

The Children of Nahor

20 Now after these things it was told Abraham, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Na'hor: ²¹Uz the first-born, Buz his brother, Ke'muel the father of Ar'am, ²²Che'sed, Ha'zo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethu'el." ²³Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reu'mah, bore Te'bah, Ga'ham, Ta'hash, and Ma'acah.

Sarah's Death and Burial

23 Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. ²And Sarah died at Kir'iath-ar'ba (that is, He'bron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went

23:4: Heb 11:9, 13.

22:20-24 The sons of Abraham's younger brother, Nahor, living in upper Mesopotamia (11:27). This is the first introduction of Isaac's wife, Rebekah, in the Genesis narrative.

23:1-20 Abraham buys land in southern Canaan as a burial plot for Sarah. The chapter details the negotiation and purchase of the property and stresses that Abraham declined to accept it as a gift. This field is the only portion of land that ever belongs to Abraham personally, but his purchase of the site anticipates the full acquisition of Canaan by his descendants (12:7; 17:8).

in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. ³And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and said to the Hittites, ⁴"I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." ⁵The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶"Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our sepulchres; none of us will withhold from you his sepulchre, or hinder you from burying your dead." ⁷Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me E'phron the son of Zo'har, ⁹that he may give me the cave of Mach-pe'lah, which he owns; it is at the end of

23:3 the Hittites: The descendants of "Heth" (10:15), one of the ten nations that occupied Canaan before its conquest by the Israelites (15:18-21).

23:4 a stranger: A foreigner living among natives but possessing no property.

23:9 cave of Mach-pelah: Abraham will be buried with Sarah in this same cave (25:9-10), as will Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and Jacob and his first wife, Leah (49:29-32). Samaritan tradition locates the burial place of the Patriarchs, not in Hebron, but in Shechem in central Palestine. Stephen follows this Samaritan tradition in Acts 7:16.

The Sacrifice of Isaac

The drama of the Book of Genesis reaches its greatest intensity in 22:1-19, the heart-wrenching story of Abraham offering his beloved son as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. So momentous is the event and its outcome that it stands as one of the defining moments of salvation history. Had Abraham shown anything less than heroic faith, there is no telling how the grand narrative of the Bible would have developed thereafter.

The question is how to interpret the significance of the episode. For some, the story is a protest against the rituals of child sacrifice that plagued the biblical world. By holding back the knife, the Lord shows that he rejects rather than requires this kind of savagery in the name of religion. For others, the story is a lesson in trusting God and obeying his word, even when life's circumstances seem to contradict his promises. Stretching our faith beyond comfortable limits is seen as the path to greater blessing that Abraham blazes for us by his example.

Both of these readings provide genuine insights into Genesis 22. But more can be said about the spiritual and theological dimensions of the episode. In the interpretive tradition of Judaism and Christianity, the sacrifice of Isaac is an event of monumental historic importance. It is one of the few events in Scripture that have a lasting effect on the shape of God's plans for the future and the world.

Spiritual Significance

For Abraham personally, the sacrifice of Isaac marks the highpoint of his developing relationship with the Lord. Ever since his call in Genesis 12, Abraham's faith in God has been gradually deepening and maturing to the point where, in Genesis 22, God sees fit to test the strength of his commitment. Preceding chapters describe how the plot builds to reach this climactic moment. (1) Initially Abraham is asked to leave his home and set out for the land of Canaan at the Lord's direction (Gen 12:1-2). (2) Later he is asked to sacrifice animals from his herds (Gen 15:9-10) so that the Lord can put his lingering doubts to rest by the ratification of a covenant (Gen 15:18-20). (3) Then the patriarch is asked to sacrifice part of himself in a covenant of circumcision at the age of ninety-nine (Gen 17:1-21). (4) Finally, the Lord asks for the life of Isaac, Abraham's beloved heir (Gen 22:1-2). No greater sacrifice could be asked of a father than this, all the more so since God's promises to bless Abraham are literally bound up with Isaac on the altar (see Gen 17:19).

So it is that Abraham learns the lesson of trustful surrender to the Lord. At each stage in the process, more is asked of him than before, until all that Abraham holds dear is given over to God and nothing is held back. Each time he is summoned to sacrifice, he is asked to love the Creator more than his creatures and to esteem the divine Giver above his most precious gifts. Even when God's promises and credibility hang by a thread, the only acceptable course is to entrust ourselves to him in faith. Because Abraham followed this course, he shows himself to be one who fears God (Gen 22:12). This is significant because

his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a possession for a burying place." ¹⁰Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹"No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it; in the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." ¹²Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "But if you will, hear me; I will give the price of the field; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." ¹⁴Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵"My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead." ¹⁶Abraham agreed with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had

named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

¹⁷ So the field of Ephron in Mach-pelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave which was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over ¹⁸to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Mach-pelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as a possession for a burying place by the Hittites.

The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah

24 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ²And Abraham said to his servant,

23:16, 17: Acts 7:16.

23:10 who went in at the gate: Not passersby, but the elders or officials of the city that oversee legal transactions (cf. Ruth 4:1-2).

23:15 four hundred shekels: A very high price.

24:1-67 Abraham commissions his head servant to find a bride for Isaac. The story details how God, in his Providence, oversees the process and ensures the success of the mission.

24:2 hand under my thigh: The loins or thighs represent the locus of man's procreative powers (Job 40:16; Heb 7:10). Putting the hand under the thigh is an oath gesture, signifying that the swearing party invokes a curse of sterility upon himself should he fail to uphold his pledge (Deut 33:11). Here the oath makes Abraham's last living request binding upon his servant should he die before Isaac is

the Bible extols "fear of the Lord" as the preeminent religious virtue, the very essence of what it means to possess wisdom and to live uprightly in the eyes of the Almighty (Ex 20:20; Job 1:1; 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7).

Theological Significance

In early Jewish theology, the sacrifice or "binding" of Isaac is an event that sends ripples down through the history of the covenant people. It is said, for example, that Isaac played an active role on Moriah by offering himself as a willing victim and that the merits of his action were stored up for the redemption of Israel in future days. Thus, saving events such as the Exodus from Egypt, the forgiveness of the people after the golden calf apostasy, and the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land were all made possible by the sacrifice of Isaac. Likewise, the cultic ministries of the Temple, especially the daily burnt offering and the yearly Passover sacrifice, were considered liturgical memorials of Isaac's offering. In these and other ways, the sacrifice of Isaac was believed to secure lasting benefits for the descendants of Abraham.

From a Christian perspective, the sacrifice of Isaac points forward to the salvation of the world by the Messiah. Anticipation of this rests on both a prophetic and typological reading of Genesis 22. *Prophetically*, the divine oath to bless the world through Abraham in Gen 22:16-19 is fulfilled in Jesus Christ as the messianic offspring of Abraham (Gal 3:16). Through him the blessings of God's covenant with Abraham, destined for all families and nations, are poured out for the salvation of Israel and the Gentiles alike (Mt 28:19; Acts 3:25-26; Gal 3:14). In this way, the curses of the Adamic covenant are surpassed and surmounted by the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled by the Messiah (see Rom 5:12-21). *Typologically*, the offering of Isaac serves as a preview of how the world's redemption would be accomplished. Like Isaac, Jesus is an only beloved Son (Mt 3:17; Jn 3:16) who is not spared by his Father but is offered in sacrifice (Rom 8:32). So too, as Isaac is returned alive to the arms of his father, thanks to the intervention of God (Gen 22:12), Jesus is restored to life in his Resurrection (Heb 11:17-19). Building on this NT foundation, the Fathers of the Church went on to correlate Isaac carrying the firewood (Gen 22:6) with Jesus bearing his own Cross (Jn 19:17), to link the deliverance of Isaac on the third day after consignment to death (Gen 22:4) with the deliverance of Jesus from death on the third day (Mt 16:21), and to see the ram caught by its horns in the thicket (Gen 22:13) as a depiction of Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb (Jn 1:29), crowned with thorns (Jn 19:2). Finally, the sacrifice of Isaac is said to have taken place on Moriah (Gen 22:2), which is none other than the mountainous elevation of Jerusalem (2 Chron 3:1), the city where Jesus was called upon to offer his life in sacrifice. Given these remarkable prophetic and typological features, it is no surprise that Christian tradition places Genesis 22 alongside other OT passages such as Isaiah 53 that most clearly describe the work of the Messiah for our redemption.