

## ***One of the Strangest Stories in the Bible***

I think one of the strangest stories in the Bible is when God asks a dad to sacrifice his own son on an altar.

This is not just any father and son combination. This is Abraham and Isaac.

The Bible storyline is that God promised Abraham, “I will make of thee a new nation and give you a new land.” (see Genesis 12). And in his old age, Abraham was going to have a son.

Years go by, and the promise is not happening. So Abraham has a concubine and has a son with her. But that son was not the promised child. That son was named Ishmael, and the descendants of Ishmael now make up many of the Muslim countries surrounding Israel still today.

God promised Abraham a seed, and Abraham tried to accomplish that promise

his own way, and God said no. Eventually, finally, Abraham is 100 and his wife is 90. Against all natural odds, miraculously, they have this baby. Isaac is his name.

Again, one of the strangest stories in the Bible is when God tells Abraham:

Gen. 22:2 *“And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”*

### ***To Mt. Moriah***

Abraham gets up early the next day, takes a couple servants, takes his son Isaac, gathers some firewood, and goes three days to Mount Moriah. You can read all of this in Genesis 22 and Hebrews 11. They leave the servants at the base of the mountain, and Abraham and Isaac begin climbing. They

have the wood for the altar, the fire, and the knife.

Genesis 22:7–8 *“And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”*

[I imagine some nervous laughter...  
“Dad?”]

*“And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.”*

This is still so strange. They had seen animal sacrifices, but human sacrifice? “God? Are You sure?”

But Abraham was confident in God. He told his servants that they would both be back, and Hebrews 11 tells us Abraham believed God would raise his son from the dead. He had so much faith in God that Abraham literally laid his only begotten son on the altar, and verse 10 says he stretched

forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

### ***Why Blood?***

That does not seem right. What is this whole matter of sacrifice? Why does someone or something need to die? Could we not just burn a candle, burn some incense, or leave some food in front of an idol like other religions?

The idea of a blood sacrifice goes all the way back to the beginning of creation. Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden.

Adam had walked with God, talked with God, face to face. But Adam disobeyed God's command, broke God's law, and the curse of death fell on mankind from that time on.

I am giving a broad overview of the message of the Bible, but Scripture teaches that man used to be pure, and mankind walked with God. But man's sin broke that

purity, and now we are born in sin, having broken God's commands.

In God's plan, in order for His perfect holiness to be satisfied, in order for man to be purified, and in order for man to come into God's presence, a substitute must be made.

God warned Adam that the punishment would be death, so that is where the blood sacrifice comes in. God's justice could be satisfied if something shed its blood in the place of another.

When Adam sinned, God made a coat of skins to cover Adam and Eve. There was blood shed over their sin, in place of their sin.

Their sons—Cain and Abel—were both apparently instructed in sacrifices. One son, Cain, brought a food sacrifice, something he had grown. But Abel brought a blood sacrifice, and only Abel's sacrifice was

accepted. So Cain killed Abel in a jealous rage.

The blood sacrifice was not just a Mosaic law practice. The Jews later performed rituals, burning animals on the altar, but that came much later. The whole idea of sacrifice came from the mind of God, the design of God.

### ***Blood Substitution***

Are you with me so far? Man broke God's law, and justice must be paid. But in God's grace, man does not have to pay with his own blood. A substitute sacrifice could be made.

That is what the animal sacrifices represented all through the Old Testament.

### ***David and the Threshingfloor***

In 2 Samuel 24, David's reign takes place almost 1,000 years after Abraham.

This is Israel, the promised nation. They are in their land. David is the second king of Israel, and in this chapter David sinfully numbers the people. God judges David's sin with a pestilence, a plague that sweeps through the land for three days. As the plague draws near, the prophet tells David, "Go build an altar." Here it is again. There has been sin, so blood must be shed. David buys this hilltop—verse 18, the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite.

In verse 25, there are burnt offerings and peace offerings. The burnt sacrifice was one where the whole animal was consumed. The peace sacrifice was a celebration of thanks to God. God will no longer judge. The payment is satisfied, completely forgiven. Now there is peace.

### ***Is God Fair?***

On one side, some people think God is not fair. "It was not that bad. The payment

of blood is too severe.” And we sit as the creation, acting as though we know more than the Creator. In order to be a true atheist, a person would have to know everything there is to know in the universe in order to know there is not a God, or, if there is one, that He is somehow morally bad.

So I do not believe that there are any true atheists. But an agnostic will say, “I am not sure if there is a God or not.” That is something we can work with. At least the agnostic is not saying, “I know for sure there is no God,” because that person is leaving the door open for gaps in knowledge. There may be things that person does not know.

### ***Two Reactions to God’s Justice***

Some think this concept of God requiring blood goes too far. “God is cruel and mean.”

Others think God does not go far enough. “What about all the heinous evil in this world? Are you saying those people could be forgiven, that they could have peace with God, and that God would drop all charges against them?”

That is exactly what I am saying. The worst person on this planet can have all charges dropped against him, as long as a blood sacrifice takes his place.

### ***God Will Provide Himself a Lamb***

I left the Abraham story at a critical moment. Just as Abraham was lifting up the knife to slay his son, a voice from heaven calls Abraham’s name and stops him. Abraham’s earlier words came true when Isaac had asked, “I see the wood and the fire, but where is the sacrifice, Dad?” Remember what Abraham said? “God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” And right then:

Genesis 22:13 *“And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.”*

### ***Faith, Not Proof***

The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11:19 that Abraham had faith in God. Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham reasoned, “God, You said this was my promised son, so I am going to believe You, even though it does not fully make sense to me right now. I believe what You said. By faith, I accept it. You have never lied to me before. You have been trustworthy so far. I am going to trust You.”

To be a true atheist, a person would have to know all that there is to know and be able to prove that there is no God.

To prove means to show that something cannot be any other way. If you watched our Easter promotional video, I said, “With that definition of proof, I cannot prove anything.” I cannot prove my wife will not harm me in my sleep. I cannot prove that my lunch today was not laced with arsenic.

We do not live life by absolute proof. We live every day with evidence. Faith in that evidence shows that my wife loves me, she cares about me, and she does not want me to die in my sleep. The evidence also suggests that the food at our family gathering today will be safe. I do not believe anyone in our family would poison the meal—although if you know our family, you might think the probability is higher! But I am not going to take out a chemical test kit and test my food before I eat it, because I live by faith in the evidence that it is good food.

In the same way, Abraham could not prove anything, but Abraham believed that God was true based on the evidence that God had been faithful up to that point.

### ***The Same Mountain***

As it turned out, the sacrifice was right there beside Abraham. God told Abraham to go, and three days later Abraham stood on Mount Moriah, and God provided a ram as a substitute sacrifice.

Now consider David, on the very same mountain, almost 1000 years later. After three days of pestilence, David offers a sacrifice to stop the wrath of God against sin.

You know what else is significant about that hilltop? Not only did Abraham sacrifice there, and not only did David sacrifice there, but that very site became the place where the temple was built. You can confirm that in 2 Chronicles 3:1. This is not being said

simply to create a compelling story. This is the incredible nature of the Bible.

### ***The Meaning of the Temple***

The temple of God was the place where the ark of the covenant of God was kept. Once a year, the high priest would take the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it on the mercy seat. Although the people had sinned, their sin was covered symbolically. God forgave their sin. Their sin was covered by the blood. God's wrath was appeased, and justice was satisfied, because of the substitute sacrifice. In theological terms, this is the substitutionary atonement.

### ***From Passover to Calvary***

David reigned roughly around 1000 BC, about 1,000 years before Christ. And 1,000 Passovers came and went, year after year. Faithful Jews would gather with their families, slay a spotless lamb, and eat it as a

memorial, remembering that day when Israel was released from bondage in Egypt. The blood of the lamb was put on their doorposts, and the death angel would pass over the homes that had the blood applied.

In the same way that a lamb took the place for Adam's sin, and a ram took the place for Isaac on the altar, and an ox took the place for David's sin on that altar, and a goat took the place of all Israel on the Day of Atonement every year—right there on that hill, Mount Moriah—

There was another hill, just a few hundred yards away. It is called the place of the skull, or Golgotha, or Mount Calvary. Our church is named after that place, where Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross.

A man named John the Baptist identified Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

John saw Jesus as a sacrifice, a substitute for sin—just like the lamb, just like the ram, just like the ox, just like the goat. John was declaring that Jesus would shed His blood for man’s sin.

Jesus lived a perfect life and was unjustly sentenced to death on a cross. When Jesus hung on that cross, some of His last words were, “It is finished.” Then the skies went black as all the sin of humanity was placed on Jesus, and the Father turned His back on His only begotten Son.

Jesus became sin for us, who knew no sin, as the Bible says.

### ***The Empty Tomb***

There are so many parallels in the Bible. Jonah spent three days in the whale’s belly. Abraham walked three days to Mount Moriah. David experienced three days of pestilence.

If you know the story of Easter, Jesus was in the grave three days and three nights.

On that incredible Easter morning—Sunday morning, the day after the Sabbath, very early in the morning, a great while before day—Jesus rose from the dead, and the tomb was empty.

## ***Why the Empty Grave Matters***

### **1. Because Animal Sacrifices Were Not Enough**

Why is that significant? For many reasons.

First, because the Bible teaches us that animal sacrifices were not sufficient to cover sin forever. The best those sacrifices could do was roll sin ahead another year.

But here is what God says in His Word:  
Hebrews 9:11–14

*“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and*

*more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;*

*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*

*For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:*

*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*

So there it is. Jesus became that sacrifice for us.

2 Corinthians 5:21

*"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."*

When you accept Christ's free gift of salvation, all your sins are forgiven.

Colossians 2:13–14

*“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;*

*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;”*

We needed an eternal sacrifice, and that required an eternal God to sacrifice Himself for us.

## **2. Because Jesus Conquered Death**

Second, because the empty grave shows that God is more powerful than death itself. In the greatest chapter on the resurrection, God wrote this:

1 Corinthians 15:55–57

*“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”*

*The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*

*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

The last great enemy on this earth is death itself, but Jesus made a way to defeat death.

### **3. Because If It Is True, It Changes Everything**

Third, the empty grave is significant because, if it is true, it changes everything. You have to do something with that.

If it is true, then there is a God in heaven who is calling you to trust in Him. All who reject Him will end up in an eternal hell, forever separated from God by their own choosing. You will get your own will.

“But I do not want to choose today.”  
Refusing to choose is a rejection of the free gift of salvation.

### ***Pascal’s Wager***

Do not risk it. Pascal’s Wager says there are two options. Either Christianity is true or it is not true.

With both options, you have two choices. If Christianity is not true, you can believe it or not believe it.

If Christianity is not true, those of us who believe it are simply wasting our time. When we die—poof—it will just be nothingness.

If Christianity is not true, the same thing happens either way—poof, nothing.

So it would not hurt you whether you believed it or not.

But on the other side, Pascal’s Wager says this.

If Christianity is true, you still have two options: believe it or not believe it. If you believe it, you have everything to gain. If you do not believe it, you have everything to lose.

### ***The Evidence and the Call***

The evidence says there was a man named Jesus. He lived a life in Nazareth, doing many great things. Everyone agrees that Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross. Even the most skeptical historians believe that.

But the evidence also points to an empty grave. There were cowards who turned courageous. There was a literal empty tomb. There were eyewitnesses. There was a turning point in history, based on the singular event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I was not there. I cannot prove it. To prove means to show that it cannot be any

other way, as we said before. But the evidence points to an empty grave and a resurrected Lord.

So if that is true, it changes everything. I owe Him everything. At least, that is what He said He expects of us.

That is why Christians are sometimes a little urgent with this message. We believe it, and we literally think that your eternity is at stake.

That tomb is empty. Jesus rose from the dead. He is calling you to repent of your sin and turn to Him in faith today. You can call on Him today and be 100% certain that you are on your way to heaven.

1 John 5:12–13

*“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life,*

*and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”*

### ***The Invitation***

Your sin required a blood sacrifice, and Jesus shed His blood for you.

Every lie you have told can be forgiven. Every lustful thought can be wiped clean. Every sin of anger, every blasphemy against God, every covetous thought, every greedy intention, every curse word you have uttered—it can all be forgiven, nailed to His cross, forever.

I am not talking about joining a church, giving an offering, or doing good works.

Jesus has done all the work necessary to save you.

We simply respond to Him in faith. We trust Him completely, turn to Him in repentance and faith, and believe in Him.

John 3:16

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*