

CHAPTER SIX

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1 THE PROPHET JOB

After the confusion of languages at Babel, many generations passed before the Scripture records the next intervention by God in history. All through these passing years the Lord did not forget his promise to send a DELIVERER. Though the majority of people lived with little thought of God, each generation records those who believed his promises. One such individual was a prophet named *Job*.

Job knew that he had a problem—a sin condition. In one conversation with God, Job told the Lord that ...

Even if I washed myself with soap and my hands with washing soda, you would plunge me into a slime pit so that even my clothes would detest me.

Job 9:30-31

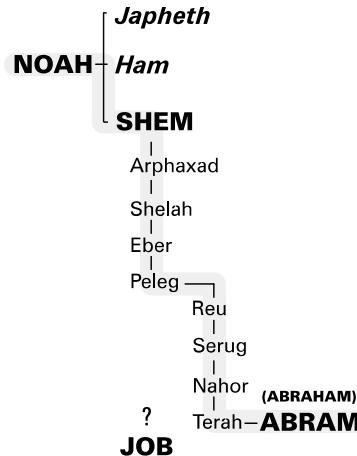
Job knew that washing his body would not make him right with a holy, sinless God. Even if he scrubbed himself clean on the outside, inside, Job was still a sinner deserving God's punishment. Job feared God's judgment on his sin. He wished that there might be someone—a go-between—a mediator who could approach God on his behalf and, placing one hand on Job and another on God, plead for mercy.

If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod [of judgment] from me...

Job 9:33,34

Although Job regularly offered an animal sacrifice as a death payment for his sin, Job seemed to understand that the animal sacrifice could not take away his sin-debt. It was only a temporary covering. Perhaps it was that knowledge, as well as Job's awe of God's greatness and uncompromising holiness, that prompted him to ask an all-important question.

“... how can a mortal be righteous before God?”



Job wondered how he could get rid of his sin and gain a righteousness equal to God's righteousness so he could be accepted in God's holy presence. God's reply could probably be summarized like this: *"Job, just trust me and I will take care of your sin problem. I will provide you with the righteousness needed to be in my holy presence. Trust me."*

And Job did just that. He trusted God. He spoke of THE ANOINTED ONE, THE DELIVERER coming to earth to somehow fulfill God's promise to Adam and Eve to save mankind from sin's terrible consequences. Job called THE DELIVERER his *Redeemer*. He said...

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Job 19:25-27

Job knew that when he died, he would see God. It was something he looked forward to because he trusted God and was in a right relationship with him. Later on, we will find out why Job called THE PROMISED DELIVERER his *Redeemer*.

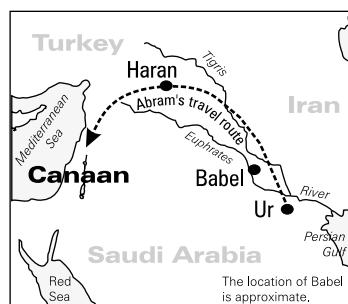
2 THE PROPHET ABRAHAM

Another couple who believed God's promises was Abram and Sarai.

Now Sarai was barren; she had no children. *Genesis 11:30*

Abram was born in the country we now know as Iraq. His hometown was the city of Ur, just south of Babel. Following the Lord's instructions, he left home and moved to Haran. It was here that God spoke to him a second time.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, ... and go to the land I will show you." So Abram left, as the LORD had told him ... Abram was seventy-five years old¹ when he set out from Haran. *Genesis 12:1,4*



For Abram this was a big step. He couldn't consult an atlas, research the country on the Web, or discuss plans with a travel agent. He didn't even know where he was going! God had not told him. As he traveled, he would have to trust God to lead him one day at a time. His unknown destination was Canaan which is modern-day Palestine.

So they came to the land of Canaan. And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 12:5,7 NKJV

Because Abram believed God to be his Savior from sin's consequences, he offered a blood sacrifice on an altar as an *atonement-covering* for his sin. Although the animal offerings were only a picture of what was needed for sin to be removed, Abram's sacrifice was clear evidence that he recognized the need to have a substitute pay the death penalty for him. He was trusting God just as Abel, Noah and all the other righteous people had done in the ages past.

Abram lived a semi-nomadic life, so much so that the locals called him a *hebrew* which carried the connotation of a *wanderer, the one from beyond*. Because Abram spent a lot of time in one area, the local town took on the name Hebron. From this time on, Abram and his descendants were referred to as *Hebrews*.

FOUR PROMISES

God also gave Abram four specific promises:

1. *I will make you into a great nation...*²
2. *I will make your name great...*³
3. *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse...*
4. *...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*

Genesis 12:2,3

When God **blesses**, he bestows favor and well-being.
When God **curses**, he brings misfortune.

God's first promise was good news to Abram. In order to become a great nation, he would have to father children, but since he had no offspring and Sarai was past childbearing age, he was perplexed as to how this would happen. But God had promised, so it must be true.

The last promise hinged on the first, and was a direct reference

to THE DELIVERER. God was telling Abram that one of his descendants would be THE ANOINTED ONE, and that HE would be a blessing to everyone. The Scripture says Abram believed God and rejoiced at “*the thought of seeing*” the day of THE DELIVERER’s arrival.⁴

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless . . . ?”

God . . . took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1,2,5,6

This last sentence is loaded with meaning. We will look at three words that have far-reaching implications. They are the words *righteousness*, *credited* and *belief*. The last one is so important I will commit an entire section to it.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

We saw earlier that the word *righteousness* is used in reference to God’s perfection; that he is flawless, holy, pure, clean, totally without blemish or sin.

CREDITED

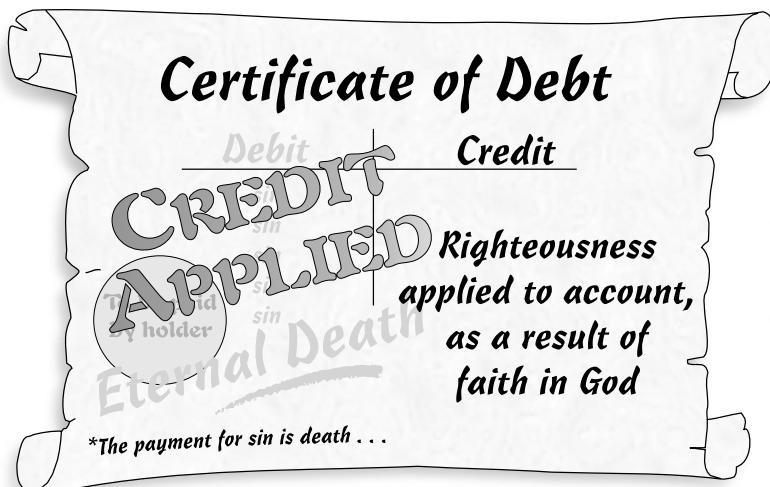
The word *credited* carries the thought of settling a monetary account through a payment. The term has common usage today in our financial world. We like seeing money *credited* to our bank account as it shows we’ve been on the receiving end! But what does the Scripture mean when it says,

“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”?

Genesis 15:6

Remember that *Certificate of Debt* that every human has as a result of sin? Well, Abram had one too. But because Abram believed God’s promises, God placed a credit on his account. He gave Abram *righteousness*.

It was like God was saying, “Abram, because you are trusting me, I’m going to make an advance payment on your sin account. I’m going to place *my* perfection on your ledger. Now you need to understand, *my* righteousness far exceeds your sinfulness. What I am giving you will more than offset all your sin. You can consider your sin-debt as paid. And because what I am giving you is *my* righteousness, it will not only take care of your sin-debt, but it will fully provide you with all the perfection needed to live with me in Heaven.”



*Romans 6:23 paraphrased

The Scripture says Abram had such confidence in God keeping his word, that he ...

... was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:10

Though Abram’s body would eventually die, Abram would not experience the horrific penalty associated with the second death. He knew he would live forever with God in Heaven.

Earlier on we asked that two-sides-of-the-same-coin question, “How can we get rid of our sin and gain a righteousness equal to God’s righteousness so we can be accepted in his presence?” For Abram, the answer was simple: trust the Lord, believe his promises, and God will provide.

3 GENUINE BELIEF

This third word, belief, can be easily misunderstood. We need to understand some things about it as it appears in the Word of God:

- ❖ The words or concepts of *belief*, *faith*, *trust* and *confidence* are often used interchangeably.

Abram **believed** the LORD. | He **believed** what God said.

Abram put **faith** in the LORD. | He had **faith** in His Word.

Abram **trusted** the LORD. | He knew God to be **trustworthy**.

Abram had **confidence** in the LORD. | His **confidence** was in God alone.

- ❖ True belief is built on fact, not feelings. When you sit in a chair, you trust that it will hold you up. You don't sit in it because you have a wonderful feeling or an overwhelming passion about chairs. Rather you observe that the chair is substantial, and based on that fact, you rest yourself upon it. Abram's faith rested on fact—God's promise. It was a matter of simple arithmetic.

God said, "You will have a son"

+ God is Great, he can do anything.

= Abram will have a son

- ❖ It's not the *amount* of faith⁵ you have, but *in whom* you are placing your trust. Abram's faith may have wavered at times, but his confidence was firmly placed in God.
- ❖ True biblical belief does not stop with mental assent to the facts. If it did, it would not be genuine faith.

Faith can be illustrated the following way: Two friends are at a county fair. One asks the other, "Do you believe that the roller coaster will stay on those tracks?" The other replies, "Of course I do!" Then the first friend says, "Okay, let's go for a ride!" If the second friend is reluctant and begins making excuses for not joining in the fun, it's doubtful that he really believes. Although he may say so with his mouth, more importantly, he doubts it in his heart.

Roller coasters may deserve misgivings and there may be other good reasons for not taking a ride, but the point is this: belief or faith affects our actions.

Abram's belief went beyond agreement. He staked his life, his reputation, and his actions on it. Because he believed, he was obedient to God and traveled to a foreign land. Because he believed, he offered sacrifices, trusting God to save him from sin's consequences.

At the same time, it's important to understand that Abram's obedience wasn't an attempt to prove to God or to others the genuineness of his faith. Rather, because he trusted God, the natural result was that he did the things God wanted him to do. So when we read the words, *"Abram believed the LORD..."*, we need to be thinking of all that is implied.

As we study further, we'll understand more facts and we will see in greater depth how faith becomes a determining factor as to man's sin-debt being paid. For now, it is enough to know that God honors those who put faith in him.

4 HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

As the years passed and Abram and Sarai still didn't have children, they decided to take things into their own hands. In accordance with the culturally accepted method of dealing with childlessness, Sarai took her slave girl, Hagar, and gave her to Abram. He had a child by her—a boy they named *Ishmael*. Abram had a real live descendant now—one who could fulfill God's promise. There was only one problem. They had done things their way, not God's way.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."

Genesis 17:1,5

Abram, now Abraham, had no problem with what God was saying. After all, he had a descendant. Hagar had given him a son—Ishmael!

God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Genesis 17:15,16

This wasn't such good news. Why was God mentioning Sarah at all? Did God not know about Hagar? Abraham had a son—Ishmael! Could not THE PROMISED DELIVERER come through him? Why was it necessary for THE DELIVERER to descend through Sarah? She was so old! It was impossible!

Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"

And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"

Genesis 17:17,18

Abraham pointed out to God that Ishmael was a candidate.

Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you...and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."

Genesis 17:19-21

So there it was. God would only honor that which was done His way. Sarah was to have the promised child in one year's time, and God had given the child a name, Isaac. God had not forgotten Ishmael either. We will read more about them later.

THREE VISITORS

So Abraham and Sarah waited. In the meantime God came again, this time in the form of a man—and with him two angels who also appeared as humans.

The Lord: *"Where is your wife Sarah?"*

Abraham: *"There, in the tent."*

The Lord: *"I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."*

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

The Lord (to Abraham): “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah: ... was afraid, so she lied and said: “I did not laugh.”

The Lord: “Yes, you did laugh.”

Genesis 18:9-15

It must have been a revelation to Sarah to know that her thoughts were being read by an all-knowing God. She tried to deny that she had laughed. Denial doesn’t work with God. He said, “Yes, you did laugh!” God holds a person responsible for his own actions.

Abraham and Sarah believed that God would keep his promise, but as we can see, their faith went through ups and downs. At times there were struggles with doubt, but the wonderful thing about God is this—he says he will honor faith the size of a mustard seed.⁵ Mustard seeds are very small. *What counts is not the amount of faith you have, but in whom you are placing your faith.* Abraham and Sarah were trusting God.

5 ISHMAEL & ISAAC

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.

Genesis 21:1-3

God had kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah, even in their old age. He always keeps his word and delights in doing the impossible. Abraham now had two sons—Iсаac by Sarah and Ishmael by Hagar. Though this old man would have other children, these two are the ones we know the most about.

When Ishmael was about sixteen years old, and Isaac was only two, an event happened that changed both Ishmael’s life ... and world history.

Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking.

Genesis 21:9 NASB

Ishmael was making fun of Isaac. Ishmael, at 16 years of age, did not understand God's plan to make Isaac the father of a great nation which would channel into the world the prophets, the Scriptures, and ultimately THE DELIVERER himself. As for Sarah, she did not appreciate Ishmael poking fun at her son.

Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac."

The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son.

Genesis 21:10,11 NASB

Although God had said THE PROMISED DELIVERER would come through Isaac, it did not diminish the fact that Ishmael was still Abraham's son. There was an obvious father's love for his boy. Abraham was caught between his wife's protective jealousy and his own affection.

But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. "And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant."

Genesis 21:12,13 NASB

In a sense, God was telling Abraham to let Hagar have her freedom.

So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes.

Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept.

Genesis 21:14-16 NASB

You can imagine Hagar's despair. From her perspective, she was doing her best to care for her son without help or home in the world. In the midst of her sobs, she had forgotten that God cared for her and Ishmael.

God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him."

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink.

God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer.

Genesis 21:17-20 NASB

The Scripture says that God was with Ishmael as he grew into manhood. Although it was through Isaac that the Lord would send THE DELIVERER, God also wanted to bless Ishmael. The Lord wishes to be the God of all people. Every individual has access to the Lord if they approach him God's way.

Just as God promised, Ishmael did indeed become a great nation. Many of the Arab nations today directly trace their lineage back to this man.

He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Genesis 21:21 NASB

6 THE PROVIDER

The biblical narrative now turns to an event in Abraham's life that he would never forget.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

Then 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."

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the

donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Genesis 22:1-18

This is a most profound story. At first glance it appears that God is endorsing child sacrifice!! But look deeper.

TAKE YOUR SON

The setting is simple. God asked Abraham to take his son and sacrifice him on an altar—to put him to death. This is no idle request. When the Word of God refers to this son as being Abraham's only son, it does not mean that Abraham had no other offspring. Instead the Lord was focusing Abraham on the one son from whom THE ANOINTED ONE would descend. For years he had waited for this child, and Isaac was the very son that God had promised would not only be the father of countless descendants, but the one from whom THE PROMISED DELIVERER would come. The Lord had been very specific about that and it was obvious that a dead son could have no offspring!

God's request must have bewildered Abraham. In all probability he had witnessed the human sacrifices practiced by other nations of his day and knew it was a common form of appeasing their gods. Yet God's command to sacrifice his son went against everything Abraham knew about the Creator. God, in his love, had promised Isaac as a descendant that would bear many children. There was no earthly way to harmonize God's previous promise with His present command. And yet Abraham had learned that the Lord was utterly trustworthy, so he did just as God requested. Calling his son, he saddled the family donkey and taking the trappings for sacrifice-making, he set off to do the Lord's bidding. His heart must have been torn with anguish! Being obedient was an immense step for Abraham, but that step showed his absolute faith in God's goodness.

The Scripture does not leave us guessing Abraham's thoughts. It tells us that Abraham clung to God's promise, convinced that even if he sacrificed Isaac, the Lord would raise him from the dead.

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice... Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and... receive Isaac back from death. Hebrews 11:17,19

The Scripture says that God was testing Abraham's faith. We'll understand the reason why in a few more pages. This ultimate

test of offering his own son revealed to Abraham, and to us, his genuine confidence in the Lord.

Abraham and his son, along with two servants, headed off to the mountains of Moriah. When they got nearer, Abraham and his son went on alone. Abraham carried the knife and the fire—his son carried the wood. Somewhere along the way the boy queried his father. No doubt, the lad had witnessed many sacrifices and it didn't take a college degree for him to realize that one of the essentials was missing—the sacrifice itself. Where was the lamb?

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Genesis 22:7

One can't help but wonder if Isaac was thinking about the prevalence of child sacrifice in neighboring religions. He, too, was trusting in the Lord and in no small way! When his father replied that God Himself would provide the lamb, Isaac went on willingly. It says they went together.

God showed them the exact place to erect the altar on one of the mountains of Moriah. Many years later, the Jewish temple and then the Dome of the Rock would be built on Mount Moriah.

BOUND

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Genesis 22:9

Abraham's son was no infant. The Hebrew word translated *boy* was used of young males all the way up to military age. He was certainly old enough to put up a fight and, in spite of the fact that Abraham was not a young man, there is no record of a struggle. It is obvious that the son willingly submitted to his father, an act which showed implicit confidence in his dad whom he knew to be a follower of God's Word.

Once bound on the altar, Abraham's son was helpless. He was under direct and specific orders from God to be slain. There was no way he could save himself. The Scripture says Abraham stretched out his arm and took the knife. You can

see the old man's hand shake. His jaw sags. His heart is about to break. This is *his* son! The strain of the moment is incredible. Slowly the trembling arm is raised and in the somber light of the day, the cold metal of the knife glints. Deliberately, the mind commits itself to the plunge, and then ... and then God intervened. The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven and said ...

"Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Genesis 22:12 NKJV

There must have been tears. You can see Dad and son weeping in overwhelming relief. God had intervened. The sentence of death was gone!—at least for the son it was gone. But still there was a death.



A SUBSTITUTE

The Scripture says that God provided an animal.

*Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram
caught by its horns.*

Genesis 22:13

Entangled in this way, the sheep could not injure itself in an effort to be freed.

He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Genesis 22:13

There was death all right, but it was the ram's death instead of Abraham's son. The son went free because a ram died. God had provided a substitute. Abraham found that God is truly a ...

... Savior in time of distress ...

Jeremiah 14:8 NASB

This event so imprinted itself on Abraham's mind that he named the mountain as a reminder of what God is like.

So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

Genesis 22:14



Notice how Abraham named the mountain "*The LORD Will Provide*"? We just saw that God provided a substitute sacrifice. Why did he not name the mountain, "*The LORD Has Provided*"? This question will be answered in a later chapter.

A LESSON FOR ALL

The story ends with God reaffirming his promise to Abraham. His offspring would be many—the whole nation of Israel. Included in God's promise was the fact that THE ANOINTED ONE would be one of the descendants of Abraham and Isaac. It was said that He would be a blessing to all people.

"I swear by myself," declares the LORD... "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Genesis 22:16,18

God's request of Abraham to sacrifice his son was a *once in a lifetime*—*once in the history of man* sort of request. God wanted to communicate certain truths not only to Abraham, but also to us—truths having to do with judgment, faith, and deliverance through a substitute.

Just as Abraham's son was under God's direct order to die, so all mankind is under the sentence of death.⁶ His son could not save himself. But Abraham trusted the Lord, believing that somehow his loving God would make the difference. And God did intervene. He provided a way of escape through a substitute. It was a life for a life—the innocent dying for the guilty.

Just as Abel had offered a sacrifice to die in his place, so the ram had died in the place of Abraham's son. And just as God had viewed Abel's sacrifice as acceptable, so God saw fit to provide a ram as an acceptable sacrifice in the place of Abraham's son. It was God's idea. It was man coming to God in God's way, believing that His Word was true.