

Chapter VI

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF ISAAC

The typology of Scripture is both mysterious and marvelous. It is mysterious because, until we have the keys to unlock the types in Scripture, they are closed to us. It is marvelous because, once we have the keys, wonderful truths concerning God's plan of redemption are opened to us. This has already been observed in the firstborn and the second-born. It has also been seen in the birth of Isaac to parents who were past age, as representing the virgin birth of Christ.

Isaac was certainly not virgin born; but his birth, nevertheless, required a similar expression of God's miraculous power, for Sarah was past age, having passed through menopause, and Abraham was old and impotent. It was while they were in this condition that *God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed: and thou shalt call his name Isaac ...* (Genesis 17:19). *And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken*

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to him (Genesis 21:1-2).

The mysterious aspect of the life of Isaac does not stop with his birth. It continues in Genesis chapter twenty-two where he and the ram portray Christ's vicarious sacrifice for sin. Then in chapter twenty-four the selection of his bride portrays the calling out of a redeemed people to be the bride of Christ. In keeping with these types, God told Abraham: *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* (Genesis 22:2). This command, considering the third chapter of the gospel of John, brings forth a clear representation of the Lord Jesus Christ:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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. (John 3:14-16)

This link between Isaac and our Lord was clearly by God's design. Abraham was to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, which was a sin offering. In this offering the victim was laid upon the wood of the offering and slain, which speaks of crucifixion. Then its body was burned, which would cause it to rise in the gases of combustion. This speaks of the resurrection from the dead.

There was no question in Abraham's mind what God had asked him to do. Neither was there any hesitation in his response of faith to do it. There is a good chance Abraham understood the significance of his actions. In Romans 4:19 we learn, he was *not weak in [the] faith*. The untranslated definite article before *faith* indicates that it was not his personal faith, but the body of revealed truth that was the source of his strength. Thus he knew if he sacrificed Isaac, God would raise him from the dead because of His promise, *In Isaac shall thy seed be called*.

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This historical incident, by God's design, was a prophetic portrayal of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. This was accomplished when, according to God's command, Abraham rose early and saddled his ass with the burden of the wood and all of the items necessary for the sacrifice. Then Abraham, Isaac and two of his servants traveled for three days towards what is present-day Jerusalem. There, *in the land of Moriah*, they arrived at the mount God had told him of, and Abraham said to his servants, *Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you* (Genesis 22:5).

Just as God would sacrifice His Son for sin on mount Calvary at a future day, Abraham intended to sacrifice Isaac on the same mount on that day. Even so he told his servants, *I and the lad will come again to you*. His faith was based, as we have just noted, upon the fact that God had promised him a son, which he had received in his old age. God had also promised that all of the families of the earth would be blessed in this son. Therefore he believed that if he sacrificed Isaac, then God would raise him from the dead. This is confirmed in the book of Hebrews: *[W]hen he was tried, [Abraham] offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure* (Hebrews 11:17-19).

When they arrived at the base of the mount, Abraham transferred the wood and the other items necessary for the sacrifice from the ass to his son. Then they ascended the mount together. The Scriptures declare that both asses and men need to be redeemed (Exodus 13:13). Thus, in the typology of Scripture, the ass represents man in his fallen state. Both asses and men can be

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stubborn and self-willed, and both asses and men are under a curse unless redeemed. The Scripture says, *Cursed is every one who hangeth on a tree* (Galatians 3:13). Therefore the wood that was removed from the ass and placed upon Isaac, to bear it to the mount, speaks of the curse of sin.

This makes the transferral of the burden from the ass to the son a picture of the doctrine of imputation. *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* (II Corinthians 5:21). The One who knew no sin took our sins upon Himself and bore them to the cross of Calvary, where He made *one sacrifice for sins forever* (Hebrews 10:12). Thus, in his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul wrote:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (Galatians 3:10)

And:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:13-14)

When they arrived at the top of the mount, Abraham laid Isaac on the wood of the offering. This was in obedience to God's command to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. It was then that *the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. 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*

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stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen (Genesis 22:11-14). Clearly then, to this point in time, Isaac was a type of Christ; but when he was lifted from the wood and the ram was offered in his stead, then Isaac became a type of a sinner saved by grace. After that Isaac again became a type of Christ again as he descended the mount alive, portraying the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Everything that happened that day was significant. Prior to their arrival at the top of the mount, Isaac had questioned, *Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?* Abraham had answered, *My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering.* In their immediate circumstances God provided Abraham with a ram to offer in Isaac's stead. Then, with the absolute sureness of God's promise, in the fullness of time, the second Person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, came to be *the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,* when *God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons* (Galatians 4:4-5).

The prophetic aspect of the events of those days was confirmed by the name Abraham ascribed to the mount. He called it *Jehovah-jireh*, which means, *in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.* Thus on that mount on that day, many of the details of what God would do through Jesus Christ were *seen* in the sacrifice of Isaac; and in the ram which was offered in his stead; and in their coming again from the mount.

Some time after the offering of Isaac Sarah died at age one hundred twenty-seven, when Isaac was thirty-seven. Assuming that Isaac was offered at age thirty-three, the same as our Lord,

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this gives us a span of four years between his sacrifice and the death of Sarah. If we allow each year to represent a decade, this takes us from the death of our Lord to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the death of Israel as a nation. It would seem then, in this respect, Sarah was also a type of the nation of Israel. Sarah, like Israel, tried to fulfill God's promise to Abraham by the works of the flesh; and Sarah, like Israel, died a short time after the offering of Isaac on the mount.

After Sarah's death Abraham sought a wife for Isaac. This compares to the preaching of the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles throughout this church age. Abraham sent his faithful and trusted servant into a far country to Abraham's kindred to seek a bride for Isaac. The selection of a bride for Isaac compares to the calling out of the world a body of believers, which will one day be the bride of Christ. Thus Abraham (as a representative of God) sent his servant (who can be compared to the Holy Spirit) into a far country (which can be compared to the world) to seek a bride (who can be compared to the redeemed) for his son (who can be compared to the Lord Jesus Christ).

The bride was found by the word of the father and the ministry of the servant. This is comparable to the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God. Thus the servant told Rebekah of Abraham's proposal and, in accordance with the foreknowledge and elective purpose of God, Rebekah responded favorably to the word of the father through the ministry of the servant. Then Rebekah (as a type of a believer) agreed to leave her father's house (a type of the world) and return with the servant to the land of the father (a type of heaven) and to become the bride of Isaac (a type of the Lord Jesus Christ).

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No one, after the post resurrection appearances of our Lord to His apostles, has ever seen our Lord face to face. Even so, like Rebekah, we have been called to leave our former lives for a new life with Christ. One day the trumpet shall sound and all of the redeemed shall see Him, Who redeemed them and espoused them to be His bride. Consequently:

Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. (Genesis 24:63-67)

If the death of Sarah represents the death of Israel as a nation, then the sorrow that followed can be compared to the seventieth week of Daniel, *the time of Jacob's trouble*. This week (the seven years of the great tribulation) will end with the second coming of Christ: when Israel will look on Him Whom they pierced and be saved. Then Christ will reign with His bride (the new Jerusalem: made up of redeemed Jews and Gentiles from all ages) in Christ's eternal Kingdom. There, like Isaac and Rebekah in his mother Sarah's tent, they will be comforted.

As far as I can discern, after his marriage to Rebekah, subsequent events in the life of Isaac no longer portray him as a type of Christ. Rather he is seen as a believer who may be subject to the Spirit of God and the Word of God, or as a believer who may be subject to the flesh. Thus, in the role of the spiritual man, when Isaac and Rebekah attempted to have children, they found that Rebekah was barren; and so Isaac did not resort to the flesh, as Abraham did with Hagar in similar circumstances, but *Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived* (Genesis 25:21).

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Barrenness in the wives of these two patriarchs is significant. It emphasizes the fact, that though we can *plant* and we can *water*, it is God alone Who gives the increase. There is no question that it is the will of the Lord for the church to bring forth fruit in abundance, but always in accordance with the will of the Lord; the methods of the Lord; in the Lord's time and by His power: because it is not possible that one chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world should fail to come to faith in Christ at God's foreordained time.

Christians, individually or collectively as a church, may fail to avail themselves of opportunities to proclaim the truth, but as Mordecai advised Esther: *[I]f thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place...* (Esther 4:14a). Therefore the church is to be faithful to its assigned tasks of preaching the gospel in all of the world and teaching its members the truth of the Word of God, grounding them in the faith. If the church is faithful in this, the Lord will give His increase in His time. This He cannot fail to do. When it comes to an increase, we must not forget, ... *the desolate [Hagar] hath many more children than she which hath an husband [Sarah]*.

It goes without saying, fleshly schemes have no place in the service of our Lord. Even so the desire for the greater increase is constantly addressed by the churches and is in evidence in my weekly mail. Very often it includes a letter or an advertisement with a new scheme, or an invitation to a seminar to learn how to finance the church, triple church attendance, reach the unreached, etc., etc. These sound like high and holy goals, but the problem is with the methods suggested for their accomplishment. They are akin to Sarah's scheme, they appeal to the flesh and are accomplished by the flesh. The instigators of these schemes cry out with Abraham, *O that*

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Ishmael [the flesh] might live before Thee. They do this unabashedly, apparently thinking they are fulfilling the promises of God by their wanton desire for more.

Continuing with the narrative, we find that Rebekah conceived because of the entreaty of Isaac and God's intervention in her behalf. In a similar manner the church conceives by the faithful preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God. Yet those who are redeemed retain their Adamic nature. Because of this, it will be readily observed that the redeemed have this treasure of eternal life in *earthen vessels*. Therefore we must not be deceived into thinking that by our own determination and will we can live unaffected and undaunted by our Adamic nature, which has a propensity for sin and fleshly manipulations. Only by the Word of God and the Spirit of God can these propensities be held in check.

This is emphasized by Rebekah's pregnancy, during which there was movement of an unusual nature within her womb, because *the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them* (Genesis 25:22-26).

Rebekah, like Isaac, portrays a believer in Jesus Christ. She also portrays the church. In the typology of Scripture, the *two manner of people* within her womb reveals the *old man* and the

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new man that are at work within the believer individually, or in the church collectively. The believer in Jesus Christ has the potential to walk in the Spirit, by means of the Word of God operating upon and through his regenerated spirit, or he has the capacity to depend upon himself, endeavoring to fulfill the work of God in the energy of the flesh. This last mode of operation produces more visible results than the former, as equivalent values of *wood, hay and stubble* are much greater in size than *gold, silver and precious stones*: all of which are representative of the works of believers, which will be tried by fire at the judgment seat of Christ (see I Corinthians 3:9-23). In this regard, the apostle Paul wrote:

If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former [manner of life] the old man, which is corrupt according to [the lusts of the deceit]; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created [according to the truth of righteousness and holiness]. (Ephesians 4:21-25)

As time progressed there came to be a famine in the land, which was comparable to the famine that was in the days of Abraham. Like his father, Isaac determined to go into Egypt to escape the effects of the famine. He took his family and started his journey south. As they approached Gerar, near the Egyptian border, the Lord appeared unto Isaac and said: *Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws* (Genesis 26:2-5).

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Isaac responded to this appearance of the Lord by obeying the Lord's command and so he and his family settled in Gerar. He was blessed to hear that the covenant God had confirmed with Abraham was now confirmed to him. All should have been well: he was dwelling where God told him to dwell; he was redeemed; he was in a covenant relationship with God; he had a redeemed wife and two sons; he had the promise that his seed would one day possess all of the land from the Nile river to the Euphrates river; his posterity was to be multiplied like the stars of heaven; and through his lineage the Christ was to come to provide a blessing for all of the families of the earth.

Nevertheless Isaac would learn that the flesh is ever with us. Just when we think we might have it under control, it can raise its ugly head and trip us up. While *Isaac dwelt in Gerar: ... the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon* (Genesis 26:6-7).

It is so easy to fall prey to the flesh, which is ever with us. This emphasizes why our relationship with the Lord is not based upon works of righteousness which we have done: not before our salvation, nor after it. It emphasizes, *There is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not*. It emphasizes that salvation is of the Lord; and it emphasizes the infinite wisdom of God in establishing our relationship with Him on the basis of a judicial standing, secured by our Lord Jesus Christ, so that each believer is reckoned *dead, and [his] life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is [his] life, shall appear, then shall [he] also appear with him in glory* (Colossians 3:3-4).

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This judicial relationship is possible because the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world by means of the virgin birth, so that He could be both God and Man. In His humanity, as a member of the nation of Israel and the tribe of Judah, He was heir to the throne of David. He was responsible to the law because of the covenant relationship between God and the nation of Israel. He was related to the entire human family, so that He could be its Federal Head. Consequently He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it: so that *one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled*. Not only did He fulfill the law, He fulfilled all righteousness. Then, with no sin of His own, He willingly took our sins upon Himself, dying *the Just for the unjust*. This, then, satisfied the Holiness, Righteousness and Justice of God, as well as His Love, Mercy and Grace: enabling God to be Just and the Justifier of him who does no more than to believe in Jesus: so that, ... *as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all [in Christ] be made alive*.

Like Isaac, we can *trust in the Lord with all of our heart*, or we can *lean to our own understanding*. When we trust in the Lord, we can be assured that He will direct our steps. When we trust in the flesh, we can be assured that the product, whether we call it good, or whether we call it evil, is unacceptable to God. The believer, then, is to live his life by the faith. The faith life that we are to live is based upon the body of revealed truth concerning Jesus Christ in His Person and in His Work.

When the believer lives by the faith, he pleases God. When he does not, it is impossible, no matter what he does and no matter the motive, to please God. The apostle Paul wrote, *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin*. But, praise God, even though there are lapses in the lives of

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believers, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. Consequently there is never a time when we, as believers, are void of the grace of God and the cleansing power of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!*