

Sacrifice & Salvation

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When God formed His relationship with our father Abraham He set in place the foundations for His relationship with all of mankind. Abraham was the “friend of God” and he communicated with God personally. God could simply say “Abraham,” and he answered. God also set principles in place enabling potentially anyone to have the same kind of relationship.

In the two previous Yavoh issues we have addressed some of those initial principles. Faith is counted for Righteousness and Righteousness has kissed Justice. Justice demands Sacrifice and with Sacrifice you receive Salvation. The previous issues of Yavoh spoke of Faith, Righteousness, and Justice. Now we will speak of Sacrifice and why Sacrifice leads to Salvation.

Abraham, first named Abram until God was ready to make His covenant with him, was familiar with sacrifices as a form of expression before God and he knew how to build altars. The Scripture records for us that Abraham built three different altars in the Promised Land. When it comes to sacrifices, there are two events which stand out: the promise of a son and the offering of his son, Isaac. The first came as a result of Abraham’s question of how he would receive the great promises God had given him. In particular, God had promised Abraham many descendants; however, at that time Abraham had no children. The closest person he had to an heir was his servant Eliezer.

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.” And Abram said, “O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.” Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1-6

God promised Abram that he would have children, that he would father a host of descendants. To accomplish that promise Abram would have to have at least one son to carry on the inheritance, yet another question arose within Abram’s heart. Even if I have a son and many descendants, how will I know that they will truly receive the promise of the land?

And He said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.” And he said, “O Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it?” So He said to him, “Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

Genesis 15:7

God's instructions for Abram to offer sacrifices brings us to the topic of this article. God directed Abram to prepare five different sacrifices: a heifer cow, a mature female goat, a mature ram (sheep or goat), a turtledove, and a young pigeon. The law of Moses, in the book of Leviticus, offers some explanation for these particular creatures to be used, but there is a major difference in the presentation before God. Abram's sacrifices were not laid on an altar per se. Instead, they were "cut" in two pieces, with the exception of the birds, and laid opposite of each other. Biblical scholars believe that this was an ancient custom for forming a covenant. The two parties would take a sacrificial animal to the feast of the agreement. The animal would be filleted into two pieces and each party would walk between them signifying that if they did not keep their part of the agreement, then they were calling for them to receive the punishment meted out upon the sacrifice.

God instructed Abram to prepare the sacrifices to establish His covenant with him and assure him how he would possess the promise for his descendants and the land. It is interesting to note that "birds of prey" came because of such a large sacrifice laid out and Abram had to defend the sacrifices from them.

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions. And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." And it came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.

Genesis 15:12-17

When the time came for God to join Abram in the sacrificial ceremony, God gave Abram a prophecy about his descendants. God said that Abram's descendants would be strangers in another land where they would be enslaved and oppressed. God also promised that He would judge that nation, delivering his descendants after four generations, bringing them out with many possessions and back to the land promised to Abram. God then advised Abram that he would live to a "good old" age. With this prophecy God then passed between the sacrifice pieces like a whirling, fiery tornado. The same day, it is then said, God made a covenant with Abram concerning his descendants and their return to the promised land, defining the land's area.

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite. "

Genesis 15:18-21

This prophecy was the basis for the children of Israel to look for God's redemption while they were enslaved in Egypt and was the basis of the ministry of Moses in leading them out of Egypt. In fact, Moses takes care to note the fact that they departed exactly 430 years to the day when God gave Abram this promise.

Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came about at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12:40-41

This verse has perplexed some Bible students. It seems to infer that the period of time from Jacob

entering Egypt with 70 souls until the beginning of the exodus was 430 years, when in reality, it was only about 230 years. To better understand what Moses said we need to see what else Moses said about their day of departure.

And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the Lord brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten. On this day in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth. And it shall be when the Lord brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month."

Exodus 13:3-5

As it turns out, the day that Israel left Egypt was the anniversary of God's prophecy to Abram and his sacrifice, 430 years to the day of God's prophecy and Abram's sacrifice.

Before we leave this sacrifice described to us in Genesis 15, we need to take note of something missing. God passed through the sacrifice, thus calling upon Himself to keep the covenant, but Abram did not. There is no evidence whatsoever that Abram passed between the sacrifices. He simply prepared them as God instructed and kept the birds away. So, what does that mean?

God committed Himself to the covenant with Abram by declaring that if He did not fulfill it correctly then He would be subject to the penalty of the covenant. But Abram never passed through, which means that God must keep Abram's part of the covenant as well. We have the evidence that God did fulfill His good word. He did deliver the children of Israel with Moses noting God's prior promise. In fact, we observe the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread to this day memorializing God's promise to Abram and His deliverance of his descendants out of Egypt. However, the descendants of Abram have not been so faithful in keeping the covenant made with God. This is part of the reason why God must pay the price of the sacrifice. This is why God's Son had to be sacrificed for us. God is keeping our part of the covenant made with our father Abram.

The second sacrifice that Abraham kept with God was even more dramatic. We call it the Akeda - the binding of Isaac. It is recounted to us in Genesis 22. God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and Sarah with the birth of Isaac. Isaac was a grown young man when God suddenly instructed Abraham to prepare another sacrifice. This time a specific place was cited and Isaac was chosen as the sacrifice. We are not sure how well Abraham dealt with this emotionally, but he did as God instructed him.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Genesis 22:1-3

It must have seemed bizarre to Abraham. God promised Isaac to him; it was from this son that many descendants (more than the stars) were to come from. Why would God be asking for him to be given back? Furthermore, didn't we just say that God would have to pay the price for Abraham's failure in the covenant. Regardless of what Abraham was thinking, he did as the Lord said and traveled to the location specified by God.

On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will

worship and return to you.” And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.

Genesis 22:4-6

Abraham knew the purpose of the journey. God had instructed him to sacrifice Isaac. Normally, a sacrifice dies, so why did Abraham tell his servants that he and Isaac would be returning? Why did he not instead say, “Go home now, I will return later,” or “I will be back in a little while.” Why did he say Isaac would be returning?

The answer is not directly said, but it clearly appears that Abraham expected God to keep His “good word.” If God wants him sacrificed (killed), then God will have to resurrect him to keep His promises. Isaac came to this same understanding very shortly after.

And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” And Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

Genesis 22:7-8

Abraham’s statement to Isaac was profound, even prophetic. Abraham promised Isaac (and us) that God would supply Himself with the sacrifice. This is the basis for the “Lamb of God” definition for the Messiah. The sacrifice that would pass a person from death to life would be provided by God Himself, not brought by a man. Abraham is clearly stating that if anyone is going to die then it must be God’s sacrifice. Somehow Isaac knew that it would be all right for him. The repetition of the phrase “So the two of them walked on together” seems to indicate that Isaac agreed with Abraham’s understanding.

Isaac’s agreement with his father is a foreshadow of the Messiah’s agreement to offer Himself in agreement with His Father. On Passover night (the memorial of Abram’s sacrifice and redemption from Egypt because of the lamb’s blood on the doorposts) Yeshua had to come to agreement with His Father to be taken to same place Abraham took Isaac.

He [Yeshua] went away again a second time and prayed, saying, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done.”

Matthew 26:42

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

Genesis 22:9

Yeshua was also bound, and He was lifted up above the altar that was in Jerusalem. According to Matthew’s account of the crucifixion, a Roman Centurion in charge of the execution testified that at the moment of death several specific things happened. There was a darkness that covered the area and an earthquake occurred. This earthquake was severe enough to split the veil in the temple. (Do you remember the split sacrifices offered by Abram?) Also, the tombs were opened. There is only one place on earth that a gentile could stand to observe these events. It would have to be directly east of the temple across the Kidron valley upon the Mount of Olives. From this vantage point, a person can look over the temple wall, over the great altar, through the great doors of the temple and into the sanctuary with the veil. Additionally, the Valley of Kidron on the side of the Mount of Olives is a large Jewish cemetery. This is the cemetery where the prophets are entombed. The tombs are boxes above the earth with stone lids. When the earthquakes shook, it caused the lids to slide open.

What is even more significant than what the Centurion saw is what our Heavenly Father saw looking from the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies out from the temple, above the altar, upon the Mount of Olives, hanging on the cross. It is recorded that Yeshua's death was at the ninth hour, which is 3 pm for us. This was the exact time that the ceremonial Passover Lamb was placed on the altar in the temple in Jerusalem. Truly, Yeshua was our Passover Lamb offered at the place and time according to all of the prophecies. It was the memorial of Abraham's sacrifice, the place where Isaac was bound and laid on the altar, the memorial instructed by Moses to remember the lamb that passed them from death to life, and the very moment when the temple ceremony was offering the Evening Sacrifice.

The very moment for Abraham and Isaac, when Abraham lifted his hand to slay Isaac on the altar, God stopped the test of Abraham. There was no need for Isaac to die, or be resurrected for that matter. Instead, a suddenly new concept was introduced – Salvation.

And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

Genesis 22:10-12

Isaac was not sacrificed, but another was.

Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided."

Genesis 22:13-14

The other sacrifice was a ram (male lamb) with his head caught in a thicket of thorns. I am sure you remember that when Yeshua was offered up His head was caught in thorns as well. It is interesting that Abraham's declaration of God's promise to provide the Lamb in that place resounded so clearly to Moses. It is echoed by God's swearing by Himself what follows.

Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Genesis 22:15-18

Truly, God has not only provided the sacrifice but He has sworn by Himself to fulfill His promises to Abraham. The writer of Hebrews cites this oath, saying there is none greater.

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

Hebrews 6:13

Abraham had kept his word to his young men servants.

So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Genesis 22:19

They lived. It is a simple expression but it defines salvation for us. This salvation that was defined by Abraham and his son Isaac is the same salvation defined by our Heavenly Father and His Son, Messiah Yeshua.

The Apostle John restated it this way.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

John 3:16-21

In John's letter he summarized the salvation that God has given us by defining it directly with the Son of God. These verses become more meaningful when we understand the background given in the Torah.

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

I John 5:11-13

Did you notice the subtle shift from "salvation" to "eternal life." Actually, it wasn't that much of a shift, it is simply a reminder of the salvation that Abraham was speaking of when he promised to return with the lad to the young men. Salvation which does not include the resurrection from the dead, being passed from death to life, is no salvation at all. Therefore, salvation inherently means eternal life and resurrection.

The Apostle Paul makes an even stronger assertion that salvation inherently must have resurrection. Yeshua's resurrection is the proof that we have received the Passover, being passed from death to life, that our sacrifice for failing to keep the covenant has been paid.

Now if Messiah is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Messiah has been raised; and if Messiah has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Messiah, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Messiah has been raised; and if Messiah has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Messiah have perished. If we have hoped in Messiah in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

I Corinthians 15:12-19

While Paul allowed the question of the sacrifice of the Lamb and resurrection to be asked, his answer is unquestionable.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

1 Corinthians 15:20

Christianity has long taught that salvation is from the Messiah and the Messiah's sacrifice, but only a remnant of Christians understand and can cite the Scriptures as proof that the Messiah's sacrifice was planned long ago by God's relationship with Abraham as the friend of God. Hearing God's promise to Abraham to bring his descendants to the promised land and Abraham's promise to Isaac for God to provide the Lamb Himself is foundational to our understanding the Salvation provided by the Messiah.

As we conclude, let us review what Abraham has taught us. Faith is counted for Righteousness; Righteousness has kissed Justice; Justice demands Sacrifice; and with Sacrifice, we receive Salvation. It really is all about the Messiah. We believe that God has promised us a Son, that from this Son many descendants would have a part in the promised land (the kingdom). Believing in the words of God has resulted in doing the right thing. We don't have any righteousness of our own, we claim the righteousness of God through the Messiah. God's law demands that corrections must be made when covenants and agreements are broken. These rules were established by God, the Messiah; therefore, the Messiah is our Justice. Sacrifices are God- defined acceptable substitutes or gifts. In the case of our sins, only a God-defined substitute is acceptable in exchange for our lives. There is only one acceptable sacrifice that will pass us from death to life. It is the Lamb of God sacrifice provided by God Himself. No man can bring an animal for atonement of willful defiant sin against God. Only Yeshua of Nazareth, the Messiah, has provided Himself in that place. Therefore, we declare that we have received the gift of eternal life and the salvation of God. The Messiah is the faith, the righteousness, the justice, the sacrifice, and the salvation. This is what our father Abraham taught us and what we believe to this day.

YAVOH - He is Coming is a monthly newsletter published as an outreach ministry of Lion and Lamb Ministries.

The ministry is a non-profit organization with an end time prophetic message in a Messianic Jewish context.

Subscription to *YAVOH - He is Coming* is without cost and supported only by donation.

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