

**FOUNDING FATHERS 2: A STUDY IN THE BOOK GENESIS**  
**MESSAGE: ISSAC & ISHMAEL**  
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In 1777, a group of Irish gentleman created a document for the rules of having duels. It was called the Code Duello and was accepted and widely known throughout Europe and the American colonies. The Code Duello has 26 rules for how a duel should take place. They included so many rules because deadly violence was not something to be taken lightly and they had several stops along the way where offended parties could make amends before shots were fired.

The strange irony was all of these rules for duels were instituted so that men could fight and shoot at each other with honor. You could follow the rules and if you did end up killing the other man, then you were simply following the rules. In the 1800's many places including the United States outlawed duels, yet they continued. It was a grey area that often let the judicial system look the other way. A holdover that everybody could sense felt wrong and probably knew in their heart of hearts it was wrong, but in extreme cases, they could still justify it and people were rarely prosecuted.

The great thing about the Code Duello was that it gave people a lot of options. I think people knew in their heart of hearts that deadly violence was not the answer, that spilling blood wouldn't fix the issue. The Code Duello gave them many options including later adaptations in America where you could throw away your shot. You could shoot off to the side of a person or shoot above their head. Male anger and pride would be satisfied and no one would actually get injured, but sometimes there was no way out. Sometimes there was no exit and people did die.

Such was the case for Philip Hamilton who was offended by George Eacker. Eacker issued some inflammatory comments about Philip's father, Alexander, and these two men ultimately met in Weehawken, New Jersey. Many believe that Philip threw away his shot and then Eacker killed him. They followed the Code Duello and had multiple opportunities

to avoid violence, but Philip ultimately engaged in the duel at the leading of his father. Alexander himself was no stranger to duels. Long before his fateful duel with Aaron Burr at the same spot three years later, Alexander Hamilton was the principal in at least ten duels, although they never actually ended with shots being fired. They all were de-escalated and cooler heads prevailed. They followed the Code Duello and ultimately someone offered forgiveness without blood having to be spilled. I think this led Alexander to believe Philip's duel would end non-violently too. It didn't.

This brings us to a great sadness in Hamilton's life, the loss of his first-born son. You really have to ask, "Who would put their son's life at risk? Who would play an active role in the potential death of their own son? What kind of Founding Father would do such a thing?"

We are in the second week of our *Founding Fathers* series wherein we are looking at the eerie similarities between the Founding Fathers of our country and the Founding Fathers of our faith. Their main similarities are that they are all heroic and all also messy. Their lives are impressive as they take great steps of faith and their lives are also cautionary as they suffer great falls from grace. While Hamilton did much that was laudable and impressive in helping to found this country, there were also extreme sins. Chief among them might have been Hamilton's role in the death of his own son. Our big picture for this series is that we are leading up to Easter, and we are looking for true freedom. That elusive gift is hard to attain, especially when freedom sometimes looks like slavery and slavery sometimes looks like freedom. Put another way for this series, we often confuse Egypt and Canaan. The things we think will set us free often limit us, and the things that limit us often give us the greatest freedom and joy.

The music from today is *Quiet Uptown*, and it's the song sung in the aftermath of Philip's death. It represents extreme loss and pain. When you look at the situation, you have to wonder, what kind of father would allow his son even in the proximity of such violence? What kind of father would even allow his son the possibility of being killed? That brings us to the story of Isaac.

*Genesis 22: 1-8*

Much ink has been spilled about this story. For some, this is a beautiful foreshadowing of the coming Christ, a father who is willing to give up his beloved son. Like Christ ascending to Golgotha in order to be sacrificed with a wooden cross on his back, Isaac the beloved son is ascending Mt. Moriah as a sacrifice with the wood on his back. There are so many connections, so much symmetry and foreshadowing. In one sense it is beautiful.

For many others, it is a horrifying picture. Lest we miss this, God seemingly asks for child sacrifice. Whether he stopped Abraham or not, this is a strange request. Not only for Abraham. Can you imagine? This is his long awaited son. He travels for days crying to himself occasionally as he considers the potential loss of his son. His eyes moist as he walks up the hill and prepares for the sacrifice. Don't forget this from Isaac's perspective; this is easily one of the most traumatizing things I can think of. Your dad is your hero and you have this sense of foreboding. There is no animal to sacrifice. You are marching up the hill and your dad is being mysterious and cryptic. Your dad ties you up and raises a dagger over your head. That is one of the worst things I have ever heard of.

All of it is based on what? So God could test Abraham? So God could say, "Now I know you fear me?" I used to read this passage before I had kids and think, "Wow, what faith." What tremendous courage and bravery. No matter what God asks for, you have to be willing to lay it down and give it up. God wants all of you and you have to do it.

There are more than a few problems with this line of thinking and interpretation of this passage. 1) You have to take into account the trauma and seemingly capricious/needy nature of this request. This is akin to one of you giving your child a hamster or a new puppy for Christmas, then six months later asking them to take the pet out into the backyard and asking them to kill that pet so that they prove they love you the most and won't keep anything from you. Quick survey, is anyone okay with that? Jesus says, "God the Father is the giver of all good gifts." He says we, even though we are fragile and evil, know how to give our children good gifts, so God in perfect love, who is way above us, would he ever give

you a snake when you ask for a fish or a scorpion when they ask for an egg? You have to ask if this seems in the nature of God? If we are uncomfortable with this, then why do we think God may be okay with it? 2) Morally speaking, God is requesting murder and specifically child sacrifice. This is something completely heinous and not unheard of at the time. Abraham has now entered into Canaan and the most famous pagan God was Molech. He was a large statue with the body of a man and the head of a bull. His hands were often outstretched and the idol was huge with fires burning inside. Common practice was to pass your first-born child into the waiting arms of Molech and they would be received into the flames to appease this God and expunge your sins. This is awful, truly awful stuff. It seems God is not that different from Molech here. He requests this same sacrifice. 3) This passage is problematic. Not only does it seem incongruent with the nature of God and morally corrupt. It also seems very comparable to the pagan worship of the day for a false God named Molech. There are some questions to ask. Brian Zahnd, a pastor in Missouri, posed this set of questions. A) Does God request child sacrifice here, and in a similar vein, does God request from Joshua and Saul the ethnic cleansing deaths of women and children in the purging of the Canaan so the Israelites could take the land? I know that is an uncomfortable question, but if you read the Bible directly the clear answer is "yes." B) Does God change? Is he immutable? I think the clear answer is "no." God is the same yesterday today and forever. God did not grow up immature as a hothead for vengeance and then mature over time. God has always been who God is. God does not change, correct? C) So God has requested the death of children in the past in his name and God does not change. Is anyone in this room okay with killing children in God's name? If he asks you to do it?

I think I can speak for all of us and say, "No." So what do you do with a passage like this? This is heavy stuff. Let's stop for a little humor. There's a story of a Silicon Valley engineer who became friends with a farmer type out of the Central Valley. The engineer had spent all of his life in the city behind a screen. He knew nothing of the farm life, hunting or animals. His farmer friend invited him out into the country for a weekend of shooting and life out on the range. While he didn't know anything about it, he hesitantly went along excited for the new experience.

The farmer took his friend to his father's ranch so they could hunt some birds. He stopped at his father's house and went in while the engineer stayed in the car. The farmer told his father they would be hunting on the land. His father said that was fine but asked him to do him a favor. An old mule on the back 40 had lived a long life and had been suffering and needed to be put down. Would he do him a favor and put him down while he was out there. The farmer gladly obliged. When he came out to the car, he decided to play a trick on his engineer friend. He told his friend that his father was being a real pain in the backside and wouldn't let him hunt on his property so he was going to teach his father a lesson by shooting his father's favorite mule. They found the old mule and both got out of the truck with their shotguns. The farmer went out and shot the mule and said, "Take that!" As he prepared to turn around and reveal the joke to his shocked friend, he himself was shocked when he heard three shots behind him. He swung around to see the proud engineer with his shotgun. The farmer said, "What did you do?" The engineer said, "I'm on your side, your father upset you so much I killed three of his cows!"

You see how a mix-up with the father can lead to mistaken violence? I think we can often read a story like this and put far too much emphasis on the first part and miss the second part. The important part of this story is that that God was distinguishing himself from Molech. I don't take life. I give it. It is entirely possible Abraham misheard the voice of God. The only reason I feel comfortable saying that is the syllogism we presented earlier? Does God request child sacrifice in the Bible? Does God change? If these are true and none of us are comfortable with this conclusion, then the scripture is misleading at best. We could put our fingers in our ears and say God's ways are higher than our ways and we don't always understand God's justice, but I think that is because we aren't willing to sit with the story and think of it in light of the big story.

The Bible is full of references to people mishearing or misrepresenting God and God correcting them. The story of the Israelites and Molech was just beginning, like the Israelites and other idols. They would often conflate Yahweh with the other idols or mix the two together. In Leviticus 18 and 21, 1 Kings 1:11, 2 Kings 23 and 26, these are recurring

reminders and exhortations to avoid passing your children through the fires to Molech. He has to say it over and over again.

If that weren't clear enough, then we need to look no further than Jesus. Here is where we get to the freedom conversation today. We are going to talk about freedom in many different forms in this series, but I want to free you up spiritually and theologically today. There are some huge conundrums in the Bible where an honest reading can leave you twisted up in a theological pretzel. I want to free you up from that. I want that for you personally, and I want that for the people you talk to in the world around you because your friends and family members have questions and concerns about Christianity. They have hang-ups and things that bother them. Sometimes it is things that are central to Christianity like the identity of Christ or his call to die to yourself and follow him. And for them, we can't really explain it away, but for a lot of people, they stumble over stories like this or genocide or any number of morally repugnant things that God seems to approve of if not outright command. The problem is with 66 books written over thousands of years, it is very easy to make whatever point you want to make. You can justify almost anything.

One of my atheist friends said he came to a breaking point about the Bible when he saw two Christians debating Calvinism and Arminianism. It didn't bother him that they were debating the topic. What bothered him was that they were both right. They both had enough scripture to back up their point of view. The Bible can be like that.

So let me give you a simple tool for freedom. It's a telescope. What happens if you look through the wrong end of the telescope? Everything is smaller and a little bit fuzzy. You are using it wrong. When you look at it the right way, everything is focused, everything is magnified, everything is beautiful. When it comes to God, Jesus is the clearest picture we have everything else makes God fuzzier and smaller. If you don't believe me, then consider the times that Jesus had to correct the thinking of those around him. Think of the times he had to say, "You have heard it said...but I tell you." Don't miss this 99% of the time those he was correcting and reproofing were directly quoting scripture. They weren't mangling it. Misinterpreting it? Sure. Jesus came to clarify God. He came to show us what he wants from

us. Jesus came to show us what God was really like. So if things are fuzzy or convoluted, start with Jesus. What would Jesus do is not just a pithy bracelet to wear on your wrist. It's actually a great theological tool.

If you find something about genocide in the Old Testament that is incongruous with Jesus, Jesus wins. If you find something in the New Testament about the subjugation of women that is incongruous with Jesus, Jesus wins. It doesn't seem like this needs to be said but I'll say it anyway, Moses, David, Elijah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Paul and Peter were men writing about God. Jesus was God. If there is anything inconsistent, fuzzy or small that Jesus would not agree with, then we have a problem.

Please hear me, I am not advocating to only read the gospels. I am simply stating a hierarchy of interpretations. I believe the Bible is inspired and authoritative, and I believe the interpretative weight needs to be properly allocated. Jesus wins. I have to tell you there is extreme freedom in this. I want to encourage you to read your whole Bible. It is the story of unfaithful, fallible people trying to understand and relate to a faithful perfect God. Needless to say, there are some hiccups, but Jesus is the telescope. He makes it all make sense. He clarifies perceived inconsistencies. He is the answer.

There is freedom in this for your own spiritual development because Jesus made it simple. "Follow me by loving God and loving others." There is freedom for all of the potential arguments and concerns people have. If Jesus is real and the Holy Spirit is real, your sole job is pointing them to Jesus and letting the Holy Spirit work on their hearts.

The wildest thing about the death of Alexander Hamilton and his son is how common duels were. When Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton squared off, don't forget that Aaron Burr was the current Vice President of the United States. This wasn't a back alley brawl by vagrants and ne'er do wells. This was two distinguished statesmen lining up to kill each other. Further study of Hamilton and Burr show they knew this practice was barbaric and immoral. Not only that, it was illegal at the time, yet they still found themselves in

Weehawken. Despite modern sensibilities, despite personal convictions, despite the law of the land, they still found themselves in Weehawken.

I blame the Code Duello. Someone wrote down rules and gave you options with plenty of outs, instead of saying flatly, "This is wrong." There is no way it can be right. The Code Duello made it an honorable thing with opportunities to fix the situation or at least handle it well, but there is no handling of violent death well. It was wrong. For some people, the Bible can be a Code Duello. We can build an honorable case for the things we do even though Jesus gives clear answers. Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, become the servant, pick up the towel and the basin. But we can read David, Paul and Moses (men who were trying to talk about God) and prove Jesus, who was God, wrong. For some that feels like freedom, because we can prove anything and justify anything, but true freedom is found in limiting yourself to Christ.