



The God Who Spares Not His Only Son

Behold Our God! – Read the Bible for Life Series #3

Genesis 22

Pastor David Sunday

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Please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 22. Let's read this exquisite portion of God's Word and marvel at how profound it is and how it points us to **Behold Our God** in the face of Jesus Christ.

¹After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ²He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." ³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." ⁶And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. ⁷And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

⁹When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ¹²He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

¹⁵And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

This is God's holy Word. Thanks be to God.

I have on my bulletin board at home, a prayer I've written out that I turn to often, asking God to make this truly the prayer of my heart. It says,

Lord, I am willing
to receive what You give;
to lack what You withhold;
to relinquish what You take;
to suffer what You inflict;
to be what You require;
and to do what You send me to do.

That is the attitude of a believer. An attitude of complete willingness to do whatever God requires one to give. Whatever God asks. Of course Hollywood does not understand that kind of commitment to God. There is a movie portraying missionaries in the Amazon. At one point, there is a scene where the young son of a missionary couple dies of a tropical fever. As they bury him, the boy's father cries out to heaven in a rage, "I did not give my permission for You to take my son!"

The truth is, for many, many generations, servants of God have gone to unknown places and have given God explicit permission to take everything from them. Many have arrived at their destinations after a long journey, only to bury their wives or their children right there on the shores of the place of their appointment. They *did* give God their permission to take their lives and let them be consecrated to Him. They were not shocked nor in despair when God demanded the ultimate sacrifice.

This passage that we read this morning is poignant because it confronts us all with questions we must answer as we claim to be believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. The questions go like this: Does God have the right to ask anything from us? Is there anything, which God could not require from us?

As easy as it is for us to say, "Take my life Lord and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee..." this chapter, this story, presses into our hearts and asks us:

- How willing are you?
- To what extent will you obey God?

- When God commands you to make some costly sacrifice, to do something that seems impossible or unreasonable, are you still willing?

This chapter tells us that God will provide tests. God is a tough test giver. He never stops examining His people. There never comes a time in our lives where God stops testing us. He tests us to show what is really in us. To show what He has put into us and prove the genuineness of our faith. This will never end.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “God does not put heavy burdens on weak shoulders. God educates and tests our faith by trials that increase in proportion to our faith. God expects us to do adult work and to endure adult afflictions only after we have reached a mature status in Christ Jesus. Therefore, believer, expect your trials to multiply as you proceed toward heaven. Do not think that as you grow in grace your path will become smoother and the sky calmer and clearer. Quite the contrary; as God gives you greater skill as a soldier of the cross, He will send you on more difficult missions. As He more fully equips your ship to sail in storms, He will send you on longer voyages to more boisterous seas, so that you may honor Him and increase in holy confidence...Let Abraham's story warn us to never plan on a rest from trials this side of the grave. The trumpet still plays the notes of war. You cannot sit down and put the victory wreath on your head. You do not have a crown. You still must wear the helmet and carry the sword. You must watch, pray and fight. Expect your last battle to be the most difficult, for the enemy's fiercest charge is reserved for the end of the day.”

Think of Genesis 22 as a test preparation guide. When I teach my high school students, they like to get a little test prep guide. In fact, I think they would protest if I ever gave them a test without giving them a review sheet in advance. They always want to know what is on the test.

God is giving us this chapter and teaching us some lessons in this chapter to prepare us for the real test that will surely come into our lives of faith.

There are three lessons I want to draw out from this wonderful narrative.

Lesson One:

Don't Despair When God Demands What is Most Precious to You

Genesis 22:1-2

Notice I didn't say *if* God demands. Don't despair *when* God demands what is most precious to you. What is dearest to you?

In the Hebrew text, there is a clear connection between this narrative we've read today and the one we read last Sunday in Genesis 12 that was the beginning of the narrative of Abraham's life. Remember what God said to Abraham? God said literally, "*Get you out of your country, your kindred, and your father's house. Get out of there and go to the land that I will show you.*" God was calling Abraham to leave behind everything that was dear to him, everything that was near to him, everything that was clear to him. God was saying, "Leave your past behind you." Then the whole story is the narrative of Abraham's life of faith as he lives in the gap between what God has promised him...

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3)

These are great promises but there is a gap between the promises God has made and the reality that Abraham is facing. There's a long time between the actual fulfillment of those promises in day-to-day life. In chapter 12, he receives God's glorious promises of a people, God's protecting presence, a plan and a place. He has to leave his land and travel as a nomad in the land of promise when it was occupied by foreigners.

Then Abraham faces famine in the chapters that we've read this week if you're following along with the Read the Bible for Life plan. His faith in those promises is tested with a famine in the land. Then he gets separated from Lot. Then Abraham has to step in and deliver Lot from enemies. Then God reaffirms His covenant to Abraham in chapter 15 but Abraham still doesn't have a child. That is essential to these promises being fulfilled. He's an old man and his wife is barren. Then they

get impatient with God and think, “Well, couldn’t we just help Him along in the fulfillment of His promises?” So Sarah says, “Here, take Hagar my maidservant and have a child with her.” And Ishmael is born. But then in chapter 17, God reaffirms His covenant with Abraham, making it clear that the promised child will come from Sarah but it still hasn’t come.

Finally in chapter 21, we see the height of joy and the depths of agony for Abraham. The height of joy because Isaac is born. It’s a miracle. Sarah is barren; she’s unable to give birth yet she has a child. The promised child comes and God makes it clear that it is through this child—Isaac—that all these blessing are going to flow to Abraham. But it’s also the depth of agony because in that chapter, Abraham has to say goodbye forever to his other son, Ishmael, whom he sends away.

So as we come to chapter 22 and you would think God is done testing Abraham. You would think that it’s now time for this old man to rest, to enjoy retirement, to have a good time with his promised son. But not so. According to 22:1, “*after these things* [after all that Abraham has gone through] *God tested Abraham.*”

It’s been said by an Englishmen, “Cheer up! When things look glum—bet your life there's more to come.”

That’s what Abraham is experiencing here. More testing. In fact, this is the hardest of the tests. In the words of C.S. Lewis, “Why do the righteous suffer? Because only the righteous can put up with it.”

God’s demanding a great deal from Abraham. Don’t despair when God demands what is most precious to you.

“Abraham!” calls the Lord in verse one.

“Here am I.”

“Take your son, your only son Isaac. Ishmael is gone. Take Isaac whom you love.” God knows what He is asking of Abraham.

God knows what He is asking and requiring of us. He doesn’t take this lightly. He realizes when he is demanding that which is most precious to us. He knows it

won't be easy. Remember this: God cannot demand anything of us that is more precious to us than it is to Him. What God is asking of Abraham is precious to Abraham but Isaac is even more precious to God. So whatever sacrifice God demands of us, it is a sacrifice He has first provided in order for us to give it back to Him. We can only give Him what He has first given us. And what do we have that we did not receive from Him?

So God says, "*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.*" Moriah is a very significant place. Look at 2 Chronicles 3:1. Many, many years later, this is where King Solomon built the temple, the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. Then if you fast forward many more years into the time of Jesus, we see there is another promised Son Whom a Father marches up a mountain adjacent to that temple mount and there that Father sacrifices His only Son. His only beloved...His only begotten Son.

Let's not minimize the severity of this test! We know it is a test but Abraham did not know it was only a test. From Abraham's perspective, God is calling him to do something unimaginable. The sacrifice involved is excruciatingly intense. It seems that the God who called him in chapter 12 to leave his past behind is now calling him to leave his future behind because He is calling for his son—the son of the promise—the one in whom all those blessings are concentrated.

The key word in this chapter is the word "son" which is repeated ten times. God had said in chapter 21 that through this son—Isaac—Abraham's offspring would be named. All the promises of chapters 12, 15 and 17 are centralized in this promised son. Isaac is the key to God's salvation flowing out to a guilty and dying world. He is the key to everything. And now God is saying, "Abraham, I want your son back." It seems absurd what God is asking of him here in verse two. Would killing Isaac mean kissing God's promises goodbye? Is God putting His promises in reverse gear? (Adapted from Joyce Baldwin).

John Calvin minces no words when he comments on this verse: "Yet not only is the death of his son announced to him [Abraham], but he is commanded with his

own hand to slay him; as if he were required, not only to throw aside, but cut in pieces, or cast into the fire, the charter of his salvation, and have nothing left to himself but death and hell.”

That’s what it seems God is asking of Abraham. “Give up the one I have given you and in whom those promises would have been fulfilled. Kiss your future goodbye.”

It raises a crucial question for us: What do I love more, the promises of God or the God of the promise? What do I treasure more? The blessings of God or God Himself? Ask yourself, “Do I serve God for His blessings or is God Himself my great desire? Am I willing to obey God even if I cannot see God honor His promises in my lifetime? If God were to take away every possession I own, and along with it take my spouse, my family, my friends, would I still worship Him?”

It’s so easy for us to say, “Yeah, I’m a follower of Jesus” within the comfortable confines of a gathering like this but really, are you ready, like Jesus says, to lose your life for His sake? Because He says, *“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it”* (Mark 8:35).

You must be willing to let go of all that is dear to you, even if necessary to have all God’s good promises postponed until the life to come. Are you ready to follow a God—to worship a God—Who may say, “The promises I have made I will never forsake yet you will not see the fulfillment of them until 100 years from now.”

Ask yourself: “What if I were to see no fruit after a lifetime of faithful service—would I still serve Him? What if I were to pour my life into sharing the gospel with people who rejected it, over and over again—would I still delight in proclaiming the good news? Am I willing to say, ‘If I have God and God alone, I am richly satisfied’? Am I willing, if necessary, to have all God’s good promises postponed until the life to come? Is God and God alone enough for me?”

Is He worthy of your worship? Will you trust Him? Is God your chief desire?

Do not despair when God demands what is most precious to you. And the corollary of that truth is...

You will not despair when God demands what is most precious to you
if God Himself is most precious to you.

Lesson Two:
Don't Delay in Surrendering the Best You Have to God
Genesis 22:3-10

The test that God asks of Abraham is severe but his response is superb. His obedience is **exemplary**. He doesn't delay in surrendering the best he has to God. We see in verse three that his obedience was **prompt**, "*So Abraham rose early in the morning...*"

Derek Kidner says, "It seems safe to infer a habit of facing a hard task resolutely." Henry Law has commented, "Prompt obedience is the surest wisdom... To linger is to court ruin. Delay is the craftiest net of Satan. It is the terrible pitfall, out of which there are rare escapes."

Abraham promptly obeys God's command. He does not linger like Lot did earlier in Genesis.

He is **conscientious**. Verse three tells us he "*saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac.*" He got everything ready, then lastly, he cut the wood for the burnt offering. Then he "*arose and went to the place of which God had told him.*"

Abraham is **resolute**. The destination was 45-50 miles away. It took three days to get there but we see in verse four, "*On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.*" So he had three days to turn back but he didn't. He kept pressing on. His obedience was not complete overnight...neither will our obedience be.

He is **solitary** in his obedience. When you get to verse five, Abraham tells his servants to stay behind. He's going to walk up that hill alone, with his son Isaac carrying the wood on his back, indicating that Isaac is old enough and strong enough to at least be a teenager. Why were the servants left behind? Perhaps so they could not lay their hands on Abraham to prevent him from raising the knife?

He is **trusting** in his God. There's a very, very illuminating remark in verse five: *"Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.'" We're coming back. He doesn't know how this is all going to work out. He's ready to give God what is most precious to him but he says, "We're coming back." You see his trust in verse eight after Isaac addresses the elephant in the room. He says, "'My father!' And he said, 'Here am I, my son.' He said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' Abraham said, 'God will provide for himself the lamb....'"*

God will provide. The word means God will see to it. Our word 'provision' is a word that indicates that God sees in advance all the needs of His people and God in His sovereign wisdom and goodness is able to attend to those needs. God will provide the lamb. And we have in those words the gospel in a nutshell. The good news. God will provide.

Abraham's obedience is **absolute**. With that trust, Abraham is able to render unto God an absolute, unreserved obedience. An obedience that does not even allow his precious son to come between him and his Lord.

In verses nine and ten, the closer we get to the climax, the slower the pace as every moment is specified. It's a way of saying Abraham was completely obedient. Look at these details: *"When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son."*

Don't delay in surrendering the best you have to God. How did Abraham do this? What was going through his mind? There's a New Testament passage I would like you to turn to but keep your finger here in Genesis 22. In Hebrews 11, the Holy Spirit gives a divinely inspired explanation of what was going on inside Abraham's mind as he was going through this excruciatingly agonizing test. How does he remain trusting in God in the midst of offering to God that which is most precious to him? Laying his whole future on the altar?

Hebrews 11:17-19 tell us. *"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only*

son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' [Here's how he did it.] *He considered* [he was speaking truth to himself; he was preaching the gospel to himself] *that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."*

In the mind and heart of Abraham, there's a great battle going on. "I don't like what God is demanding of me right now. I cannot see how God is going to fulfill His promise. But this I know: God is faithful and God is powerful and God is able. God has not created a problem for me that He cannot solve. God is for me, not against me. He has not become my enemy. God is my faithful God."

So Abraham cannot see how the problem will be resolved, but he says, "God, You have promised that through Isaac my offspring shall be named and now you're asking that I give you Isaac and the only thing I can say that must be true is that if You take the life of Isaac, You will also raise him from the dead because You will not go back on Your Word, God. I trust You. I will not waiver."

Abraham did not waiver through unbelief when he considered the promises of God but he grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what God promised He would perform. That's what Paul says in Romans 4.

When we disobey God, it's not because we lack the will power, it's because we lack faith. All our sin springs from unbelief. All our sin springs from the fact that we find ourselves in a distressing circumstance or in a tempting circumstance and we don't believe the gospel. We don't believe that when God has stretched us to the limit, He is for us and not against us. His goodness and richness and sweetness and wisdom and power and love will not fail us. God will make a way because God has made a way through the offering of another Son.

That's why Martin Luther said, "The gospel cannot be beaten into our ears enough or too much." Speak that gospel-truth to yourself today. God will provide. It's not just a financial promise. This addresses the deepest needs of your life, whatever they are. Whatever God brings you into, God will provide a way. This truth enables you to say with Jonathan Edwards, "I have been before God, and have given myself—all that I am and have to God. I have given myself clear away, and

have not retained anything as my own.” Our lives are theaters to put God’s promise-keeping power on display.

Do not delay in surrendering to God what is dearest to you. And here is the corollary of that truth...

You will not delay in surrendering the best you have to God if you believe
God has not withheld the best He has from you.

If you believe God has not withheld His very best from you, then you will not delay in surrendering your very best to Him.

That brings us to our third and last lesson today...

Lesson Three:
Don’t Doubt that the Joy of God’s Provision Will Far Exceed
the Pain of Your Sacrifice
Genesis 22:11-18

Abraham sees the joy of God’s provision in verses 11 through 18. He understands and experiences the fact that God is a God Whose eyes roam to and fro that He may strongly support those whose hearts are fully His (2 Chronicles 16:9). He believes that God is and that God is a rewarder of them who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). And Abraham experiences the reward of his faith in verses 11 through 18.

He experiences three joys in this section. First of all, the **joy of knowing** that he fears God in verses 11-12. Then in verses 13-14, the **joy of seeing** the provision of God and in verses 15-19, the **joy of sharing** in God’s blessing.

1. The Joy of Knowing that He Fears God (Genesis 22:11-12)

Just look at what Abraham knows, what is discovered through this whole process.

“But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’”¹²He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the

boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

Now was God up in heaven saying, “Oh, I hope Abraham fears Me. But I don’t know....” Then God breathes a sigh of relief when He sees what Abraham does. No, God knew what was in Abraham’s heart but Abraham doesn’t know that God knows. Let’s put it this way: It’s one thing to say, “I fear God.” It’s another thing to know that God says, “You fear God.” To know that God looks on my life and sees in my life an authentic, real, God-fearing faith, that’s a real encouragement because I can say I fear God all I want but the question is, “Does God say that I fear God? Does God see that in me?”

The test has a design and it’s to prove the authenticity of Abraham’s faith and the genuineness of his fear. God is not the One Who needs to know. Abraham is the one who needs to know. Abraham would have resonated with John Newton who wrote the following a while back, in which he talks about the hardness of his heart, the darkness of his soul, and his awareness of sin.

'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord, or no,
Am I His, or am I not?

Yet I mourn my stubborn will,
Find my sin, a grief, and thrall;
Should I grieve for what I feel,
If I did not love at all?

If I love, why am I thus?
Why this dull and lifeless frame?
Hardly, sure, can they be worse,
Who have never heard his name!

Could I joy his saints to meet,
Choose the ways I once abhorr'd,
Find, at times, the promise sweet,
If I did not love the LORD?

Could my heart so hard remain,
Pray'r a task and burden prove;
Ev'ry trifle give me pain,
If I knew a Saviour's love?

Lord, decide the doubtful case!
Thou who art thy people's sun;
Shine upon thy work of grace,
If it be indeed begun.

When I turn my eyes within,
All is dark, and vain, and wild;
Fill'd with unbelief and sin,
Can I deem myself a child?

Let me love thee more and more,
If I love at all, I pray;
If I have not lov'd before,
Help me to begin today.

If I pray, or hear, or read,
Sin is mix'd with all I do;
You that love the LORD indeed,
Tell me, Is it thus with you?

[Lovest Thou Me? By John Newton]

We wrestle. Am I the real deal? Is my faith authentic? Do I really fear the Lord? Will I stand for Him in the time of testing? And God in His grace sends these tests to prove that the genuineness of our faith, which is more precious than gold, is real (1 Peter 1:7).

2. The Joy of Seeing the Provision of God (Genesis 22:13-14)

Therefore, count it pure joy, brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance and endurance, proven character; proven character produces hope (James 1:2-3). Do not despise the testing God brings. Believe. Don't doubt the joy that is on the other side of the test will far exceed the pain of the offering.

Abraham has the joy, not only of knowing that he fears the Lord and that God sees that he fears Him, but he has the joy of seeing God's provision—the lamb caught in the thicket. Of course, I've hardly said it but any Christian is thinking it: We are seeing the shadows of a far greater story here.

This is like one of those pencil sketches of an artist where they are going to draw out what they are going to do on the real canvas. The pencil drawing is beautiful itself but then when the masterpiece is unveiled, the pencil drawing fades into insignificance. We have to wait until the Gospels to see the masterpiece unfold.

The historian Roland Bainton tells that on one occasion Martin Luther and his wife, Katherine, were reading Genesis 22 in their family devotions. Martin read the story and when he had finished, his wife said, "I do not believe it. God would not have treated his son like that." And Luther said, "Oh, but Katie, He did. He did."

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Just as Isaac willingly and quietly and submissively allowed himself to be carried up that mountain and laid on that altar and was bound by cords and became the willing object of his father's sacrifice in obedience to God, so our Lord Jesus, *"like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth"* (Isaiah 53:7). Our great Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep.

Paul reflects on this story in Romans 8:31-32 and he says, “...*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*”

Abraham, through his trust, gets to see that gospel—that good news—foreshadowed. Maybe this is what Jesus was referring to in John 8:56 when He said Abraham rejoiced “to see My day.” And he did see it and he was glad. The joy of seeing the Lamb—“*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29).

3. The Joy of Sharing in God’s Blessing (Genesis 22:15-19)

And finally, Abraham has the joy of sharing in the fulfillment of God’s promises. You know, God has made exceedingly great promises to us who believe and we can do nothing to bring about their fulfillment except trust and obey and believe that God will fulfill what He has promised. After Abraham trusts and obeys, God reaffirms His blessing—His covenant—in verses 15 through 19. We need to take away from these lessons a confident trust in the faithfulness of our great God Who does not spare His Son from us. A God Who passed the test Himself that He never ultimately forced Abraham to pass.

Genesis 22 was just a preparation—it was just a test. God did the real thing. “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).

Gresham Machen said, “The more we know of God, the more unreservedly will we trust Him. The greater our progress in theology, the simpler and more childlike will be our faith.”

Let’s pray. Lord, we are willing but we need You to make us more willing and ready. We are willing, Lord, to receive what You give. Lord, we are willing to lack what You withhold. We are willing, Lord, to relinquish what you take. Some in this room right now are facing severe tests. It feels like You are demanding much of them. Help them, Lord, to be ready to relinquish what You take with the confidence that You have given us Your very best. Lord, we are willing to suffer what you inflict; to be what you require; to do what you call us to do. We present ourselves as

living sacrifices to You, holy and acceptable through Jesus Christ. This is our reasonable worship. Take our lives, Lord, let them be consecrated to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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