

Ramifications

Easter Sunday

April 8, 2012

I love this old photo of a boy standing outside the Temple area in Jerusalem and staring off toward the Mount of Olives.



We're given *one story* from Jesus' boyhood, and it takes place here, and the setting wouldn't have looked that much different. After describing Jesus' birth, Luke says ...

And the child grew and became strong; he was *filled with wisdom*, [Didn't he come *pre-filled*? Or do you think this is maybe one of the things Philippians 2:7 is describing when it says Christ Jesus "emptied himself" and become man?] and the grace of God was upon him. Every year his parents went to Jerusalem [In March or April] for the Feast of the Passover. When he was *twelve years old*, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. – *Luke 2:40-42 NIV*

The custom was commanded and detailed in the Law of Moses.

... on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family ... The animals you choose must be year-old males [They must be ram-lambs] without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. [They can be lambs or kids] Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. – *Exodus 12:3b-6 NIV*



And in Jerusalem, there was a *national* Passover lamb, and elaborate religious ceremonies, and a city-wide celebration. I can picture Joseph pointing out the significant sites that Jesus has been studying in scripture: "This is the City of David, the home of King Solomon!"



I can hear Joseph saying, "2000 years ago, the Lord commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. And because of his faith, he was promised that the Messiah would come through his offspring. *And that's you!* The Passover Lamb is a reflection of the ram God gave to Abraham as a substitute sacrifice." "And the promise was given to Abraham *right here* on Mount Moriah!"¹

¹ Compare Genesis 22:14; Isaiah 2:3, 30:29

[God] said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, [Ishmael was an illegitimate] and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." ... [So Abraham, Isaac, and two servants make a three-day journey] 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 was confident that God would resurrect his son] Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, [He even carried the wood of his own sacrifice up Mount Moriah] 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 [The saddest altar ever built to God!] 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 [lamb] 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." – *Genesis 22:1-14 NIV*

And 12-year-old Jesus is on *that* mountain. At twelve, Jewish boys came under obligation to observe the ordinances of the law; and I imagine young Jesus taking it all in with rapt fascination.



On the 10th, the High Priest went to Bethlehem to select the perfect lamb. Everyone in the city prepared palm branches and lined the parade route from the North Gate to the temple. And when the lamb appeared, the priests cried out, "Hosanna in the highest, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord" And the people waved their palm branches and joined in. What was going through Jesus' young mind as he watched that lamb? Was he contemplating Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Messiah?

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter ... - *Isaiah 53:7b NIV*

21 years later, while they were waiting for the national Passover lamb, Jesus rode in and took the exact same path to the temple. And when the people lining the streets recognized him as the teacher and miracle worker who had just raised Lazarus from the dead they waved their palm branches and cried out to *him!*

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." – *Luke 19:39-40 NIV*

12-year-old Jesus watched the lamb being led to the temple where it would be examined for purity for four days. The same way he would be questioned by the Priests and Pharisees as an adult. But they will only look to condemn. Just before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, he calls them on their hypocrisy.

Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? ... Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad. – *John 8:46, 56-57 NIV*

This is an incredible clue to what's going on. And it's an invitation to examine God's Word. *When* did Abraham see Jesus' day? Two times in the story it says Abraham *saw* something.

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place ... [He saw the *place*, Mount **Moriah**] – *Genesis 22:4a NIV*

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. – *Genesis 22:13 NIV*



Can you imagine how Abraham rejoiced when he saw that substitutionary ram-lamb sacrifice with its head in a thicket? I'm thinking it's a story that would've spread far and wide!

In the 1920s, an archaeologist named Leonard Woolley dug up two matching statues in a royal cemetery in Abraham's birthplace, the city of Ur, from around the time of Abraham (2400^{BC}). He named them, for obvious reasons, Ram in a Thicket.

Abraham's ram in the thicket represents the Messiah, crowned in thorns, as a substitutionary sacrifice to replace the Passover Lamb.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed the ground with "thorns and thistles". (Gen 3:18) The crown of thorns symbolizes the sin Jesus was bearing and the curse he was breaking. He became the King of the curse, for *us*! But, those who were cross examining Jesus were only looking to condemn.

"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" [This is God's name, as revealed to Moses] At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. – *John 8:57-59 NIV*

Jesus isn't claiming to have lived *before* Abraham; he's claiming *eternal existence* and equality with God! It's such a forceful statement that they immediately try to kill him for blasphemy. God revealed his name to Moses from the burning bush; (Ex 3:14) or, as the more literal versions translate the Hebrew term used ...

... in the flame of a burning **thorn bush**. – *Acts 7:30b NAS*

The One who pronounced the curse of thorns, now appears in thorns, to promise Moses deliverance of his people from Egypt. And the celebration of that deliverance is ... Passover! And who stops Abraham, and offers the ram in the thicket? Up until that moment only God speaks to Abraham. Now someone else jumps in when it comes to the substitutionary, ram-lamb sacrifice.

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." [This angel is equating itself with God] – *Genesis 22:11-12 NIV*

Jews believe when God needed to appear, he took the form of an angel. But this angel doesn't *appear*. He calls out "from heaven".

The **angel of the Lord** called to Abraham **from heaven** a second time and said, "I swear by **myself**, declares **the Lord**, [Well, now he's just calling himself God!] 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 22:15-18 NIV

Jesus is not only the Messiah that Abraham was promised; He's the One who *promised* him! "Before Abraham was born, I am!" Jesus is the angel *and* the angel is God. Jesus as Messiah is God in flesh. And he died on the very day (John 19:14-18) and time (Mark 15:34-37) the Passover Lambs were killed (The "ninth hour" i.e. 3:00pm; translated as "twilight") and rose to validate the sacrifice!

Back to 12-year-old Jesus: when the National Lamb was killed, the High Priest would say "I thirst", take a sip of water, and say "It is finished"; these would be Jesus' last words on the cross. (John 19:28-30) And as twilight came for young Jesus, all over the city, as had been done for centuries, the family Passover lambs were stretched onto wooden crosses and roasted for the feast.

After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, [The temple was madhouse during Passover, this is the first chance a 12-year-old boy has to get to the "big guns"] but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. [It was a big group] Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. [Can you imagine? "We've lost the Messiah!"] After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. – Luke 2:40-47 NIV

"Why would God test Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son, when scripture tells us that child sacrifice is an abomination to God? Is there a deeper message contained within? Does the ram symbolize a substitutionary sacrifice? Does the thicket symbolize the thorns and thistles of the curse? Why does the angel call itself Lord, though it doesn't appear? Why does Isaiah say that the Messiah will be, 'despised and rejected by men' and, 'the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all' and, 'He was oppressed and afflicted' and he 'will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities' and he'll be, 'led like a lamb to the slaughter'? (Isaiah 53:6-11) Is the Passover Lamb and the ram in the thicket symbolic of the coming Messiah?"

Can you imagine being the Rabbi in Jesus' hometown?! "Today we're talking about King David ... and ... *yes Jesus*, you *already* have a question? No more Isaiah!"

When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? *Your father* and I [Little Jesus is used to referring to Joseph as *father*] have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. [They'd been looking where a *boy* might be. But, he's *twelve* now, and *obligated to the law*] "Didn't you know I had to be in *my Father's* house?" [In his first recorded words, he refers to *God* as *Father*, declaring himself *God's Son*] But they did not understand what he was saying to them. [He's gonna get that a lot.] Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. – Luke 2:48-52 NIV