

## Abraham's Sacrifice (Part Five): Promises Confirmed

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You know, we hear promises all the time. People make them to us probably more than you realize. They are everywhere in this culture in the form of warranties, guarantees, advertisements, contracts, and assurances from others. "We will replace parts in your car's powertrain if any of them should fail within the first 100,000 miles." "The company guarantees your satisfaction or your money back." "This amazing product will erase your wrinkles within six weeks." "If our gizmo fails to satisfy you in any way, just send it back for a full refund. No questions asked." "If you display our yard sign in your yard for two months, we will take ten percent off your bill." "Sure bud, I'll bring your chain saw back next Friday. No worries." And let us not forget: "We have been trying to reach you about your extended warranty."

Promises are ubiquitous in our culture. One can even say that much of our society is built on promises. Promises to pay, promises to build, promises to ensure, promises to repair or replace, promises to attend, promises to support, promises to work. I think we get the gist of what I am saying. They are such a common facet of life that we probably do not give them much thought. We do not even think of them as promises, but they are. We certainly expect people and businesses or other entities like the government to follow through and provide what they promised.

When somebody tells you something to your face—that they are going to give you this or do this for you in exchange for that—you expect them to follow through on what they have said. When the transmission goes out at 35,000 miles, we expect it to be repaired or replaced free of charge because that is what the warranty says. When the dry cleaner says that your suits or dresses will be available for pickup at three pm on Thursday, when we arrive at three pm on Thursday we expect them to be there and handed over to us. When the contractor promises to have his work finished by a specific date, we hold him to it. When a friend promises to meet you at a certain place at a

certain time, we are inclined to react somewhere along the spectrum of irritated to furious when he or she does not show up.

Promises, whether kept or broken, reflect on the promiser. We get a gauge of that person's trustworthiness by how well he follows through on his promises. Is he reliable? Does he stand by his promises, or is he a liar and irresponsible, or is he a cheat and a crook? Is his word his bond? That used to be a valued trait in this country. Many a big deal was a handshake and a promise and great things were built. Or does the other person make promises so often and so easily that he could never keep them all even if he tried. But he makes these promises, says he will do all these things to give himself an advantage of one sort or another. Because he is slick. He is trying to work all the angles. Does the other person promise the world and provide almost nothing in the end?

Now, this character issue that I am talking about here in terms of following through on promises, comes to a head when we include God in the discussion. In fact, His very divinity is at stake. If He makes a promise and fails to fulfill it, He immediately becomes untrustworthy and a liar. We can no longer have faith in a God who tells us falsehoods and will not back up His words with the promised action, or the promised blessing or whatever it is that is under discussion. Suddenly God becomes fickle. He is inconsistent. He is capricious. You cannot know what He will do at any point. He might just suddenly get so upset at all of us down here that He just wipes us off the earth. One cannot trust a God with feet of clay, with a character flaw.

Now, critical scholars and atheists like to tell the world that this is exactly how the God of the Bible is. They tell us all kinds of things in their papers and their commentaries. That He cannot be trusted because He is so different from one testament to the other or even from one book to the other. And they say this is pretty much proof that all of this was made up by human beings way back when. We are just following a bunch of Jews that wrote these things down 3,500 years ago and we are just all being duped. It is a great piece of literature, but you cannot trust it at all because in the Old Testament, they say, He is capricious, He is vindictive, He is violent, He is a stern lawgiver and all too human. He is like the gods of Greece and Rome. And in

the New Testament, they claim He is meek and mild, He is loving and gracious, forgiving. Not the same God at all. These are just figments of a human imagination, and so, not worthy of worship.

They are certainly not going to worship Him because they do not believe that He is who He says He is. They cannot reconcile His actions in the Old Testament with what He does and says in the New. And they often bring God's promises into the discussion because God does not keep all His promises.

Shocking, is it not? It is true though, but it becomes a non-issue when we understand that there are two kinds of promises—the conditional and the unconditional. *Conditional* promises are fulfilled only when the other party fulfills the stipulations of the promise. But on the other hand, God keeps His *unconditional* promises no matter what. It does not matter what the other party does. If He gives an unconditional promise, He fulfills it. Critical scholars and the atheists fail to make this very critical distinction and bad mouth Him to the world as untrustworthy because they see that He did not do certain things that He said in parts of the Bible that He said He would.

Let us look at this distinction with a couple of examples from the Old Testament starting in I Chronicles 17. We are going to read a short passage, verses 7 through 15. This is at the time when David had decided that God needed a house. David had built his own house and he says, "Why am I here living in this nice house, my palace, and God lives in a tent?"

**I Chronicles 17:7-15** [God is speaking to Nathan] "Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, "Thus says the Lord of hosts:" I took you from the sheepfold, and from following the sheep, that you should be ruler over My people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a name like the name of the great men who are on the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel. Also I will subdue all your enemies. Furthermore I tell you that the Lord will

build you a house. And it shall be, when your days are fulfilled, when you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My mercy away from him, as I took it from him who was before you [speaking of Saul]. And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever."'" According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.

So God sends Nathan the prophet to reply to David's desire to build Him—God—a house, and He rejected it. We know why; David was a bloody man, He said. He was a man of blood, a warrior who killed many people on the battlefield. And so God said, "I'll let your son build Me a house. He'll be a man of peace" (which is essentially what the word Solomon means). Instead, God says that He would build a house for David, meaning, not necessarily a palace for David to live in, but a house as in a dynasty. There would be a Davidic family, a Davidic line, and He says here, it will be forever. It will never end. There will be son, after son, after son. You will find in another place that there will always be a throne upon which a son of David, a scion of David sits. He says there that it is a "throne that shall be established forever." When God says that He means it! And that is what He has done.

In Jeremiah 33:17, God reaffirms that David's throne will rule Israel forever. He says there, "For thus says the Lord: 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.'"

Let us go to Psalm 89. We will get another confirmation. I want to go to this one directly. He says,

**Psalm 89:34-37** "My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky."

And he tells us to think about that—selah, pause, meditate, consider.

So we see here in these terms, He makes it very clear that He is not the lying type of Person who will promise and not deliver. He is going to give David all these things because the promise, the covenant, He made with David was utterly *unconditional*. He said, "I'm going to give it to you. You don't have to worry about that." To this time in history, and we can in faith look into the future and say that He has fulfilled that promise. We can see the Davidic line coming through various nations. We currently believe that it is in the nation of Britain right now—the royal family there are descendants of David. And soon, hopefully very soon, the great Scion of that line will come and take over the throne and rule forever—Jesus Christ.

Now, let us go further back into the Old Testament to the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 28. This is the chapter we call the blessings and curses. The ones we are going to read, the blessings, are kind of the counterpart to Leviticus 26, where there is a similar listing of such things.

**Deuteronomy 28:1-9** "Now I shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God:

Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways."

So God makes another promise, or actually a set of promises. There are many good promises there to the people of Israel as they are about to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. This is what awaits you, Israel. You are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I am going to give you all of these things. He promises them wonderful health and prosperity, fertility, safety, and blessings in everything that they set their hand to. And He promises to make them a holy nation, a separate nation. People that people would regard as different and better.

But did you catch the catch, the condition? He mentions it at least twice in this passage, probably three times. But He mentions that most important two letter word "if." This is an example of a *conditional* promise. He says, "If you keep the commandments of the Lord your God," "if you obey the voice of the Lord your God." God says, "Hey Israel, I am willing to do all this for you. I'll give you great crops. You'll live to be 105," or what have you. It does not specify, but with good health you will probably live quite a long time. "I'll fight your enemies for you. You'll never lack, your country will be secure." Never have a miscarriage, and on and on it goes with all these wonderful blessings. I am sure they were shouting, "Yay! Wonderful! We're going to have all these things."

But there was that "if" there. *If* you listen to Me, *if* you do My commandments, *if* you obey My voice. Israel had to keep God's commandments and walk in His ways if they were going to receive these things, which they famously failed to do. Their behavior was atrocious most times and God would not give them these great blessings when they failed to do their part. They were not living up to the contract. The contract said, I will give you this if you do that. They did not do *that* so He did not give them *this*. It is just how it works. He did not fail to follow through on His promises. They failed to meet the required stipulation.

God had His storage houses ready to give to them, open up to them. I will give you all of this from heaven. If you just tithe to Me, I will open the windows of heaven and give you all the good things. Nope. Money grubbers kept everything and squandered it. That is the way people are. They do not want to give God anything and so He is not inclined to give them blessings because these particular promises are conditional. It matters what the other

person does. God was under no obligation whatsoever to fulfill His promises because Israel did not uphold their end of the bargain.

We need to understand this distinction. That there are unconditional promises and there are conditional promises. With *unconditional* ones God says, "I will do this, I will give you that." And He does. But *conditional* promises are those where He says, "Okay, I'm willing to give you just about everything, but you have to do something for it and that is obey, you have to follow Me. You have to do what My voice tells you to do." And they, as I mentioned, most of the time did not.

This point comes into play in the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Now, we will see in this fifth and final sermon in this series that what God promises to Abraham, the father of the faithful, are unconditional promises. *Unconditional* promises. God needed no further proof from Abraham to know that Abraham would obey His voice and fear Him no matter what. And the promises, the promised blessings, the rewards, were now locked in. They were guaranteed, as good as given. And you know what? They are promises we can trust too. They are not just for Abraham and not just for his physical descendants, but they are for his spiritual descendants as well. So we can take out of them great faith, hope, and knowledge as a conviction that we can use as we move forward toward the Kingdom.

Let us go back to Genesis the 22nd chapter. As I have done the last few times, I am going to back up just a little bit so we get a running start into the material for today. I am going to start in verse 10 and I will read through verse 13. This is what was covered in the last sermon on this in Part Four.

**Genesis 22:10-13** And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. [Isaac is already tied up on the wood which is on the altar.] 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. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

If you will remember my last sermon, it concentrated on God's providence. We learned that God's providence is maybe the most expansive of all theological ideas. That it covers everything of God's plan and all the things that He will do to make sure that it comes to pass, as well as the common providence of things like food and water and shelter and clothing and those sorts of things that He is very willing to give us.

But providence can be very specific. It does not have to be just the great plan of God and all that He does to make sure it comes to pass. But it can be even a very specific thing that is needed to help a person or to move a person along or what have you. And it could even be a ram, one solitary ram stuck in a hedge or some sort of bushy area. Now last time I did not talk much about the ram and I would like to do that as we begin here.

The ram was the substitute sacrifice for Isaac. Now why a ram and not a lamb? We all know Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God. We do not call Him the ram of God, but God provided a ram instead of a lamb. A ram, I am sure you know this (but maybe for a few of you who do not), is an adult male sheep and adult male sheep all have horns. The logo (I do not even know if they use it anymore), for the Los Angeles Rams (they used to be the St Louis rams) had a big golden horn (or a white horn at various times), on the side of their helmets because they were the rams and rams have horns. The text in verse 13 here specifically mentions its horns were caught in a thicket and that is very likely significant. There is not a word in the Bible that does not become significant at some point, it seems.

What God does in this description is give us a pointer, if you will, a hint to the meaning that we are supposed to take from this ram and not a lamb. We understand a lamb. Oh, they are so cute and cuddly and innocent. But what about a ram? We do not think of rams as cute, cuddly, and innocent. We think of them like the bighorn sheep, knocking heads on a mountain top somewhere. That is how we think of a ram. We have Dodge Rams. They are tough and they will carry everything you need and they can go through any kind of terrain. That is how we think of rams. Very, very much different from how we think of lambs.

The Hebrew word for ram is '*ayil*, "a" with a lot of different diacritical marks on it, and "yil." It can also be translated, not as ram, but as ruler, or as mighty. The powerful Medo-Persian Empire that we read about in Daniel 8 specifically is symbolized as a ram. Describing this ram,

**Daniel 8:4** . . . no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great.

This is the ram. Nobody says this about a lamb. They think of lamb chops and Night to be Much Observed with roast lamb. You do not think of that in terms of ram. A ram is a tough male of his species that is going to be a fighter. No one wants to mess with him.

However, Abraham's ram was caught, he was subdued, restrained, he was detained by a thicket, the thicket that was holding him down. The thicket is a thick wild growth of things like brambles and thorns and shrubs and trees. It is an image of untamed earthly places, and by extension, it is also an image of the base people who inhabit such wilderness areas like that. Isaiah 10:34 says that "the Lord of host, the Majestic One, will cut down the thickets of the forest when Israel returns to the land." This is Jesus Christ, the Lord of hosts, the Majestic One who comes in great power and glory, promising that when Israel returns in the Second Exodus, that He will cut down all the thickets. It will not be a wilderness anymore, as it were. There will not be people there, base people, earthly people who are going to cause trouble. That is the idea of thicket here. A thicket it is a place you do not want to go into, you do not want to mess with.

But in Genesis 22, verse 13, the ram that was going to be offered was caught—"the ram was caught in a thicket." So God provides this illustration of the ultimate substitute sacrifice as a ram, a mighty ruler who no one can withstand, yet at this time, he is caught or captured by an unruly earthly people. Now, if you are thinking like I am thinking and putting yourself at the time of Jesus of Nazareth and His crucifixion, here He was a man, yet very God with all the power and what did He say? "Hey, don't worry, I could call down twelve legions of angels if I needed to." He had all power. He had the closest relationship with His Father that ever was. God would give Him

anything that He needed. Yet he was caught. He was arrested by Jews, turned over to the Romans, and crucified. He was restrained from using His power. He restrained Himself. He did not call for the twelve legions of angels, but He gave over to them willingly in order to fulfill His purpose.

So we have the great ram, yet giving Himself up, not using the power, not using His horns as it were, which are a Hebraic symbol of strength, might, and power. He *allowed* Himself to become restrained for the purposes of becoming God's sacrifice for sin. This ram is also shown in Genesis 22 as being a burnt offering and this explains why He allowed Himself to be restrained—because He was totally dedicated to God and His purpose and He knew that His work was not finished. He had to give Himself as a sacrifice to pay for all of our sins to fulfill the type here in Genesis 22, and therefore also the promises that are promised to Abraham along with it.

Remember, last time we looked into the phrase "lifted up his eyes" and saw or looked. That is here also in Genesis 22:13. As I mentioned last time, it could indicate a revelation beyond mere sight. Remember I talked about that it could mean that he could see out of time, not just what he was going through at the moment, but that God gave him a revelation of what would happen when Jesus Christ was crucified. He had a vision maybe, or an idea came into his head that this is how it was going to be fulfilled. Again, I want to say that this idea of foreseeing many thousands of years is less likely than its literal meaning, but it is something to consider in this verse as well. We could think of it perhaps as saying, "Abraham considered heavenly or spiritual things and understood."

Abraham, it says here, "lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns." I am thinking in terms of the way this is constructed here, that it is telling us that he had to lift up his eyes and look before he could see the ram. It was not something he had noticed before. Now, I do not know if God just zapped a ram in there and he was caught in the thicket. But I would think that a ram getting caught in a thicket would make quite a bit of noise. You would hear the rustling, probably hear it panting or making some kind of noises of its own. It would be thrusting his head around and trying to get out. But Abraham had to lift up his eyes and

look. Maybe you could say, on the other hand, he was so distraught about what he was having to do there that he totally could not see anything. He was focused on Isaac and everything around him was just a blank.

But it was behind him. It was like it was out of his sight, out of his line of sight. It was not in his line of vision and it only became apparent once Abraham lifted his eyes and really looked. It was revealed to him. That is the way I am kind of thinking of. It was not necessarily that is what it was but it gives you the flavor of this—that God had to reveal the ram to him. It was not plain to see, but he had to think on a little bit higher, more spiritual level in order to see the substitute sacrifice that God had provided for him and for all others who would believe in Him. It kind of has the flavor of Colossians 3: 2. You know this this is the famous New Testament "look up" scripture, if you will, where he says,

**Colossians 3:2-4** Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth. [The verse before, "Seek those things which are above." And of course the object of this looking above, setting our mind on things above, is Jesus Christ.] For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

I get the idea this was a stunning revelation to Abraham, this substitute sacrifice. He had said to Isaac, "Hey, God's going to provide a lamb." But he looked up and God provided a ram! A little different. He was expecting a nice, white, little lamb. He got a *ram*! I think this expanded his mind. It was something behind him, something he could not see, and he had to look up and see that there was more to the substitute sacrifice. He had to expand his horizons beyond the little lamb and think of the substitute sacrifice as the great ram, the mighty ruler whom no one could withstand. Who would do his will in all things. Yet he was restrained and gave Himself.

So I have to ask the question because we have lots of blinders. I mean we could turn all the way around and still not see what is really going on because it is just the way that our minds are. We tend to compartmentalize and ignore and do all these things. So I have to ask the question: When we lift our eyes, do we look up and see God? Do we see spiritual things? Do we see heavenly things? Or do we just see the physical around and about? Do

we see the visible and not the invisible things of God? Like my dad's famous sermon, "Do You See God?" When you look up, when you lift your eyes and look, do you have the mind and the eyes of Christ to see things in spiritual ways?

If I am right, we see Abraham getting his vision expanded to think of the substitute sacrifice in a *greater* way. That this would not just be a future descendant like him, this would be a truly great and awesome Being and I am sure that he understood that it had to have been God Himself—the Creator. But maybe it had not sunk in enough. God had to show him this in this type—lamb versus ram. I do not know, I am just kind of guessing here but I think it is an educated guess and something to think about.

The man, JB Phillips, who wrote the *New Testament in Modern English*, we call it the Phillips version of the Bible, wrote another little book (the first half of which is very good, the last half of which is not very good). But the title of that book is *Your God is Too Small*. He went through the first half of this book asking you to think about God more broadly, as greater than the things that you normally compare with Him. You know, He is the harried telephone operator who is trying to listen to and respond to all these prayers, the calls that He gets every day. Or He is the big teddy bear that you can go up and squeeze whenever you need a little bit of comfort. Or He is the judge or He is this and He is that—He is the great policeman who makes sure everything is just and orderly on His beat. But He is greater than all of those things because we tend to pigeonhole God by our own experiences and we need to see Him as far greater than *any* of those things.

I think this is kind of what Abraham got a dose of here. That maybe he had thought of God in too small a way and God opened his eyes a little bit further so that he could see another aspect of His character, of His being, and it probably shocked him once he started thinking about it beyond this vignette in his life.

**Genesis 22:14** 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."

As I mentioned last time, this verse along with verse 2 and verse 8, states the theme of the whole episode, God will see and provide. Specifically and literally, it is the ram or the lamb, however you want to look at it. I think we should look at it in both ways that He provides. But the thrust of the story is that God's providence is essentially limitless to those who fear God and obey His voice, because that is what He gets to in the end, when He starts confirming to Abraham the promises that He had made to him all along.

From God's point of view, His providence, as it is in this vignette, focuses on the sacrifice, the Son's sacrifice, because that is the important, pivotal event in all of human history. That initiates the required relationship. That if we pursue it diligently will culminate in eternal life and glory in His Kingdom. Nothing like that happens unless the Son gives Himself as the substitute sacrifice. Because that sacrifice opens the way for us to be forgiven, our sins are paid for, ourselves bought back, and we can then have life—real life—with a relationship with the Father and with Christ. And everything that we need along the way to the Kingdom, once that step is taken, that is, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and we accept it, once that happens, God is willing to give us anything and everything that we need in order to make it to the Kingdom. He will give us whatever it is at the right time.

Now, the name mentioned here, Mount Moriah, identifies both the place and it identifies God. He is called Yahweh Yireh, "God will see and provide," and it gives us an assurance of His character. The assurance is that He is always watching out for us and providing us what we need at the right time. He is very timely. He gives us what we need at the right time. From this we can understand that our God is a vigilant, omniscient God who not only sees our needs, but is active and responsive, filling them in a timely manner. He is not a God who goes to the refrigerator and World War III breaks out. That is not how He works. He is always watching. He is always especially watching His people and when they need something, He is there to give it, especially if the thing they need is what they actually need to move forward, to produce the fruit, to produce growth, so that they could make it into the Kingdom.

So we can understand from what we have seen here in Genesis 22, that God is there and He sees what we need and He will provide it. We, as sons and daughters of faithful Abraham, have to have the same kind of faith that he

had, where he said to Isaac, "God will provide the lamb" because he had a relationship with God and knew that that is how He was. We have got to come to the same level of trust that He is not going to leave us destitute at a time of need. He is going to give us whatever it is that will help us to overcome, if we will use it.

I want to show you a few things from the New Testament, especially about this particular point. Let us go to Matthew the sixth chapter. Obviously, if you know your chapters, that is right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus of course is speaking. This is about God providing.

**Matthew 6:25-34** "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life [Is that not something that we worry about so often, "Am I going to even make it out of bed today."], what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. [Because they are material, they are physical, they are just looking at the next day. They are not looking spiritually, they are not lifting up their eyes and looking.] For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. [He sees, He perceives what you need.] But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. [Is that not an unconditional promise right there? Maybe some conditions there, you have got to be seeking the Kingdom and His righteousness.] Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Jesus tells us flat-out not to worry, He will provide what we need. Just keep your eyes on the ball. Let us go to Ephesians 3. We will read verse 14 through the end of the chapter.

**Ephesians 3:14-21** For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. [Do you realize what that means—to be filled with all the fullness of God?] Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever and ever. Amen.

The apostle Paul says God is there, He is waiting, He is willing to give all of these spiritual gifts even to the point of, as he says, being filled with all the fullness of God. That is everything! Let us move on.

**II Corinthians 9:8** And God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

So you want to do something good? God will give you all abundance to do that. You do not need to worry about not having what is necessary because he is talking about giving here to the churches, collecting the food that the Jerusalem church needed during that time of famine. And he says, "Look, you need to understand that if you want to do a good work, God is with you. He is going to give you all sufficiency to get that work done, if it is a good work." All right, one more.

**Romans 8:31-32** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son

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[Now, we are getting back to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ again, which is the highlight of Genesis 22.], but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

You are His children. He is going to give you everything you need to succeed. If you believe, if you obey, if you follow, if you persist, He is willing to give it all. As Jesus teaches, if we are truly convicted of all this, that God provides everything that we need as we need it, then we can let go of our anxieties and act in faith, and seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness without hindrance.

Now, we have to get over our humanity. But on God's side, He is willing to give everything we need. As he says in Matthew chapter 10, this is part of the fear of God, knowing that He values us and will care for us as only He can.

One more kind of offhand comment on Genesis 22:14 about the saying at its end there that on the Mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. It is instructive, I think, for us to consider all the major things that God has provided on mountains. I am just going to list a bunch of these and let you think about it.

An end of the Flood on Mount Ararat.

The law and the covenant given on Mount Sinai.

The blessings and curses on Mounts Gerazim and Ebal.

An end to David's plague at Ornan (or Arauna's) threshing floor on the of what became the Temple Mount.

Victory over Baal at Mount Carmel.

The teaching of the still small voice on Mount Horeb.

Jesus' victory over Satan. As an example, the final temptation was on an exceedingly high mountain.

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The foundations of Christianity delivered by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount.

A glimpse of Christ's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.

He gave us an overview of end time prophecy on the Mount of Olives.

Jesus' sacrifice, of course, was on Mount Moriah.

The Holy Spirit in the upper room was on or adjacent to the Temple Mount.

And there are many others. I just gave these as a kind of sampling of the things God has provided on the mount.

The reference in verse 14 here in Genesis 22, is to Mount Moriah of course. But the metaphorical implications of God providing from a mountain are intriguing. Remember in the Millennium, the nations are going to go up to the mountain of the Lord to receive the law, to receive instruction. It is just something to meditate on, to consider it.

**Genesis 22:15-19** Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "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." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

I am not going to cover the promises in any kind of detail. That has been done elsewhere. You can go to the things we have spoken and written about Israel and these things are in there quite a bit. But as it says here (this is

actually the third time God speaks to Abraham), it says the second time they spoke out of heaven on that day. But it is sometime after the burnt offering of the ram had been completed, maybe after it had been completely consumed. I do not know. But along with these blessings, or the confirmation of these blessings, comes the well-known phrase "by Myself I have sworn," which Paul homes in on in Hebrews the sixth chapter. Before we go there, I want to go to Isaiah 45 so we can get an Old Testament commentary, if you will, or a clarification on what this phrase means.

**Isaiah 45:22-23** [God says here] "Look to Me, and be saved all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall take an oath.

God uses the same phrase here, more or less, and the context helps us to understand what He means by it—by Myself I have sworn, or as He says here, I have sworn by Myself. The explanation is in verse 22. He says, "For I am God, and there is no other." No being is higher, mightier, holier, or trustworthy, more anything than God. So then, who can God swear by other than Himself? There is no higher authority for Him to swear by. So He makes an oath, saying, by Myself I have sworn. He is essentially backing His statement by His own righteousness and His unchanging character. He says, "I'm staking My divinity on this oath. I'm saying, by Myself, I will do this."

Let us now go to Hebrews 6 and we will read verses 13 through 20, as Paul, or whoever the author of Hebrews is, does a commentary on this phrase.

**Hebrews 6:13-20** For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise [meaning Abraham]. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end to all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise [Who are they? You and me. This was for us.] the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we

might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The author here, we will say Paul, links God's oath, not to the physical blessings that He later bestowed on physical Israel (those things in Genesis 22:17), but to the greater spiritual promise in Genesis 22:18, "In your seed all nations will be blessed."—the most important promise of all. I mean, the gates of your enemies and having kings come up in your line of descent and those sort of things, they are wonderful things. They are great. But the real icing and cherry on top of the cake is that in your seed all nations shall be blessed. This is the most important promise He gave to Abraham: that one of his descendants would come to fulfill the type of the sacrifice of Isaac. By His selfless work, that is, the sacrifices, Jesus Christ, His sacrifices in his selfless work in living sinlessly and dying to redeem us from sin, He would rise from the dead. Is not resurrection our hope—His resurrection?

And not only did He rise from the dead, He passed through the veil, He went directly into the Holy of Holies. He went right there to God's throne and became our High Priest where He stays now, that is where His office is, as it were, and He mediates between us and the Father. And in that office as High Priest, He can provide all we need, as we saw in those other scriptures that we went through. He can provide all we need in our relationship with God so that we can indeed lay hold on eternal life in His Kingdom. The author points out here that this promise is both immutable, that is, unchangeable—it will not change ever—and confirmed by God's oath backed by His perfect character. So He is not going to ever change the promise.

Beyond that He makes an oath by His own righteousness, by Himself, by His own perfect character, that He is not going to renege on it, that He is good for it. It is sure! It will happen! Part of it has already happened. It is the finished work of Jesus Christ. But as the heirs of promise, us, in a spiritual sense, it is not over. We have not completely been born into His Kingdom. There is still stuff for us to do. We still have to grow, we still have to overcome, we still have to produce all that fruit. Who knows, we may have persecutions to overcome.

We do not know what is coming, but God will, as only God can, ensure its completion in each person He calls and chooses. He has put Himself on the line, as it were, that He will complete His good work in you. As the author says here, this should provide a strong consolation, great encouragement, and assure us that the Anchor, our anchor, which is in heaven, that is, Jesus Christ, who is our connection to God's throne, our connection to the Father, is sure and steadfast. He has already proven that He is reliable. He is not going anywhere. He is there for us whenever we need Him. We have no reason to doubt or fear that our High Priest is at work on our behalf and He will finish His work in us successfully, providing everything that we need without fail.

So Abraham, with the promises confirmed, went back to Beersheba with Isaac and the young men. You can imagine, that for Abraham it had been the most enervating, emotionally fraught three days of his life. But it was also the most *spiritually* rewarding three days of his life. Especially that last day, in the last few hours when everything was revealed to him and he finally understood and God gave him those wonderful promises confirmed. Now he had God's assurance that all God's promises would one day be conferred upon his descendants through Isaac, and especially that one great promise: that one Descendant, his greatest Descendant, would save the whole world, provide blessings to all who would follow Him and believe in Him.

Now, what do we take out of all this? Well, I am not going to go over everything. But I think most of all we need to *remember Abraham*. We need to remember that he is the father of the faithful and that he, through his actions, through his faith, has taught us something wonderful that we need to keep in the forefront of our minds. Notice what God tells us, tells spiritual Israel, in Isaiah 51.

**Isaiah 51:1-2** [He says] "Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness [Is that not us? Are we not following after righteousness?], you who seek the Lord [we read that in Colossians 3]: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him."

That is what He tells us to focus on. That He called Abraham, called Sarah—but especially him—and that He blessed him and increased him. God provided for Abraham. He provided a glimpse into the plan of God. He provided the ram for the sacrifice. So God tells us: He says, "Remember your spiritual roots, remember where you came from."