

condemned by the prophets. Some exegetes, however, have warned against such apologies because ultimately God gave what Abraham was not really called to give -- his Son.

We sometimes forget what was involved in human sacrifice. Albright has restudied the human sacrifices of Canaan (*Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, pp. 236-243), and has argued that the Molech sacrifices were not really to a god Molech, but *Molech* (or *melek*) was a name for the royal sacrifice, the extreme sacrifice, when a king might sacrifice his dearest son to avert divine wrath and save a nation. In such a case the son would in some instances step forward in noble dedication to give his life to save his father's throne. Elements of this ritual we could admire. What then was wrong with the human sacrifice? First, that it was given to the wrong deity without adequate consciousness of sin or of God's righteousness or mercy. Abraham was not guilty in these areas. When called upon to make the supreme sacrifice to the one true God, he rose to that level of faith. And so did Isaac. A strong young boy, he could easily have eluded the old man. But, no, he lay bound on the altar. The second thing wrong with human sacrifice was that it was not good enough. The Psalmist expressed this well. "No man can redeem the life of another... no payment is ever enough" (Ps 49:7-8). The prophet likewise, "Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression?" (Mic 6:7, cf. v6). Moses in his extremity offered himself in eternal condemnation to pay the price of Israel's sin (Exod 32:32). Here was a human sacrifice beyond anything Abraham envisaged. Hebrews tells us that Abraham in great faith considered the possibility that his sacrificed son would be restored to him later. But Moses offered himself in eternal immolation. And Moses who had spent forty precious days in the presence of God presumably knew well what he was offering -- but the great fault of human sacrifice is that it is not good enough. Not an Isaac, not a Moses, not a Paul (Rom 9:3), could bring us peace with God; none but the One who came as God in the flesh could bear the awful load. We can hardly bring ourselves to recognize the faith of an Abraham who saw Christ's day and was glad (John 8:56). Abraham may have spoken better than he knew as he ascended the hill, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." But as Abraham stood the test of full obedience and as he sacrificed the ram providentially at hand, he called the place, "the Lord will provide," and there in his trial and triumph he foresaw, albeit dimly, "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Abraham after this experience surely did not believe that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin. But he had full reason to believe that the sacrifice of the animal symbolized a greater and nobler sacrifice that God himself would supply.

So the sacrificial ritual exhausts the possibilities to see to it that the sacrifice must be perfect, the priestly mediator must be cleansed, the shrine inviolate. The temple with its graded degrees of holiness through which its priest came to the place where God caused his Name to rest surely symbolized a real approach of man to God through a Mediator whom God would supply. And the sacrifices themselves in their manifold meaning of atonement (basic to all of them), worship, communion, thanksgiving and consecration could but point forward to a better, truer final sacrifice.