

INTO THE HEART OF GOD - by Alan J. Dunn

Day 1: My sandaled feet kick up clouds of desert dust as we walk towards Moriah. Dust. Did He not say *I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth*, innumerable? Will my hope now crumble into dust?

It was Him. I heard His voice. He spoke as He did in Ur when He first called me. But why would He call me to do this? How could He want a father to sacrifice his son? How could He want me to destroy the one who embodies all that He has promised? How will He fulfill His promises if this boy dies?

But He is stronger than death. O how we laughed when Isaac was born - to us, so old, so long past our time. He brought life from this old man and from her withered womb. I know He can give life to what is dead. His promises directed my hope to days beyond death, to a country beyond this world, to a posterity born of promise.

Was not Isaac born of promise? How I love him! How will I be able to obey this command?

Day 2: I have no words to speak to Isaac. He knows that our God has summoned me, but he has no idea why - yet. When did He last summon me? Was it twenty, twenty-five years ago that He visited me in Mamre? We walked together and I stood with Him overlooking the Siddim Valley. I'll never forget that walk. He drew me near to Him. He not only gave me promises, He gave me Himself. He communicated His heart to me. He told me that He would righteously deal with Sodom. Indeed, the Judge of all the earth shall deal justly. I understood Him somehow. I felt His reluctance to vent His wrath. I knew He wanted to spare the city. I resonated with His heart as I inched closer and closer. What if there are fifty righteous? Forty-five? Forty? I stopped at ten. If only there had been ten. Somehow I knew He was pleased with me as I pleaded for them. I was acting just like Him, and He let me get close - closer than anyone has ever gotten, right into the heart of God. It was like I was His friend. He told me His plans. He taught me His justice. It was exhilarating! I felt what He felt for the Sodomites: compassion. I experienced His yearning desire to spare.

But the city could not be spared, should not be spared. I could not bear what I saw the next morning. The valley percolated like a lake of fire and belched smoke like a furnace. O Lot! Lot! If only you had not left me! If only you had not compromised. I saw His wrath. But it was too much for me. I could not feel what God was feeling then. I could not take it in.

When I left Mamre, I wanted nothing to do with Him. I put the land behind me and entered Gerar to take care of myself. But my age-old policy of lying about Sarah not only jeopardized her but my beloved Isaac as well. I should have learned my lesson years ago when we went down to Egypt. Why did I lie about her? Even after she had conceived, I lied and limply let her be taken to Abimelech's harem.

Ah, Abimelech - in many ways, a better man than me. I know now that it was the Lord who intervened and preserved Sarah and moved Abimelech to return her to me. The Lord used that old friend to bless me and to restore me to His worship. And, just as He promised, the Lord blessed Abimelech for having blessed me. These past years in Beersheba have been so peaceful, so complete. I have all that He promised. Despite my fear, my unbelieving fear, He has been faithful. Why, after all these years, is He summoning me to Him again? What blessing could there be in the sacrifice of Isaac?

Day 3: I know where He wants me to go now. The young men remained behind in the hope that we will return to them. Isaac now carries the wood and fire. He knows that I am going to offer a sacrifice. My answer to his question seemed like it came from outside me. God will provide the lamb for the offering. But how? How? I know that it is Isaac who must be offered.

Isaac knows it now too. What love is this that now drives us, father and son? Isaac allows me to bind him on this altar. He could easily overcome me, easily run from this madman. But he knows as do I: it is the Lord. The Lord our God has commanded me to do this and Isaac trusts Him even as I do. Isaac trusts Him with a faith that penetrates the black vale of death; a faith that acts while morals are suspended for higher ends; a faith that relinquishes all that is loved to love Him who is all. Isaac has learned well. I have taught him from his childhood that my God is committed to bless me, and to bless him and then through him, to bless all the families of the earth. I see Isaac's faith, steadfast beneath his fear. He knows Him. He believes His promise too. He lies back on his branchy casket by faith. He is beautiful.

Lord! Why do You want me to do this? Have You not made me Your friend? Did You not reveal Your plans to me about Sodom? Did our hearts not resonate intimately as I interceded for those deserving to die? Is not that what You ultimately want for me? to know You? to think like You? to feel what You feel? to act like You? My bewilderment cannot stay my hand. I must act. I know it was Your voice and I know this is Your command.

O Isaac! I love you more now than I ever have. You are so trusting, willing to forfeit your own life in obedience to me - in obedience to Him.

Why must I do this? My heart has never felt such pain, such longing, such anguish - and yet, I have this undying hope and confidence that somehow, He must bless me. He cannot lie. I know that He is faithful, even when I do not know anything else. Ah, I ache. Who can carry out this command? Who could sacrifice his only son and suffer this agony while hoping in promises that can only be fulfilled beyond death? What man can do this?

Ah! It is not an act of man that I am to perceive: it is God who acts! Only God can do this! That is why I'm here - to act like Him - to reveal Him in this act of sacrifice! This is His plan. This is His heart. I felt His yearnings for Sodom and again, here, now - what I feel for Isaac as I sacrifice him must be what He feels, must be what He plans!

Of all His promises, that one given when I left Ur is still a mystery: *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*. How will He fulfill that promise? What should I see as I look on my son, my sacrificed son, Isaac? Through you His promises must come - even if you die. Even through death, you must bring His blessing to all the families of the earth. Then it must be. Then it will be. And it will be through my obedience to Him.

I would have done it. I was set to plunge the knife. I had passed the point of final decision. As for me, the deed was done.

And then He called again! As I unwittingly prophesied, He did provide! That ram must have been rummaging in those bushes even as I tethered Isaac to the altar. All the while, as I prepared the sacrifice, the Lord was providing. He will provide - not only for me, but for Isaac and through him, He will provide for all mankind.

I see something now that I never saw before. I see into the heart of God. I see more of His purpose for calling me and committing Himself to me. I see His plan of grace. A promised Son will come, a Son given by His own Father as an atoning sacrifice. That sacrifice will bless mankind, and will provide for men even as that ram was the provision for Isaac - a substitute to die in their place. And then, as men delivered from death, like Isaac, they will live. They will live with God; live to fulfill all His promises. Now I see Isaac as a man back from the dead. Now I see His resurrected tomorrow. I see His everlasting day. And I rejoice.