

Frontline Devotion for Friday, February 6, 2009
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"The Near Miss"
The Near Sacrifice of Isaac

The scriptural base for the devotion: Genesis 22:1-18 is provided after the monologue.
Peace. mm

I had seen it...or at least heard about it. Sometimes we would meet other families as we took our flocks from place to place. It was a chance to trade stuff-goods and food. It was also a chance to play with other kids-something I didn't get to do very often. It was the closest I got to making friends.

So I really got excited when we would see a family we had seen before. But it wasn't long before I realized that not all families were like mine. When I was ten, we met a family we would see two or three times a year, and the oldest son was this crazy kid I loved to play with. But when I ran ahead of our flocks to meet him, his mother met me. When I asked where he was, she said, "My son is with our god."

He had died. But it was worse than that. Later I heard my father talking to my mother, saying that my friend's parents had actually sacrificed him to their god. They had been having bad luck-sheep and goats had been giving birth to stillborn lambs and kids-and a holy man had told them that their god was demanding a sacrifice of their own blood to set things right. So they killed him. Killed their son, sent him to their god, to please their god and set things right.

My father came in to see me that night when I went to bed. I asked him, "Will that ever happen to me?"

"No," he said. "Yahweh, our god, is different. And you are a child of promise." I still cried myself to sleep for my friend, but I thanked our god for not being as cruel as their god.

Three years later, my father called me, and asked me to come with him. He was crying-I'd never seen him cry before, and before we left my mother came and held onto me, sobbing. Father had to ask the servants to help get me away from her.

We traveled to a mountain, and Father told the servants that had come with us to wait behind. He told me to pick up wood and to follow him, that we were going to sacrifice to Yahweh, our God.

Something was wrong; I had seen that from the start. Father was crying, Mother was acting crazy; even the servants had traveled without saying a word. Now, we were going to perform a sacrifice, and I didn't see any lamb.

I asked Father, "Where is the lamb?" And I saw him hesitate. Part of me wanted to start running right there, but then he said, "God will provide the lamb."

My father had never lied to me before. Never. And because of that, I didn't run. But still, I knew something was wrong.

We reached the spot, and he set the wood on the altar. Then he asked me to sit with him. As we sat, he took my hands and my feet, very gently, and tied them together. I could have easily gotten away from him, but he was so gentle, I simply obeyed. There were tears in his eyes again, and deep inside, I knew. I was going to join Yahweh.

Everything was ready now, and Father carried me to the altar. We were both crying, and Father kept saying, "God will explain it to you, don't worry. You will be in God's hands." But I hardly heard him. All I could imagine now was pain. The horror of the knife, the idea of my blood running out of me, my life running out of my body and into the cold ground.

I was in place now, and Father was kneeling beside me, saying words to a prayer I had heard a hundred times before. A prayer he said just before the sacrifice, just before the lamb was to be killed. I listened, saying the words with him in my head, hearing them tumble out, closer and closer to the end...to the final "AMEN."

Then it happened. The knife went up. I screamed and tried to raise my hands, but I couldn't...and in a flash, I gave up. I was going to God.

(PAUSE) I thought it was thunder. I thought it was a clap of thunder. But it wasn't. The knife never fell, and when I opened my eyes, Father was on his feet, talking to someone who wasn't there. Someone with the voice of thunder. Yahweh.

It had been a test. A test of Father's faith. God had promised that our family would be a huge family, a great nation, with members beyond the grains of sand on the seashore. But I had not come until Mother and Father were old, and now...God wanted to test Father's faith. To see if Father trusted him, even to the point of giving me up to him.

But there was something else, too. That day, we learned that Yahweh is not like other gods. Yahweh would not ask for the sacrifice of children. I will never be asked to do the horrible thing my father was asked to do. Our God simply wants us to love him. Our God is not a monster.