

# The Lord Has Provided

---

Chapter 22 of the book of Genesis begins with the words “sometime later...” Those words point us to a time after a sequence of other things. An important question might be: after what kinds of things does this Abraham story take place? Well, they’re sort of on the same theme, these things. For starters, there had been once this man and wife who looked back in shame at a perfect garden ruined, but ahead with faith to a promised rescuer from their troubles. Sometime later another man, one of the last God-fearers on earth, peered out the porthole of a boxy boat onto the gray, raging judgment of a world-flood; but saw through it to a rainbow bright future of promised love from God for him and all his children – all mankind. Sometime later, this man’s children wandered away, faces downcast: their self-reliant tower of aspirations babbling away under God’s reminder to rely on him alone. Sometime later came Abraham. Sometime later still are you and me. Whether, in the midst of it, or after the fact, we might say that all the things recorded in the book of Genesis share the same theme: **The Lord Has Provided.**

Abraham knew that because he had experienced the same kinds of things as Adam and Eve, Noah, his scattered children, and many others. Like the rest, Abraham lived a life of faith: God declared and Abraham trusted. God declared, “Go to this mystery land that I’ll show you later – leave the life you know behind,” and Abraham went. God declared, “I’ll take care of you, no matter what,” and Abraham failed to trust at times and trusted better at others. God declared, “I’ll make your descendants as numerous as the sand on the beach,” and Abraham trusted, but longed for that to come true in a personal way. And just like every other promise God had made, every other declaration, it did come true – God gave 100 year old Abraham his only son, Isaac, after a wait of many, many years. “Sometime later God tested Abraham.” God came to prove the quality of Abraham’s faith – like gold refined in hot, hot fire. He came to see on whom Abraham relied and who was most important in his life: God or long-promised, beloved Isaac. God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” God declared and Abraham did.

Though there must have been heartache and fear, read and look, and you will find faith: “Servants – stay here. *We*, the boy and I, *we* will go and worship over there somewhere. *We*, the boy and I, *we* will come back to you.” When the beloved son adds up fire and wood and wonders about the sacrifice noticeably absent – you’ll find faith: “Son, the Lord will provide the lamb for the sacrifice.” And when their going gets them to the ground where, by all he knows, his son’s blood will be spilt and his body burned to ash – you’ll find faith: the moment drawn out with the description of every action – build the altar, stone on stone; arrange the wood, gridlike; bind the boy, loop by loop; place the sacrifice on the altar; raise the knife, muscles tensed to kill his only son.

How could he do it? How could he keep on going, all the way to the end? The writer to the Hebrews summarized Abraham well: “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even

though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead..." and so, Isaac his son, if he were sacrificed. Abraham, in faith, reasoned that God had promised so it would surely happen.

There are many things that threaten our "man or woman of faith" lifestyle, aren't there? There are difficult moments in our lives where we may have to publicly and boldly declare what God demands – but they're certain to be situations in which we'll look the fool, or the cruel parent, or the narrow-minded friend. Hard to keep going then. There are times when the life we wish for just won't happen; or when the life we had falls crumbling away – situations in which it's hard to trust that God's watching over our going. It can be hard, step by step, day by day, to do just as God desires – in every situation, to enact his importance in our lives. And we don't always. And then here, God's Word presents Abraham, the mountainous example of faith – not because you'll ever have to kill your own son or daughter; not either because Abraham was awesome; but only because all he had were the promises of God just like you do.

**The Lord Has Provided** *The Promises That Keep Us Going.* There are ones of momentary significance – for the unplanned health trouble or the deflated stock portfolio: "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Je 29:11)" There are promises for daily life – for what we need or desire: 'So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ...But seek first [God's] kingdom and [God's] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Mt 6:31, 33)" There are many others too. Those promises come to people like us: in an affluent part of an economically depressed country; with children and jobs and school and play; with desires and heartaches and fears. They come to us so that we, like Abraham, can display our trust in God. They come so we can face all the troubles from work or school or finances or health by saying, "I'm going to go over there and worship", that is, to live in a way that declares that we rely on nothing and no one, that we love nothing and no one more than our God whose promises we cherish. God provides them so that in our going he can say of us, "I know that you fear [me]," just like Abraham did.

But, in the moment, many times it's probably going to feel like you're waiting, after many steps, muscles tensed, for the knife to drop – even as a God-fearer. That's a good time to remember the resolution to Abraham's sacrifice moment. After the Lord stayed his hand and revealed the nature of his test, Abraham looked and saw what God had provided: the ram to replace Isaac as sacrifice. The truth from God's Word is just the same for us: **The Lord Has Provided** us with promises that are made complete *In The Lamb to Whom We Look.*

Notice, please, that throughout this story, we see the action of Abraham. Sometimes we come to view him as an impossible to emulate, hero of faith – and God calls him that, but not because of his activity. If it were the activity of Abraham that were most important, he should have named the place of this sacrifice "*Abraham Shama*", "Abraham Listens". Abraham understood that those who trust in the promises of God rely on what God can do. So, instead, he named the place "*Jehovah Jireh*", "The Lord will provide." There isn't anything we could do to earn the promises of God. Even Abraham didn't meet the standard of sinlessness God demands. No person deserves God's promises. No person has lived a life of complete trust in God. Each person should have to be sacrificed as blood-payment for his or her own guilt.

And yet, promises God has given because they're made sure in the work God does himself. You can see it in the last promise to Abraham God gave: "I swear by (not Abraham or Pastor

Casmer or your good abilities, but) myself” God says, that “through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed”. Very similar to the promises given in that ruined garden, or to the man after the flood, or to Abraham earlier – that someone else was coming who would be so great as to bless all nations and every person. He was just hard to see from Abraham’s perspective. He isn’t now. In the season of Lent, we lift our eyes with Abraham to see the resolution to our problem *in the Lamb to whom we look*. The blessing of God comes to every person on earth in Jesus Christ. In Lent, we see him as he struggles against temptation, but never gives in. We see him pointed towards the cross and his own death, to pay for our guilt. In the Lamb, who is sacrificed in our place, we have this comfort: as I struggle with sin every day, with making anything else more important than God, in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, I have complete and full forgiveness. I can look ahead to whatever my day holds and say with Paul, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Ro 8:31-32)” Jesus is the Lamb to whom we look, as sacrifice in our place, as blessing and hope no matter the circumstance, as the one who makes us conquerors of all things, as the proof that, in his good promises, our God has provided.

Abraham and Isaac walked on together in the promises of God, through the difficulty of that test, to the difficult climax on the mountain. As we come out of Epiphany, and continue to walk as children of the light, we walk on together as God’s people, showing our faith in him alone. In Lent we see what grace it is that God has for us. We look ahead, through all our tests and troubles, to the Lamb he has provided, whose blood promises that the greatest of heavenly blessing will be ours too, sometime later...