

CHAPTER SIX

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1 FAITH

After the confusion of languages at Babel, Moses recorded the passing of several more generations. All through these years the *LORD* did not forget his promise to send a *DELIVERER*. Though the majority of people lived with little thought of God, each generation had those who believed his promises. Abram and Sarai were one such couple.

We pick up the story in Ur, a city just south of Babel. It was around this time¹ that the citizens of Ur also built a famous temple-tower, a ziggurat dedicated to the moon god. It was probably the worship of such gods that led the *LORD* to tell Abram:

“Leave your native country... and go to the land that I will show you.”
Genesis 12:1 NLT

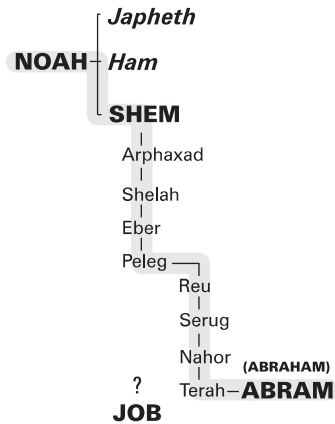
Telling Abram and Sarai to move preserved them from a false religious system. (After all, the moon is a big rock, not a god.) Abram and Sarai now had a choice:

1. They could be disobedient like the people of Babel and stay put in Ur—in effect, trusting their judgment as being *better-than-God’s*, or ...
2. They could believe that *YAHWEH* knew best, pack their bags and do as the *LORD* directed.

You can imagine the advice given to them by family and friends. *“Abram, you are financially secure! Life is great here! Don’t be a fool!”* But ...

*... Abram went, as the LORD had told him ... Abram was seventy-five years old ...*²
Genesis 12:4 ESV

This was a big step for Abram. He couldn’t consult an atlas, research the country on the Web, or discuss plans with a travel agent. He didn’t even know where he was going! God had not told him. But Abram had faith in the *LORD* to lead him one step at a time.



WHAT IS FAITH?

People have odd notions about faith, often confusing the biblical puzzle. But the Scripture uses the life of Abram to define exactly what *YAHWEH* means by “faith.” Here are some guidelines.

The words or concepts of *belief, faith, trust, and confidence* are often used interchangeably:

Abram believed the <i>LORD</i> .	He believed what <i>YAHWEH</i> said.
Abram put faith in the <i>LORD</i> .	He had faith in <i>YAHWEH</i> 's word.
Abram trusted the <i>LORD</i> .	He knew <i>YAHWEH</i> to be trustworthy .
Abram had confidence in the <i>LORD</i> .	His confidence was in God alone.

The old saying, “*Never trust a stranger,*” is particularly applicable to the subject of faith. To trust someone you don’t know is risky. Adam and Eve trusted a stranger (Satan) and it had terrible ramifications.

Before you trust a person you need to find out two things:

1. **Identity:** What is his name? Where is he from? Who does he claim to be—prince or pauper, poet or plumber, politician or priest?
2. **History:** What is his reputation? Does he keep his word? Is he reliable? For this you will need to investigate his past.

It is important to know these two things before you place your faith in a person. In light of that, the Bible says Scripture was written so mankind might become acquainted with *YAHWEH*.

We saw that Moses was to tell everyone that *YAHWEH* is the Supreme Being, the Creator-Owner of the Universe. That is his **Identity**.

As to his **History**, Scripture was written so mankind could learn that *YAHWEH* is reliable—he tells the truth. When he makes promises, he keeps them. We are still in the early stages of learning God’s history, but with time we will see that *YAHWEH*'s...

... promises have been thoroughly tested ... Psalm 119:140 NLT

The Bible encourages us to check out God’s history for ourselves. A special promise is given for those seeking him. It says if we believe *HE* exists, and if we seek to know *HIS* history, then he will reward us with additional information about *HIMSELF*.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11:6 NKJV

BLIND FAITH

There is such a thing as blind faith—people trust strangers every day. We all agree it is risky, and yet it is done.

1. **Identity:** Abram would have known many people in the city of Ur who trusted the moon god.
2. **History:** Yet the moon god had no history, no reliable reputation. He never made promises, let alone kept them. He couldn't—the moon is just a big rock which orbits the earth, unable to think, speak, or make promises.

Yet people still trusted in the moon as a god. This sort of faith is a “*leap in the dark*” equivalent to “*trusting a stranger*.” It is often based on opinion rather than reliable information.

In the Bible Abram and Sarai are used as examples of faith. Their whole lives were marked by faith, but it wasn't a leap in the dark. They knew *YAHWEH* had a reliable history, and ...

... regarded the one who had given the promise to be trustworthy.

Hebrews 11:11 NET

BIBLICAL FAITH

Some people talk about faith as if it were a gift that God gives you, like a present. But when you study the lives of Abram and Sarai, you see that their faith towards God functioned like any other day-to-day expression of trust. They believed *YAHWEH* was telling the truth and acted upon that belief.³

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

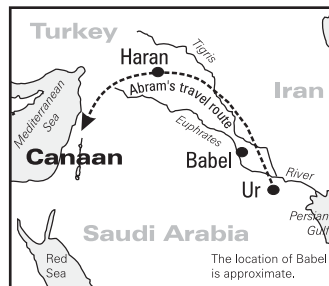
Hebrews 11:8 NIV

Their unknown destination was the land of Canaan, today the home of the Arabs and the Israelis.

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents...

Hebrews 11:9 NIV

Abram and Sarai led semi-nomadic lives. The locals called them *hebrews*, a name which carried the connotation of a *wanderer, the one from beyond*. From this time on, their descendants were referred to as *Hebrews*.



2 PROMISES

When God told Abram to leave Ur, he also gave him four specific promises. Now this is interesting for two reasons:

First of all, in Abram's country it was unheard of for a deity to make promises. Babylonian gods never made commitments. Since the gods were always fighting among themselves, people never knew which deity would be in power for the long run—to fulfill a promise.

Secondly, if *YAHWEH* made promises and consistently kept those promises, it would put him in a category that no other god or goddess was known to occupy. He would be unique. It would also build a reliable history for future people considering whether or not to trust him.

The *LORD* promised Abram ...

1. *I will make you into a great nation ...*⁴
2. *I will make your name great ...*⁵
3. *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse ...*⁶
4. *...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*

Genesis 12:2-3 NIV

God's first promise was good news to Abram because ...

Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Genesis 11:30 NASB

In order to become a great nation, he would have to father children. However, since Sarai was sixty-five years of age and he had no offspring, Abram was perplexed as to how this would happen. Once again he would need to trust the *LORD* to keep his word.

The last promise hinged on the first and was a direct reference to *THE DELIVERER*. God was telling Abram that one of his descendants would be *THE ANOINTED ONE*, and that He would be a blessing to everyone. The Bible says Abram believed God and rejoiced at "the thought of seeing" the day of *THE DELIVERER*'s arrival.⁷

<i>THE PROMISED DELIVERER would be ...</i>
1. The offspring of a woman
2. A male
3. A descendant of Abram

A PROMISED SON

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless...?”

[God] took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1-2,5-6 NIV

This last sentence is loaded with meaning. We will look at three words: *righteousness*, *credited*, and *believed*.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

As we saw earlier, the word *righteousness* is used in reference to God’s perfect character; he is totally without blemish or sin.

To live in the presence of the *LORD*, one needs what Adam and Eve lost in the garden—one needs righteousness. Humanly speaking, it is impossible. Yet the Bible says Abram ended up with this sort of righteousness, not because he had it within himself, but because God *credited* it to him.

CREDITED

The word *credited* means *to count*, *to consider*. The original rendering of this verse uses an accounting term for the word credited. It is a word that deals with a reality. For example, if you are flat broke, but a friend tells you he has credited your bank account with \$10,000, it is a certainty you have \$10,000. The word refers to facts, not suppositions. It is something you can rely upon.

The Scripture says the *LORD* *credited* righteousness to Abram. It wasn’t that Abram all of sudden began to live a perfect life here on earth, but rather God looked upon Abram as if he was clothed in righteousness, already standing in Heaven. It was a done deal. The transaction was completed. He could count on it.

The question is, “*Just how did Abram obtain this righteousness that allowed him to stand before the LORD?*” The Bible’s answer is that,

*Abram **believed** the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

Genesis 15:6 NIV

BELIEVED

Abram did what Adam and Eve should have done back in the Garden of Eden. He simply believed the LORD.

But hold it! How could a simple “belief in the LORD” clothe a person in righteous garments? Surely a person had to live a good life, do the right thing and think the right thoughts. Believing was just too simple. There had to be a catch. We will answer these questions as we continue, but for now it is enough to know that Abram had such faith in YAHWEH keeping his word, that he ...

... was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:10 NASB

Although Abram’s body would eventually die, he believed that God would make a way for him to live in Heaven as a friend.

“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. *James 2:23 NIV*

3 SON OF UNBELIEF

As the years passed and Abram and Sarai still didn’t have the son promised by YAHWEH, they began to wonder ... they struggled.

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had not given birth to any children, but she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, “Since the LORD has prevented me from having children, have sexual relations with my servant. Perhaps I can have a family by her.”

Genesis 16:1-2 NET

This was the culturally accepted way of dealing with childlessness. Sarai offered her servant girl to Abram.

[Abram] slept with Hagar, and she conceived. *Genesis 16:4 NIV*

So Hagar gave birth to Abram’s son, whom Abram named Ishmael. (Now Abram was 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael.)

Genesis 16:15-16 NET

ISHMAEL

Abram finally had a descendant! But there was a problem. They had done things their way, not God’s way.

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “... No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” *Genesis 17:1,5 NASB*

Abram, now called Abraham, had no problem with what God was saying. After all, he had a descendant—Ishmael!

And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Genesis 17:15-16 ESV

Why was YAHWEH mentioning Sarah at all? Did the LORD not know about Hagar? Surely it was possible for *THE PROMISED DELIVERER* to come through Ishmael.

Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”

And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

Genesis 17:17-18 NIV

Abraham pointed out to the LORD that Ishmael could be the promised son.

Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him ... and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”

Genesis 17:19-21 NIV

So there it was. God would bless Ishmael, but he was not the promised son. God would only honour that which was done His way. Sarah was to have a child in one year’s time and his name would be Isaac.

Though Abraham and Sarah believed that God would keep his promise, their faith went through ups and downs. At times they struggled with doubt. But God says he will even honour faith the size of a mustard seed.⁸ Mustard seeds are very small. What makes the difference is **not the amount of faith** you have, but **in whom** you are placing your faith.

A lot of faith in the moon god would not have helped Abraham, but even wavering faith in YAHWEH made the difference. It is the **object** of one’s faith that is important—not faith itself. Abraham and Sarah were trusting the LORD YAHWEH.

4 GRACE

After Abraham arrived in Canaan, he moved ...

... to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west...
Genesis 12:8 NKJV

Bethel became associated with *YAHWEH* and his blessings, a place to seek the *LORD*. Even though I'll only mention Bethel a couple more times, remember this place. It was here Abraham ...

... built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.
Genesis 12:8 NKJV

As we saw before, altars had been in use since the time of Abel. They were designated as special places to meet God. As a man approached the *LORD*, he would offer an animal, often a sheep or goat. The offering would be killed and its remains burned. These altars and offerings were very significant as they were connected to the concept of atonement. It was the means whereby God restored a sinner to a right relationship with Himself. Later, we will explain this concept in detail.

Lot

Abraham had a nephew named *Lot* who had accompanied him from Ur. Not long after they settled in Canaan, it became obvious that there was not enough pastureland for both of their flocks.

So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me ... for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the right, then I will go to the left; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."
Genesis 13:8-9 NKJV

Lot had a choice. He could choose the lush, fertile valley or the stark, rugged mountains. On the other hand, he could split both the fruitful and barren land with Abraham, each taking half.

And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere ... Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan...
Genesis 13:10-11 NKJV

Lot took the whole valley—all of it!

And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.
Genesis 13:11-13 NKJV

SODOM

Lot settled in Sodom, a city with a questionable reputation.

“Now this was the sin of... Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me.”
Ezekiel 16:49-50 NIV

The people of Sodom had given themselves over to self-indulgence. They were self-centered, reveling in ease and luxury while ignoring the hunger and poverty around them. They were a proud people whom God said were exceedingly sinful. **God told Abraham that the sin of Sodom and her sister cities was so great and blatant that he was going to destroy them.**

Abraham was concerned for Lot and wanted to know what would happen to the godly—those in the city who had their names written in the *Book of Life*.

Abraham approached [the LORD] and said, “Will you sweep away the godly along with the wicked? What if there are fifty godly people in the city? Will you really wipe it out and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty godly people who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the godly with the wicked, treating the godly and the wicked alike! Far be it from you! Will not the judge of the whole earth do what is right?”

Genesis 18:23-25 NET

Abraham probably figured he was pushing YAHWEH to the limit by asking him to spare the city for fifty God-honouring people, but then on the other hand, Lot was a good man and had been in Sodom quite a while. Surely he had influenced at least fifty.

So the LORD replied, “If I find in the city of Sodom fifty godly people, I will spare the whole place...”
Genesis 18:26 NET

You can almost hear Abraham’s sigh of relief. But then he got to thinking. Some of the things he had heard about Lot did not speak too well of his life. Maybe he wouldn’t have influenced that many people. Abraham began bargaining. He said,

“Since I have undertaken to speak to the LORD (although I am but dust and ashes), what if there are five less than the fifty godly people? Will you destroy the whole city because five are lacking?” He replied, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” Abraham spoke to him again, “What if forty are found there?” He replied, “I will not do it for the sake of the forty.”

Then Abraham said, “May the LORD not be angry so that I may speak! What if thirty are found there?” He replied, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

Abraham said, “Since I have undertaken to speak to the LORD, what if only twenty are found there?” He replied, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty.”

Finally Abraham said, “May the LORD not be angry so that I may speak just once more. What if ten are found there?” He replied, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten.”

Genesis 18:27-32 NET

Abraham must have breathed a sigh of relief. He knew Sodom. If God destroyed the people of Noah’s day, Sodom had no chance. Yet God said he would spare the city if ten godly people were found. Abraham must have been astonished.

Earlier we saw that YAHWEH revealed a type of love when he created the world. It was a love characterized by **care and concern**. We can see it in the diversity, the beauty, the fragrances, and the tasty food.

But when God said he would spare Sodom for the sake of a handful, God demonstrated love in a different light, to a different depth. It was an **undeserved love**. The Bible refers to *undeserved love* using the words *grace* and *mercy*.

Abraham had learned another aspect of God’s character. As Moses recorded this event, he learned it too—and so do we.

5 JUDGMENT

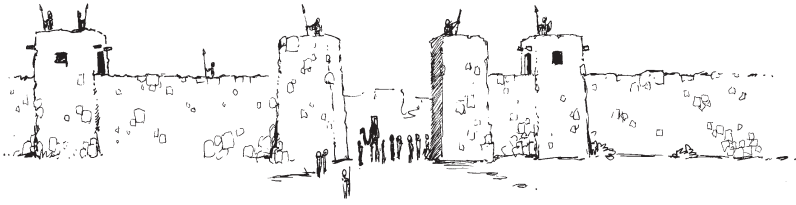
Although the LORD YAHWEH is gracious, he does not allow his love to be trampled upon forever. Sinful living is contagious and God did not want Sodom’s life-style spreading beyond the valley. So God sent angels to destroy these cities.

Angels are invisible spirits, so to be seen they had to take on the form of men.

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening while Lot was sitting in the city’s gateway. When Lot saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face toward the ground.

Genesis 19:1 NET

Lot seemed to recognize that the angels were persons of some importance. His culture demanded he show them hospitality.



He said, "Here, my lords, please turn aside to your servant's house. Stay the night and wash your feet. Then you can be on your way early in the morning." "No," they replied, "we'll spend the night in the town square."

Genesis 19:2 NET

Lot knew the sinfulness of Sodom. He feared for them sleeping out in the open.

But he urged them persistently, so they turned aside with him and entered his house. He prepared a feast for them, including bread baked without yeast, and they ate. Before they could lie down to sleep, all the men—both young and old, from every part of the city of Sodom—surrounded the house. They shouted to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!"

Lot went outside to them, shutting the door behind him. He said, "No, my brothers! Don't act so wickedly! Look, I have two daughters who have never had sexual relations with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do to them whatever you please. Only don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

"Out of our way!" they cried, and "This man came to live here as a foreigner, and now he dares to judge us! We'll do more harm to you than to them!" They kept pressing in on Lot until they were close enough to break down the door.

So the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house as they shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, from the youngest to the oldest, with blindness. The men outside wore themselves out trying to find the door. Then the two visitors said to Lot, "Who else do you have here? Do you have any sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or other relatives in the city? Get them out of this place because we are about to destroy it. The outcry against this place is so great before the LORD that he has sent us to destroy it."

Genesis 19: 3-13 NET

At dawn the angels hurried Lot along, saying, "Get going! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or else you will be destroyed when the city is judged!"

When Lot hesitated, the men grabbed his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters because the LORD had compassion on them. They led them away and placed them outside the city. When they had brought them outside, they said, “Run for your lives! Don’t look behind you or stop anywhere in the valley! Escape to the mountains or you will be destroyed!”

Genesis 19: 15-17 NET

Although Lot trusted YAHWEH as a friend, Lot was a terrible embarrassment to the LORD. Nevertheless, God showed him grace—undeserved love—in spite of his ungodly character.

The sun had just risen over the land as Lot reached Zoar. Then the LORD rained down sulfur and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. It was sent down from the sky by the LORD. So he overthrew those cities and all that region, including all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation that grew from the ground.

Genesis 19:23-25 NET

Abraham got up early in the morning and ... looked out toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of that region. As he did so, he saw the smoke rising up from the land like smoke from a furnace.

Genesis 19:27-28 NET

God had said he would destroy these sinful cities and he kept his word. He always does. People may react to this story, but we must remember, it is YAHWEH who sets the rules for how mankind should live. He did this for our well-being. We jeopardize ourselves when we ignore or try to change God’s laws. The Bible says,

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil ... Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!

Isaiah 5:20-21 NKJV

While YAHWEH is gracious, he must be taken seriously. The Scripture says that the events at Sodom remind us that the LORD does judge all sin—here on earth or in the Lake of Fire.

*... Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They **serve as an example** of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*

Jude 7 NIV

Sodom	Bethel
A place to indulge in sin	A place to meet with God
Associated with men of sin	Associated with men of faith
An example of judgment	An example of blessing

6 SON OF THE PROMISE

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.

Genesis 21:1–3 NIV

God kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah in spite of their age.

We now jump forward in the story. Isaac has matured and is the only son at home. Ishmael has moved to Egypt.

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”
“Here I am,” he replied.*

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah.”

Genesis 22:1-2 NIV

Abraham was told to take Isaac to the region of Moriah. Today the city of Jerusalem occupies this entire area, but back then it would have been sparsely inhabited. Abraham was told to ...

“Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”

Genesis 22:2 NIV

Hold it! Could this be right!? Was God really telling Abraham to kill Isaac and then burn his body on an altar? Yes, the instructions were clear. Abraham now had to make a choice:

1. He could **ignore** God, renounce him as hard-hearted and cruel, or ...
2. He could **believe** that *YAHWEH* knew something he did not know and obey the *LORD* as instructed.

ABRAHAM REASONED

God’s request must have bewildered Abraham. In all probability he had witnessed the human sacrifices practiced by other nations of his day and knew it was a common form of appeasing gods. Yet God’s command to sacrifice Isaac went against everything Abraham knew about *YAHWEH*. Not only that, but God had promised Isaac as a descendant who would bear many children. There was no earthly way to harmonize the *LORD*’s previous promise with His present command. The Bible does not leave us guessing as to what went on in Abraham’s mind. It tells us that ...

...Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead...

Hebrews 11:19 NIV

Abraham was convinced that if he sacrificed Isaac, the *LORD* would bring him back to life.

FAITH

So Abraham went, putting his faith in God's goodness. He even started his journey *early* the next day.

Early in the morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took two of his young servants with him, along with his son Isaac. When he had cut the wood for the burnt offering, he started out for the place God had spoken to him about.

On the third day Abraham caught sight of the place in the distance. So he said to his servants, "You two stay here with the donkey while the boy and I go up there." Genesis 22:3-5 NET

Abraham was so sure that both of them would return home alive, he even told his servants,

"We will worship and then return to you." Genesis 22:5 NET

A QUESTION

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. Then he took the fire and the knife in his hand, and the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father?"

"What is it, my son?" he replied.

"Here is the fire and the wood," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Genesis 22:6-7 NET

No doubt, Isaac had witnessed many altar sacrifices and it didn't take a university degree for him to realize that one of the essentials was missing. Where was the offering?

Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Genesis 22:8-9 ESV

Isaac was no infant. The Hebrew word translated *boy* was used of young males all the way up to military age. He was certainly old enough to put up a fight—remember, he had carried the wood up the mountain. Yet in spite of the fact that Abraham was an old man, there is no record of a struggle. It is obvious that Isaac willingly

submitted to his father, an act which showed implicit confidence in his dad whom he knew to be a follower of *YAHWEH*.

Once bound on the altar, Isaac was helpless. He was under direct orders from God to be slain. There was no way he could save himself. The Bible says Abraham then...

...stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

Genesis 22:10 NKJV

You can see the old man's hand shake. His jaw sags. His heart is about to break. The strain of the moment is incredible. Slowly the trembling arm is raised and in the somber light of the day, the cold metal of the knife glints. Deliberately, the mind commits itself to the plunge, and then... and then...

...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." Genesis 22:11-12 NKJV

There must have been tears of relief. The sentence of death was gone—at least for Isaac it was gone. But there still was a death.

Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. Genesis 22:13 NLT

What was going on here? Why sacrifice an animal after releasing Isaac? What was this all about? We will answer that question in the next section, but let's conclude the story first.

THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

This event so imprinted itself on Abraham's mind that he named the mountain as a reminder of what God is like.

*So Abraham called that place **The LORD Will Provide**. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Genesis 22:14 NIV*

Notice that Abraham called the place, "*The LORD Will Provide.*" Why didn't he name it "*The LORD Has Provided?*" Had not the LORD already provided an offering? Why should Abraham talk about a future provision? The difference is intentional, but we will have to wait until a later chapter to learn its implication.

... the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you ... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Genesis 22:15-18 NIV

The story ends with God reaffirming his promise that *THE ANOINTED ONE* would be one of the descendants of Abraham and Isaac. It was said *THE DELIVERER* would be a blessing to all people.

<i>THE PROMISED DELIVERER would be ...</i>
1. The offspring of a woman
2. A male
3. A descendant of Abraham
4. A descendant of Isaac

7 WHAT IT WOULD TAKE

As you read the Bible you see altars and offerings mentioned frequently. We need to understand their significance or our biblical puzzle will be missing crucial pieces. Remember that *two-sides-of-the-same-coin* question?

1. How can we get rid of our sin-penalty with its horrific consequences, and...
2. How can we gain a righteousness that is *equal* to God's righteousness so we can be accepted in his presence?

Understanding the purpose for offerings and altars in Scripture gives us needed background to answer those two questions.

THE SIN-PENALTY

As we said before, the *LORD YAHWEH* had to do something about man's sin—he could not ignore it as if it had never happened. All sin had to be punished. That is only fair and just.

But God loved mankind and did not want us to spend an eternity in the Lake of Fire. So the question was asked, "*How could God punish sin without punishing us?*" Here's part of the answer. It involved a rather vivid visual aid.

ATONEMENT

God told people to take an animal, kill it and let its blood run out on an altar.

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. *Leviticus 17:11 NIV*

We saw that the word *atonement* encompasses the idea of man's sin being symbolically *covered* before God's eyes. Ultimately, the word describes *what it would take* for the *LORD* to be satisfied that the sin-debt had been justly paid. The atonement for sin required blood to be spilled upon an altar, for the Scripture says...

...without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:22 NASB

Let's unpack that verse. Here it is again with explanatory inserts.

...without [death through] the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of the sin-debt]. *Hebrews 9:22 NIV*

The *LORD* said that **man's sin-debt could only be forgiven if there was death**. Normally, man would die for his own sin. But now, based on certain future events, the *LORD* was saying that **he would accept an innocent animal's death in man's place**—as a substitute. It would be a life for a life, the innocent dying in place of the guilty. The sacrifice pictured *the law of sin and death* being obeyed and justice being fulfilled. Sin was not ignored—it was punished.

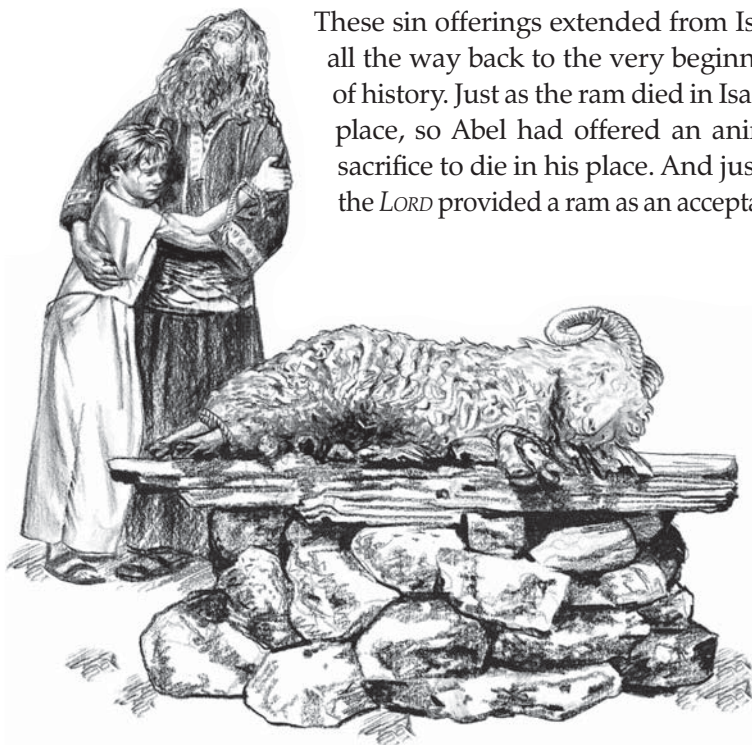
A SUBSTITUTE

Just as Isaac had fallen under God's direct order to die, so all mankind is under the sentence of death.⁹ Isaac could not save himself from God's judgment. Bound, he was helpless. But Abraham trusted the *LORD*, believing that somehow his loving God would make the difference. And the *LORD* did intervene. He provided a way of escape through a substitute. The Scripture says Abraham ...

...took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son.

Genesis 22:13 NLT

He sacrificed the ram "*in place of*" Isaac. There was a death all right, but it was the ram's death instead of Isaac's. Isaac went free because a ram died. *YAHWEH* had provided a substitute.



These sin offerings extended from Isaac all the way back to the very beginning of history. Just as the ram died in Isaac's place, so Abel had offered an animal sacrifice to die in his place. And just as the *LORD* provided a ram as an acceptable

sacrifice in Isaac's place, so God had viewed Abel's sacrifice as acceptable. Since the time of Eden, man had brought substitutionary offerings for sin. When man came to God in God's way, believing his word, man found acceptance and friendship with *YAHWEH*.

These offerings illustrated *what it would take* to have the sin-debt paid in full. In essence, they were visual aids. For this reason God had rejected Cain's offering, as vegetables do not shed blood.

... without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:22 NASB

Cain had brought an offering that was not in harmony with God's visual aid. The vegetables did not picture *what it would take* to have sin punished and forgiven.

TWO SIDES OF THE COIN

With all this in mind let's return to our *two-sides-of-the-same-coin* questions. We now have some answers we can insert.



Question: "How could mankind escape the penalty for sin?"

Answer: "The penalty for sin could be paid by a substitute."



Question: "How can we gain back the perfect nature Adam and Eve lost in the Garden? How do we obtain *right clothes*—a righteousness that is equal to God's righteousness—so we can be accepted in his presence?"

Answer: "When ...

Abraham believed God... it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend."

James 2:23 NIV

Now hold it! How could that be? How could this man with all his faults be considered righteous? He was far from perfect. And as to the matter of a substitute, does this mean we need to find an animal?

The answers to these questions will be found in the pages to come. But for now, don't worry about finding an animal. To use the words of Abraham,

"God himself will provide the lamb ..."

Genesis 22:8 NIV