. We will live in the light of the reality of God's promise, no matter what. So the angel, actually after he offers up his son, in verse 14, Abraham called the name of the place, the Lord will provide.

This comes over, you've heard people in English say, Jehovah Jireh or Yahweh Yireh. As it is said to this day, in the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. And of course, this is a great foreshadowing of what God will provide in Christ.

It's also interesting because up in verse 12, it said, now I know that you fear God. And the word for fear there is Yireh, in Hebrew. When it says, God will provide, it's Yahweh Yireh.

They're words that sound the same, but have a different meaning. When you speak them, they sound exactly the same. And so there's a tie between fearing God and God providing.

They're linked. And if we fear God, if we trust in Him, if we take what He says as reality, God provides. They're linked, even in this word play.

In the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. And this is what all of our life boils down to. We either nod to God, we either give Him passing as believers, we give Him passing reference, we give Him His due at certain times and in certain sort of safe ways, or we throw ourselves totally on His provision and on the reality of His promises.

And we say, I'll stake my life on this. I'll stake my future on this. I believe what God has said and that He will accomplish it.

And that level of faith, that level of commitment in our souls is going to determine the extent of our obedience and the extent of the glory of God that we reflect in this life. So all of these things are wrapped up in this. And then in verse 15, the angel of the Lord is going to call to Abraham a second time and speak.

And this speech and the interesting little segment, verses 20 through 24, of Abraham's relatives, this is where we will pick up next time. We'll see some fascinating things here. The one thing I will direct to your attention by way of anticipation is in verse 16 when the angel of the Lord speaks and he says, and he's speaking on behalf of God, By myself I have sworn, says the Lord.

In all the previous iterations of the promise, this is the first time God takes an oath to confirm the promise. And He swears by Himself because there isn't anything greater He can swear by. He doesn't say, By heaven I'll do this.

He's literally saying, By God I will do this. He's saying He swears by Himself. Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, blessing I will bless you.

Multiplying I will multiply. And all the people that try to say the promises to Abraham are unconditional need to contend with this passage because God says, Because you have demonstrated your faith, these things are going to take place. The promises of God are to the faithful.

They're conditioned on our faith. Even though you're a believer, if you don't live the life of faith, you're not going to inherit the promises of God. We are heirs of God according to promise.

And the promise says, If you place your trust in God, if you honor God and put Him first, God will honor you and God will put you first. Even though you may be the least, you will be the greatest. Even though you're born second, you're going to inherit the firstborn's blessings and the firstborn's rights.

God will honor those who honor Him. It's real, but it takes a step of faith. And a lot of us just don't ever step up to the plate and swing that bat.

God's pitching and we're not swinging. And it takes an act of faith. It is a requirement to inherit the things of God and to fulfill the calling of God to believe what He says and to

treat it as reality.

And that's the challenge on our lives as we close in prayer this morning. We thank you, Father, for the privilege of studying your word. We thank you even more for the privilege of occupying this place at this time in your plan.

And we pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will make these things real to us so that we can seize and lay hold of your promises by faith and fulfill the calling that you have placed on our lives. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.