



Today, we're starting a new series called *The Bloody Bible*. If you dig into the Old Testament, you'll read some stories filled with things like revenge and war. These stories can get pretty bloody. But we usually gloss over the bloody parts.

For example, if you read the story of David and Goliath in a children's Bible, it ends with David defeating the giant. It leaves out the part where David takes Goliath's sword and chops off his head.

With Daniel and the lion's den, the story ends with Daniel being rescued. It leaves out the part where the king was so mad at his advisers that he had them thrown in to the lion's den. And it especially leaves out the part where the Bible says they were eaten before they touched the ground.

Throughout this series, we're going to look at four stories that are pretty gruesome. We'll look at things like genocide, killing the first-born sons of Egypt, and the crucifixion.

Someone who is skeptical about God and Christianity might look at these passages and wonder how in the world anyone could believe in and serve a God who is this violent. And maybe, even for some of you who have been going to church for a long time, *you* have wondered whether or not the God described in the Old Testament is the same God that we believe in and worship today. And if God changed between the Old and New Testament, who's to say He won't change again?

Let me just say from the outset that God doesn't change. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The characteristics you read about God in the Bible are *always* true about Him. When the Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:8), it means He *was* love, He *is* love, and He *will always* be love. When the Bible says that God is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14), that means He *was* jealous, He *is* jealous, and He *will always be* jealous for our love. So it's important for us to learn about God even from the stories that make us uncomfortable.

## YOU

Today, we're talking about a story about sacrifice. Now, the Old Testament is full of stories about sacrifice, but it might be difficult to understand why.

In the Old Testament, people were sinful, just like we are today. And when people sinned, they were in debt to God. They owed Him something. So God allowed the people to sacrifice an animal to pay their sin debt. All throughout the Old Testament, there are stories about the Israelites sacrificing animals at the temple. Those are bloody stories.

When we get to the story of Jesus's crucifixion, you'll see why we don't do animal sacrifices anymore. But even though animal sacrifices aren't used anymore, sacrifice has always been a part of following God.

If you are a Christian, you have to make certain sacrifices. You sacrifice friendships if they are pulling you away from God. You sacrifice your time during the week to be a part of this group of believers or to serve people. You might have to sacrifice your popularity by choosing not to do something that everyone else is doing. Sacrifice is a necessary part of the Christian life.

And maybe you've made sacrifices before. Maybe you've walked away from those friends who were dragging you down. Maybe you've broken up with a boyfriend or girlfriend because they were asking you to do things that the Bible tells you not to do. Out of obedience to God, maybe you've made some sacrifices.

These are never easy decisions to make. But maybe you've thought, "I know that God will bless me if I sacrifice my week to go on a mission trip." Sometimes it turns out like that. You give up a week of baseball in the summer to go to camp, and you have an incredible time. You grow closer to God. You feel God calling you to something. And you can look back and say that it was the right decision.

But there are other times when you make a sacrifice out of obedience to God, and it doesn't feel like you made the right choice. You miss a week of practice for that church trip, and someone else steps into your starting role. You choose not to hang out with some friends anymore, but instead of

feeling proud of yourself and content that you obeyed God, you feel lonely and left out.

Today, we’re going to talk about a time when God told a man that He would be incredibly blessed, but just when the blessing started rolling in, God told him to kill it. It’s the story of Abraham and Isaac.

If you’ve heard this story growing up in church, you were probably told it was a story about faith and trust in God’s perfect plan. But if you start to think more deeply about it, you realize that it was a pretty messed-up request that God made. He asked Abraham to perform child sacrifice.

That’s something you hear about in ancient religions, but not the Bible! But studying this story can help us see more clearly what we actually think about God and where we put Him on the list of things that are important to us.

## **GOD**

[**Author Note:** I usually start out the Bible section with a quick summary of what has happened prior to the passage to put it into context.]

So let’s dig in. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 22. While you’re turning there, I’ll catch you up in the story.

Abraham and Sarah were an old married couple with no children. In their culture, it was a big deal that they didn’t have children. People looked down on them. But God stepped in and told them that He was going to turn their family into a great nation. He said that they would have more descendants than the stars in the sky.

In that moment, Abraham and Sarah thought that God was being ridiculous. After all, how many 90-year-olds do you know who have had children? But God came through. They had a son and named him Isaac. He was the beginning of this incredible blessing that God had promised. In Isaac, Abraham could see all that God had promised coming true. Let’s start reading in verse 1.

## **Genesis 22:1–2 (ESV)**

*After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He 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.”*

Let’s stop right there and get this picture straight. God told Abraham a while back, “Hey, I know that you and your wife can’t have kids, but I’m going to work a miracle through you and make your family into a great nation.”

Now, if Abraham and Sarah are going to start a great nation, they’ve got to at least have one kid, right? They did end up having one kid: Isaac. At this point in his life, Isaac isn’t a boy anymore. We’ll see why later on. But Abraham and Isaac have had years of father-son moments. Isaac’s parents loved him. He was their only son and the beginning of God’s incredible promise to them. And then God comes back to Abraham and says, “I’m going to need you to kill your son.”

And Abraham’s like, “Excuse me?”

And God says “Yeah, I’m going to need you to go up on this mountain, build an altar, and sacrifice your son to me.”

At that moment, you could imagine Abraham saying, “Nope. I’m out. This has been fun, God. You’ve done a lot for me, but this is just too much.”

That’s typically our response. God says, “Hey, if you’re going to follow me, you’ve got to give that up.” And there are some things that we’d be fine with giving up. But then God asks us to give up that one other thing that is really important to us, and our normal response is, “Too far God! You’ve gone too far!” Let’s see how Abraham responds. Check out verse 3.

### **Genesis 22:3 (ESV)**

*So 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.*

It says that Abraham got up early, got everything ready, chopped some wood, grabbed his son, and they took off. It’s tempting to read these stories in the Bible and think, “Man, these people are incredible! He just flatly trusted God and went after it!” But I can’t imagine it going that easily. I