



"A certain amount of opposition is a great help to a person. Kites rise against, not with the wind."
—John Neal

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How Expensive Is Your Religion? (Part Two)

We all have stories of people we know or have known who experienced separation from friends and family due to their beliefs. Perhaps that is our own story. From start to finish, the Bible is full of such stories too.

Beginning in Genesis, [God](#) has called on His people to choose Him over family. Sometimes, the story is that their sins separated them from God and family. A brief survey of just the book of Genesis shows God's people making sacrifices, indicating how expensive their religion was.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sinned, and God evicted them from the Garden of Eden. Though He sent them away, He did not abandon them. Nonetheless, their [sin](#) changed the relationship.

Their firstborn, Cain, murdered his brother, Abel, and was sent into exile (Genesis 4). Adam and Eve lost two sons *and* a daughter here. God "respected" Abel's offering (verse 4), suggesting that Abel was striving to live a godly life, unlike Cain, whose jealousy drove him to kill his godly brother. Abel's religion was very expensive. His was the ultimate sacrifice.

Sometime later, "Enoch walked with God" ([Genesis 5:24](#)). Jewish tradition says that he was killed by Lamech ([Genesis 4:23-24](#)). Did Enoch's preaching upset Lamech to the point that he ended up killing him? Possibly. Did Enoch count the cost and know that he could die? Perhaps. Enoch probably knew his beliefs upset his family, yet he did not look back from the "plow" ([Luke 9:62](#)). He did not deliberately antagonize Lamech or his family; his righteous example may simply have bothered them, just as Abel's bothered Cain. All the same, this man paid a high price for his religion.

How many millions or billions were lost in the Flood? Scripture says that Noah was 600 years old then. After all those years, did he have only the three sons mentioned in the Bible? Could he and his wife have left other children behind? In [Genesis 7:1](#), "The LORD said to Noah, come into the ark, you and all your household." He could have had older children who were out on their own, and they surely left aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews behind to die.

Did Noah receive death threats in the hundred years it took to build the ark? [II Peter 2:5](#) calls him a "preacher of righteousness." How much persecution did he and his family endure? If [the world](#) was so evil and violent that God was forced to destroy it, then he and his family probably faced death many times. When God called him, did Noah realize how hard it would be? He must have come to see this as time went on, yet he did not look back.

A medieval French rabbi, Salomon Isaacides, had an interesting take on Noah. He felt that God stretched the building of the ark over such a long time so that people could [repent](#). God is indeed [merciful](#), but Isaacides goes further. In [Genesis 5:29](#), Noah's father names him, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed." Because of this, Rabbi Isaacides believed that after the Flood Noah ushered in a new era of prosperity: that there was an easing of "the curse of Adam and Eve when the earth produces thorns and thistles where men sowed wheat and that Noah then introduced the plow." This plow, both physical and metaphorical, he did not look back from.

In Genesis 11 appears the Tower of Babel. God was probably working with a few people during that time. Think about how tough it must have been for

them, swimming against the tide, only to have even more separation when God confused the language. They would have sought out those speaking a like language, which may have meant packing up and moving, as [Genesis 11:9](#) says, ". . . from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth." After that, they would have to seek any of like mind. Their devotion to God proved expensive.

In [Genesis 12:1](#), the story of Abraham begins: "Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.'" At this point, Abram was a man in his seventies, well established in his city with many relatives and friends, yet God tells him to leave—without bothering to tell him where he is going. He says only that He would "show" him. "So Abram departed . . ." ([Genesis 12:4](#)). He packed up his family and possessions and off they went. His religion was worth leaving behind all that he had grown up with, all that he was comfortable with—really, his entire life to that point. It might have been even harder on Sarai, his wife, as women tend to be closer to home and family than men are.

There would be more separation for Abraham as time went on. In [Genesis 13:9](#), after reaching Canaan, he realized that he and his nephew, Lot, had too much livestock between them. So, he said to Lot, "Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me."

Later, he has to send Hagar and Ishmael away. How hard was that? He and Hagar may not have had a truly loving relationship, but they certainly shared the bond of a son, Ishmael—his *first* son! How does a person send away his son with nothing more than some bread and water? But that is what happened: "So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba" ([Genesis 21:14](#)). Hagar had to be a bit confused. She had likely thought that by having Abraham's baby, she had it made, but suddenly, she finds herself wandering the wilderness, with her son—now about sixteen—in tow, and little to show for her efforts.

Verse 11 records matter-of-factly that "the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son." As some translations have it, it

"grieved" him to send his son away. "But God said to Abraham, 'Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice, for in [Isaac](#) your seed shall be called'" ([Genesis 21:12](#)). It would help all of us if, at some point in our trials, God would speak to us and reassure us. But even though God spoke directly to Abraham, he still had to send his son away. Heartbreaking and expensive! We often compare the sacrifice of Isaac to that of [Christ](#) and rightly so, but we often skip over his sending Ishmael away, which does a disservice to Abraham.

About twenty years later, he must go through all this again with Isaac (Genesis 22). Think of the commitment involved, that a man would be willing to sacrifice his son! As we learned in Part One, *expensive* means "involving a high price or sacrifice." Abraham's willingness to obey God at the expense of his beloved son certainly fits this definition.

In Part Three, we will continue our survey of people in Genesis who paid dearly for their beliefs.

- Mike Ford

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Life, Fortunes, Sacred Honor](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Like the signers of the Declaration of Independence, we are on the cutting edge of a tumultuous period, the greatest revolution that will ever take place on earth, when peace and prosperity will come about without war. Like the signers of the Declaration, we must also pledge our lives, fortunes, and sacred honor, breaking secure ties if necessary (Luke 14:33). Many of the Declaration's signers, men of wealth and means, literally lost their fortunes, properties, and health—even their lives—receiving not one cent of compensation. Are we willing to commit and prepare ourselves as thoroughly as these patriots did?

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What is Your Bowl of Lentil Stew?](#)

by Staff

Everyone knows the story of Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew, but what does it mean to us? This article shows that each of us has the potential to do just as Esau did—each of us has a bowl of lentil stew!

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