



SACRIFICING ISAAC

Genesis 22–23

The greatest challenge to Abraham’s faith came from God Himself. Like Abraham, we soon learn that God’s commands are not always easy to follow or even easy to understand. But also like Abraham, we need to learn that obedience is always right and always rewarded.

Genesis 22 records the great test of Abraham’s faith. It also illustrates the future death of God’s only Son, the Lord Jesus.

We read in verse 1, “After these things God tested Abraham.” You need to understand that this is *not* a pop quiz. This is more like the *final exam* in God’s curriculum of faith. And it appears that Abraham is ready and waiting. God says to him, in verse 2:

“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

Did you notice how the Lord describes Isaac here? “Your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.”

Mom and Dad had waited twenty-five years for this son of the promise to be born. And by now, Isaac is a young man. Many times over the years, Abraham must have told Isaac about the promised land and a nation and a coming Messiah through their descendants.

But now the Lord is asking Abraham to offer his son up as a sacrifice—literally, a burnt offering! Child

sacrifice had no part in worshiping God. The pagans did this, but not followers of Yahweh.

We would naturally expect to hear Abraham refuse this command, but instead we read in verse 3:

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Verse 4 tells us it took almost three days to get to the place of sacrifice. Try to imagine what that



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journey must have been like for this loving father. How many times did Abraham replay Isaac's childhood—his miracle birth, his first steps, the first time he said "Papa," those special times as Isaac grew into a God-honoring young man?

You can almost feel Abraham's agony in verse 5, as he tells the others to stay there, while he and Isaac go on up the hill.

In verse 6, we read:

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.

Isaac no doubt had helped his father prepare many sacrifices before, because he notices that they have everything they need but the sacrificial animal. So, he asks in verse 7, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

No doubt Abraham has to clear the lump in his throat as he replies, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (verse 8).

Now I believe Abraham is trusting God for one of two results: either God is going to provide an animal for the sacrifice, or Isaac is going to be miraculously resurrected right there on the spot. And we know this because Abraham told the others in verse 5 that he and Isaac were going to worship and that *they* would return.

Now, the narrative moves quickly:

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. (verses 9-10)

By the way, don't overlook Isaac here. He's also trusting in the Lord's promise. This isn't just about Abraham's faith; it's about Isaac's as well.

There's no lamb miraculously waiting for them there. So, after some agonizing moments, Isaac—offering no resistance—is laid on this altar. No doubt, both Abraham and Isaac are struck by the gravity of this moment. You can almost see the reflection of the sun flashing off that sharpened blade, as Abraham raises it into the air.

And at the last moment, the Angel of the Lord—the Lord Himself—speaks:

"Abraham, Abraham! . . . Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (verses 11-12)

This was to become a prophetic announcement of a future and final sacrifice; the Lamb had yet to arrive.

Can you imagine the relief and joy that overwhelmed both Abraham and Isaac at this moment? They probably hugged one another through tears.

Then we read verse 13:

Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as

*a burnt offering instead of his son.*

Remember, Abraham had said earlier, in verse 8, that God would provide a lamb. But God provided a ram instead. Why? Because this was to become a prophetic announcement of a future and final sacrifice; the Lamb had yet to arrive.

Jesus will be introduced by John the Baptist as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This is his announcement that the Lamb has finally arrived! Isaiah prophesied of the suffering Messiah in Isaiah 53:5-6:

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Oh yes, God provided the Lamb. And what a phenomenal picture Isaac and Abraham make here of God the Father and God the Son. Just as Isaac is placed upon wood, on that altar of sacrifice, so also, Jesus is placed upon a wooden cross, which was nothing less than an altar of sacrifice.

Furthermore, Isaac willingly lays down his life just as the cross of Christ shows us the Lord’s willingness to die. Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus, “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Now all this took place on Mount Moriah, which is identified later as the place where the temple was built in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3:1). Moriah is actually a

ridge, and on this same mountain ridge is a place that will become known as Golgotha (John 19:17).

Beloved, the place where Isaac is offered is the same area where Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, would die. I wouldn’t be surprised at all to find out one day that it’s the exact same spot.

After the ram is sacrificed, the Angel of the Lord restates the covenant promise to Abraham in verses 17 and 18:

“I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring . . . and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

This is a prophetic promise that includes the coming Messiah, who will be a blessing to all the nations of the world.

Now as chapter 23 opens, we’re told that Sarah dies. In that day, people were buried in the land of their birth, which for Sarah would’ve been back in the land of Ur. But Abraham buys the cave of Machpelah in the promised land in which to bury his wife.

This is another act of faith. Abraham is buying more real estate, believing God’s promise that this land will indeed belong to him and his descendants.

And my friend, in the coming kingdom of Christ on earth, the final fulfillment of God’s promise will come to pass as all this land will belong to Israel permanently, without any objections or hesitation.

How has God worked in your life to equip you to face severe challenges to your faith?

How does the experience of Abraham and Isaac give you a fresh perspective on the death of the Lord Jesus Christ?

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