

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-20: "Child Abuse"(Part 9: Jesus as the Second Isaac)

Commenting on Genesis 22, Bart Ehrman (the Christian who became an agnostic) writes, "The God who had promised [Abraham] a son now wants him to destroy that son; the God who commands his people not to murder has now ordered the father of the Jews to sacrifice his own child."¹ However, we have noted how the context demonstrates that God never *wanted him to destroy that son* and even if He did, the son would be raised from the dead on the spot. Moreover, Ehrman is speaking better than he knows without embracing the theological implications, just as Caiaphas the high priest spoke better than he knew about Jesus:

John 11:47-52, Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." 51 Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.

The story of Abraham and his "one and only son" Isaac actually foreshadows God the Father's offering the redemptive sacrifice of the "second Isaac"—His "one and only Son (John 3:16). Rather than this being forced upon the Son—divine "child abuse," as Richard Dawkins calls it—the Father is not pitted against the Son. Christ willingly laid down his life and then took it up again:

John 10:15-18, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 "And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd. 17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

¹Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem, How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (San Francisco, HarperOne, 2008) 169.

God *sent* His Son into the world (John 3:17) to bear Israel's and humanity's curse and alienation on the cross. Yet, God the Son Himself *came* into the world to save it. With three wills of Father, Son, and Spirit united as one, the Triune God have His very self to rescue and redeem humankind:

2 Corinthians 5:19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

While there has been a shift in the last one hundred years or so away from identifying deity as being involved in the suffering and sins on the cross, deity's involvement on the cross has always been part of orthodox Christianity (by the way, everything that I have been teaching on the omnipotence, omniscience, timelessness, and genderlessness of *Esse* has been what the church has taught and affirmed from the beginning and throughout most of church history—before liberalism and man-centered theology began to take over; furthermore, anytime someone has a new idea of God that is not found in church history, it is probably heretical). We will look at this in more detail Sunday when we will celebrate communion.

Abraham's unquestioning yet difficult obedience to the covenant God not only helped shape and confirm Israel's identity in Abraham but also provided a context for understanding God's immense self-giving love in the gift of his Son. When Abraham's dedication to God's command was confirmed, God said, "Now I know (language of accommodation, God always knew) that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Gen. 22:12). Harking back to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Paul uses this story to remind believers of God's supreme dedication to them:

Romans 8:31-32 Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac anticipated God's self-sacrifice in Christ. Abraham demonstrated his faithfulness to God, and God's sacrifice demonstrated His faithfulness to us. This kind of demand God made of Abraham was one the Triune God was willing to carry out Himself. Like Isaac, but with far more intentionality, Jesus Christ *voluntarily* became the sacrifice for all of our sins:

1 Peter 2:21-25 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Ephesians 5:2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

We have no passive victim here. Jesus accepted the cross willingly for you and for me and for every person who ever lived. The sacrifice-your-own-son *test* for Abraham was not child abuse, God never intended Abraham to sacrifice his son. However, the sacrifice of the Son of God was no mere test. Jesus fulfilled what Isaac typified. No, the crucifixion was not act of divine child abuse, it was the means whereby God actually, for the first time, entered into our pain and sinfulness in the second person of the Trinity and provided for the whole world everlasting forgiveness, righteousness, love, and incommensurate blessedness far beyond what one could ask or imagine. Wow! What a deal!

John 19:30 When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.

Ephesians 5:2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Hebrews 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

1 Corinthians 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—

Revelation 21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, 4 and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." 6 And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

Blessed in and only by His Grace,

Pastor Don