



## Genesis 22 - Abraham Willing to Offer Isaac

### A. God's command to Abraham and his response.

#### 1. (1-2) God tests the faith of Abraham.

a. **God tested Abraham:** This was not so much a test to *produce* faith, as it was a test to *reveal* faith. God built Abraham slowly, piece by piece, year by year, into a man of faith.

b. **Take now your son, your only son Isaac:** Significantly, God calls Isaac **your only son Isaac**, when in fact Abraham had another son, Ishmael. But since Ishmael was put away from Abraham's family, then as far as God was concerned, Abraham had only one son.

c. **Offer him there as a burnt offering:** God tells Abraham to offer him as a **burnt offering**. This was not an offering that was burned alive, but one first sacrificed and then completely burnt before the LORD.

i. How would we react if God told us to do such a thing? Jack Smith, a columnist for the L.A. Times, was discussing this Biblical incident with his readers. He said he would have told God to mind his own business. That's what the world always says to God.

ii. Would God tell someone to do this today? In 1993, a man named Andrew Cate was sentenced to 60 years in prison after being convicted of fatally shooting his 2-year-old daughter, then walking naked through his neighborhood carrying her body. Cate claimed he was acting out the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, and God would do a miracle to win his brother to Christianity. Cate believed God would miraculously stop him at the last moment before killing his daughter. The man was obviously deranged. What Abraham did was something completely unique in God's redemptive history, given for a specific purpose once for all fulfilled. There is no way God would ever direct someone to do this same thing today.

d. **Offer him there as a burnt offering:** This test was especially hard because it seemed to contradict the previous promise of God. Hadn't God promised *in Isaac your seed shall be called* (Genesis 21:12)? If Isaac hadn't had children to pass the promise on to yet, how could Abraham kill him? Wouldn't he be killing the very promise God made to him?

i. Abraham had to learn the difference between trusting the promise and trusting the Promiser. We can put God's promise before God Himself and feel it is our responsibility to bring the promise to pass, even if we have to disobey God to do it.

ii. Trust the Promiser no matter what, and the promise will be taken care of!

- e. **On one of the mountains of which I shall tell you:** There was a specific *place* God commanded Abraham to go, a particular spot where this would happen. God is carefully directing each detail.
  - f. **Your only son Isaac, whom you love:** This is the first mention of **love** in the Bible, and it is the love between father and son, and connected with the idea of the sacrificial offering of the son.
2. (3) Abraham's immediate response of faith.
- a. **So Abraham rose early:** There is not the slightest hint of hesitation on Abraham's part. Abraham **rose early in the morning** to do this. Yet at the same time, who could sleep that night?
    - i. Abraham is trusting God, even *when he does not understand*. Sometimes we say, "I'm not going to obey or believe until I understand it all," but that is acting like you are equal with God.
    - ii. He didn't debate or seek counsel from others. He knew what to do and employed no stalling tactics.
    - iii. Abraham is trusting, *even when he does not feel like it*. There is not a line in this text about how Abraham felt, not because he didn't feel, but because he was walking by faith, not feelings.
    - iv. God had been training Abraham, bringing him to this place of great trust. In just the last chapter, God asked Abraham to "give up" Ishmael in a less severe way. God used that, and everything else, to train up Abraham.
  - b. **Saddled his donkey:** Abraham seems to personally saddle his donkey and split the wood. Though he had plenty of servants to do this for him, Abraham did it himself.
  - c. **Went to the place of which God had told him:** In wonderful, trusting obedience, Abraham went right to the spot. Abraham does this even though it would have been if God asked Abraham to offer himself instead of Isaac.

## B. Abraham's offering of Isaac.

1. (4-8) Abraham journeys to the place of sacrifice with Isaac.
- a. **On the third day:** Abraham came to the place on **the third day**. The region of Moriah is associated with Mount Moriah, which is modern-day Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3:1).
  - b. **I will go yonder and worship:** This is the first use of the word **worship** in reference to God in the Bible. The Hebrew word "*shachah*" simply means, "to bow down." While Abraham and Isaac did not go to the mount to have a time of joyful praise, they did go to bow down to the LORD.
  - c. **And we will come back to you:** Abraham is full of faith when he speaks to the young men who are with him. He believes that **we will come back**.
    - i. Does this mean Abraham somehow knew this was only a test and God would not really require this of him? Not at all. Instead, Abraham's faith is in the knowledge that should he kill Isaac, God would raise him from the dead, because God had promised Isaac would carry on the line of blessing and the covenant.
    - ii. He knew *in Isaac your seed shall be called* (Genesis 21:12), and Isaac had yet to have any children. God had to let him live *at least* long enough to have children.
    - iii. *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.* (Hebrews 11:17-19)

iv. He knew anything was possible, but it was impossible that God would break His promise. He knew God was not a liar. He had no precedent (God had not yet raised anyone from the dead), but Abraham knew God was able. God could do it!

d. **Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son:** We see Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice up the hill.

e. **He took the fire in his hand, and a knife:** Abraham took the knife up the hill. He didn't "forget" it. Unbelief would have left the knife at home, but genuine faith takes it." (Spurgeon)

f. **The two of them went together:** This literally means "the two of them went in agreement." Isaac is doing this knowingly and willingly. The phrase is repeated twice.

i. At this time, Abraham doesn't know *how* God will provide. He is still trusting in the ability of God to raise Isaac from the dead, but he won't stop trusting just because he doesn't know how God will come through.

g. **My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering:** Abraham knew God would provide a sacrifice, but where? Where was the lamb? That question had been asked by all the faithful, from Isaac to Moses to David to Isaiah, all the way to the time of John the Baptist when he declares: *Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29)

2. (9) Isaac willingly lies down on the altar.

a. **Then they came to the place:** Apparently, even on Mount Moriah, there was a specific place God told Abraham to stop, because this was the place to do this.

b. **Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac:** Isaac would have been able to get away had he chosen to. Yet he submits to his father perfectly. In remembering Abraham's faith, we should never forget Isaac's faith.

i. Jewish commentators think Isaac was in his thirties at the time of this event.

c. **Upon the wood:** As an obedient son, Isaac laid down on the wood, ready to be sacrificed.

3. (10-14) God's merciful reprieve.

a. **Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son:** Abraham was completely willing to plunge the knife into Isaac, because his faith was in God's ability to raise Isaac from the dead, not in God's desire to stop the sacrifice.

i. One may say, "It's not fair or right. God told Abraham to do something and then told him not to. If God really wanted to test Abraham, He would have made him plunge the knife into his son's chest."

ii. God *often* takes the *will* for the *deed* with his people. When He finds them truly *willing* to make the sacrifice He demands, He often does not require it. This is how we can be martyrs without ever dying for Jesus. We live the *life* of a martyr right now.

iii. But, "Often there are believers who wonder how they may know the will of God. We believe that ninety per cent of the knowing of the will of God consists in willingness to do it before it is known." (Barnhouse)

b. **You have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me:** Abraham displayed his heart towards God in that he was willing to give his only son. God displays His heart towards us in the same way, by giving His *only begotten Son* (John 3:16).

i. When God asked Abraham for the ultimate demonstration of love and commitment, He asked for Abraham's son. When the Father wanted to show us the ultimate demonstration of His love and commitment to us, He gave us His Son. We can say to the LORD, "Now I know that You love me, seeing You have not withheld Your Son, Your only Son from me."

- c. **Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son:** All the while, God still required a sacrifice. God didn't call off the sacrifice. Instead, He required that there be a substitute provided by God Himself.
- d. **Abraham called the name of the place:** The naming of the place is significant. Abraham called it, **The LORD Will Provide** (*Jehovah Jireh*); **In this mount, it shall be provided.**
- i. Abraham didn't name the place in reference to what *he* went through. He didn't name it "trial hill" or "agony hill" or "obedience hill." Instead, he named the hill in reference to what *God* did; he named it "provision hill." He named it knowing God would provide the ultimate sacrifice for salvation on that hill someday.
  - ii. **As it is said to this day:** apparently, Moses meant even in his own day, men would look at that hill and say, **"In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided."**
4. (15-19) God reconfirms His promise to Abraham in light of his faith.
- a. **Blessing I will bless you:** Imagine how happy Abraham was after passing this test of trust.
  - b. **I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore.**
5. (20-24) The listing of Nahor's family.
- a. A *concubine* was an inferior kind of wife, taken according to the common practice of those times, subject to the authority of the principal wife, and whose children had no right of inheritance, but were endowed with gifts.

Conclusion: The life application of this account can be summed up by a much later verse in the Bible, Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3: 5-6.

*References: The Bible, David Guzik, Donald Grey Barnhouse, Charles Spurgeon*

