

Peace be with you, listening friends. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

In our studies in the Torah, we have explored many wonderful and important stories about the prophet of God, Abraham.

Today we come to the most significant lesson from the life of Abraham: the true story of "*Tabaski*" (**Abraham's sacrifice**) and what it means.

Tabaski is a familiar word in some African languages. As a verb it means *to sacrifice a ram on the feast day*.

As a noun it means *the Muslim feast of "Id al-Adha" commemorating Abraham's sacrifice of his son*.

In our last lesson, we learned how God gave Abraham and Sarah a child in their old age, thus fulfilling what He had promised long before. Their son's name was Isaac.

God had promised Abraham that, through the descendants of Isaac, He would bring forth a new nation, through which all the nations of the world would be blessed.

We also saw how Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, left Abraham's household, and went to live in the land of Egypt. Thus, only Isaac remained at home, the one born according to God's promise.

One day God asked Abraham to do an astonishing and difficult thing. In the Torah, the book of Genesis, chapter twenty-two, the Scriptures say:

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."

What!? What was God asking of Abraham? He was commanding Abraham to take his beloved son to a far away mountain, and offer him as a burnt sacrifice! How could this be? Abraham had waited for twenty-five long years to have the son which God had promised him, and now God is telling him to slay his son as a sacrifice!

How did Abraham answer God? Did he argue with the words of God because they were difficult to accept? The Scripture says:

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 about which God had told him.

For three days, Abraham and his son and two servants walked and walked and walked, heading toward the mountain of which God had spoken.

Abraham's heart was ready to break as he neared that fearful place where he would have to slay his beloved son and cremate him!

Of course, we who are reading the story today know that God was only testing Abraham's faith, but Abraham didn't know that! What God had asked of him was a terrible and painful trial!

Next the Scriptures say:

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 of which God had told him, 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."

This story is very important and deserves clarification.

The story of Abraham's sacrifice has three sides: ***a historical side, a symbolic side and a prophetic side.***

In other words, to understand Abraham's sacrifice, we need to understand three things:

First, what really took place?

Second, what did the sacrifice actually symbolize?

And third, that Abraham's prophecy concerned an event that was yet to take place.

Concerning **the historical side**, we have read today how God **tested Abraham's faith** and **saved his son** from death by means of a sacrificial ram.

This happened about four thousand years ago in the place where Jerusalem is located today. That, in short, is the "historical" side of the story of Abraham's sacrifice.

Concerning **the symbolic side** of the story, God's Word tells us that **we are all like Abraham's son**. We read that God, in His justice, **condemned Abraham's son to death**.

We too are all condemned sinners and deserve God's judgment. But we also read how God, in His grace, **saved Abraham's son from death**. Similarly, God, in His grace, has come to our rescue in providing a means by which we can be saved.

What is that way of salvation?

The story of Abraham's sacrifice teaches us that **the way of salvation** established by God is the way of **the Perfect Sacrifice**.

In today's story, we saw how God provided a sheep to die in the place of Abraham's son.

Only the horns of the sheep were caught in the bush; the sheep's skin was not torn.

If the sheep had a single flaw, it could not have replaced Abraham's son on the altar.

But the sacrifice which God provided was **a perfect sheep**, without blemish.

In our study in the first chapters of the Torah, we learned about the way of salvation which God established.

Do you remember what that way was?

After Adam and Eve sinned, God decreed that, since the payment for sin is death, there could be no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood.

Thus, all who wanted to have their sins forgiven were required to take **an animal without blemish**, slay it, and present it to God as a burnt offering.

The innocent animal had to die in the place of the guilty person. This was the only way by which God could forgive the sins of the sons of Adam, without compromising His justice.

There is something else that we must remember, it is this: the Scriptures say that sacrificial animals were merely *"symbolic of that which was to come; a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves*.

The Scriptures say that it is impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins."

The blood of animals cannot pay for sin because animals and humans are not of equal value.

Thus, we learn that the sheep which replaced Abraham's son on the altar was **an illustration of a greater, more perfect sacrifice.**

The Word of God shows us that the sheep which died in the place of Abraham's son was **a symbol of the holy Redeemer** who was to come into the world and **die for all sinners**, so that God could forgive everyone who believes in Him.

In short, this is what Abraham's sacrificial sheep symbolizes: It is an illustration of the Savior whom God promised to send into the world to save sinners from His righteous judgment!

Concerning **the prophetic side** of the story, do you remember what Abraham said to his son as they were climbing the mountain?

He told him: "**God Himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice.**" And do you remember what Abraham announced after he had slain the ram, and burned it in place of his son?

He called the place of sacrifice: "**The Lord will provide.**" And the prophet Moses, who wrote the Torah, adds: "**And to this day it is said: 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided!'"**

What was the reason for this? Why did the prophet Abraham say, "**The Lord will provide**"? Why did he not say, "Praise be to God! The Lord **has** provided a sacrifice!"?

Friends, this is a question of **tremendous importance**, because the answer to it contains the Good News of God's Word, which each of us must understand and believe!

Why did Abraham call the place, "*The Lord **will** provide*"?

This is why:

Abraham was announcing an event that was to yet take place on those same mountains where the sheep had replaced his son on the altar.

In short, Abraham was declaring: "I praise God, because he has provided a sheep to replace my son on the altar.

However, I am telling you that one day, on this same mountain, **God will provide another sacrifice** which will be far greater than the ram which saved my son today from the knife and the fire.

Yes, the Sacrifice which God will provide shall have the power to save the children of Adam from eternal death in the fire which never goes out!

God will send down a holy Redeemer who will die as a sacrifice - the innocent for the guilty, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish!"

This is God's Good News for all people which Abraham was announcing when he said, "*God Himself **will** provide **the lamb** for the sacrifice!*"

Before we conclude the story of "Abraham's sacrifice" today, each of us needs to know that, approximately two thousand years after Abraham prophesied that God would provide a Sacrifice for sinners, **God fulfilled Abraham's prophecy.**

We cannot say much about it today, but those of you who know the Gospel know the story of the Redeemer.

You know that He was born of a virgin woman who belonged to the family line of Abraham and Isaac, just as God had promised.

The Redeemer who was to die in the place of sinners had no earthly father.

He came from heaven, and thus, did not inherit Adam's sinful nature.

He had no sin; He had no blemish. That is why He was worthy to die as **the Perfect Sacrifice**; as a substitute for the guilty children of Adam.

When we come to the Gospel, we will learn that this Savior's name is **Jesus**.

The name *Jesus* means **God saves**. Some call Jesus "*Isa*."

When we come to the Gospel Writings we will read how there was a prophet named John, whose Qur'anic name was *Yahya*, whom God sent to prepare the way before Jesus the Redeemer.

One day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "*Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*"

Why did the prophet John call Jesus "*the Lamb of God*"?

Because Jesus was born to shed His blood as a sacrifice which takes away sin.

Like the sheep that died in the place of Abraham's son, the Redeemer came to die for all of Adam's descendants.

Jesus is the perfect and final Sacrifice of whom Abraham prophesied when he said:

"God Himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice."

In the Gospel we will read how Jesus willingly delivered Himself up to his enemies, and how they nailed Him to a cross.

Jesus the Redeemer, whom God provided, fulfilled the prophetic and the symbolic meaning of Abraham's sacrificial sheep.

That is why, just before Jesus died, He cried out, ***"It is finished!"*** In an African proverb this means: *"All is complete, everything is perfect."*

And three days later, God confirmed the perfection and power of the Redeemer's sacrifice by raising Him from the dead!

Jesus is the One who perfectly fulfilled the meaning of Abraham's sacrifice.

And did you know that the location where Jesus died in the place of sinners was in the same mountains where Abraham slaughtered the sheep in place of his son?

Do you know the location of those two sacrifices? Yes, it is Jerusalem.

Dear friends, whoever you are, wherever you are, God is commanding you to turn from your wrong ideas and futile works, and place your hope completely in the perfect and final Sacrifice that He has provided. For the Scriptures say: *"Jesus the Redeemer Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness;*

By His wounds you have been healed."

Today we saw that Abraham's son accepted the sacrifice which God provided for him.

How about you? **Have you accepted the Sacrifice which God has provided for you?**

We thank you for listening....God bless you as you carefully consider the meaning of Abraham's words from Mount Moriah when he said,

"God himself will provide the Lamb...On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided!"