

20. The ultimate test

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If you split the surface of the world globe at the Date Line and lay it flat which is the standard way to show the map of the world, you will be able to see that Israel is located right in the center of the entire continents.

Right in the center of that land Israel, Jerusalem is located.

Right in the center of Jerusalem, the Holy Temple was located.

Right in the center of the Holy Temple, the Holy of Holies was located.

Right in the center of the Holy of Holies, the Ark of God which represents Jesus Christ was located.

That is the area which is known as the Mount Moriah where Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac in this chapter 22.

The two very important things happened on that Mount Moriah. But they both related with the sacrifices of the sons that would be offered by a human father and God the Father for us.

How interesting! In chapter 21, we've learned that there were striking similarities in the birth of Isaac and Jesus the Messiah. I even said that the birth of Isaac was the foreshadow of the birth of Jesus. In this chapter, we are going to see another similarities of their own sacrifices.

A. YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT, GOD?

Genesis 22:1-2 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 Then He said, "Take now 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."

In the "School of Faith" we must have occasional tests, or we will never know where we are spiritually. This was not so much a test to produce faith, but it was a test to reveal faith to ourselves.

It is not because God didn't know what Abraham would do. God knew all of that exactly in advance, but it was for Abraham to know his own faith.

Please note that once Abraham heard the command of God to sacrifice his only son Isaac, there was absolutely no objection or resistance from his part. It came from complete trust in God after his own blunders in chapter 12 and 20.

We need to learn to distinguish between trials and temptations. Temptations come from our desires within us, but trials come from the Lord who has a special purpose to fulfill. Temptations are used by the devil to bring out the worst in us, but trials are used by the Holy Spirit to bring out the best in us. Temptations seem logical, but trials seem very unreasonable.

All believers face similar common temptations to sin, but not all believers experience the same trials of faith. God's testings are tailor-made for each child of God, and each experience is unique.

Abraham had to learn the difference between trusting the promise and trusting the Promise Maker. If we trust the Promise Maker no matter what, and the promise will be taken care of.

Two important things we should know before we go any further:

1) The area of Moriah is where the temple was built centuries later

And it was the place that the Lord Jesus was sacrificed – right outside the city walls. Golgotha and the temple area were not very far apart. They belong to the same ridge of the Mount Moriah.

2) Burnt offering was a sign of complete surrender

It is an atonement for unintentional sin in general and an expression of devotion, commitment and complete surrender to God. The Israelites used to use bull, ram or male doves or pigeons without any blemish in total consumption by fire and smoke. It is a vivid picture of the complete dedication of Jesus Christ – the total consecration of His life. We can see how it was supposed to be done in details in Leviticus chapter 1.

God told them to bring an animal without any defect. Again it represents Jesus who was without sin. That means that He is telling us to bring our best to Him as our offerings and sacrifices. When many people don't care to keep something, or they often give leftover to church. That is wrong. We should bring our best to our God. If we bring the leftover to the Lord, that should not be called sacrifice or offering. It is nothing more than "emptying the spiritual pantry."

B. ABRAHAM'S IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Genesis 22:3-5 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."

There is not the slightest hint of hesitation on Abraham's part.

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 making ourselves equal with God. Because we cannot understand God's infinite wisdom and plan.

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.

Here we start to see incredible and fascinating similarities between this sacrifice and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ:

1) The third day

In Abraham's mind, Isaac was as good as dead when he left home as they headed out to the Mount Moriah in their three day journey. So when Isaac returned home with his father Abraham, it was alike resurrection.

As we all know, our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead on the third day, because He won victory over our sin and death.

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.

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 in God, if 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.

Please note that Abraham used the word 'worship' rather than sacrifice. He understood that 'sacrifice' is a part of 'worship'.

Rom. 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

C. FAITH WITH ACTION

Genesis 22:6-10 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. 7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

By this time, Isaac's age happened to be 33 years old at this time according to many Hebrew scholars, just about the same age as Jesus when He was crucified.

Many of people thought that Isaac was a little kid because of the word 'lad'. If he was, he couldn't possibly carry all that bundle of wood on his shoulders.

2) Wood on the son's shoulders

Note that 'wood' was laid on Isaac his son's shoulder to carry. Yes, it was the wood that would burn him as a sacrifice as Jesus would carry His cross on His shoulder to be hung on it.

3) Fire and knife in the father's hand

In the meanwhile, Abraham was carrying 'fire and knife' that would slay Isaac's life in his hand. They are the instruments of judgement and execution. We can see this as God the Father carrying out His wrath as a judgement on Jesus for the sins of the mankind.

4) God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering

I love what it says in this verse. "*God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.*" No man could come up with the right sacrifice to cleanse the offense of the mankind, because we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The only one who could do was the God Man, the Mediator Jesus Christ. This phrase is very important to see that Abraham was speaking prophetically.

So 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:

John 1:29 Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

5) Complete submission to the Father's will

In my opinion, Abraham's faith is just great and incredible. But Isaac's faith is even more incredible. He knew what his father was about to do: bound him and kill him with his knife and burn him to ash. That is not my idea of having a BBQ picnic, especially is the object of the BBQ is me. Let something else to be on the grill, not me. Thank you very much.

But Isaac trusted his God and his father's God enough to be bound without any resistance. I bet he even helped his elderly father to get himself up on the altar.

The Lord Jesus went to the cross having said, "Not My will, but Your will be done." He went to the cross to fulfill the will of God willingly.

D. THE GOD WHO PROVIDES

Genesis 22:11-14 But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 12 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of The Lord it shall be provided."

Abraham was completely willing to plunge the knife into Isaac. Abraham didn't think this was playacting.

When God finds His followers 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 need to live the life of a martyr right now.

Generally the people who have their children at their old age really cherish their relationship with the children more than the younger parents do. Maybe Abraham was cherishing his only son Isaac too much that he was starting to replace God with Isaac in his heart. God didn't want him to have idolatry.

I am absolutely sure that Abraham was so glad to hear this command of God from heaven.

The word 'know' in English in this verse seems does not justify the the omni-scient capability of God. The proper translation according to its Hebrew word 'yada' should be 'acknowledge'. In other words, God is acknowledging the incredible faith of Abraham.

"The-Lord-will-provide" is that famous "Jehovah Jireh". Indeed, God provides what we need according to His riches in glory.

Please note what it says at the end of this verse: "*In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided.*" What an incredible statement this is! That is the place where Abraham prophesied the upcoming the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. That is the place where God had received the sacrifices of animals for the people of Israel through the hands of human priests. And this is the place where God provided Himself as the Lamb of God.

However, we find a few differences between this sacrifice of Isaac and the crucifixion of Jesus:

- Isaac felt neither the knife nor the fire physically, but Jesus felt both in God's wrath against the sins of the mankind.
- Isaac's loving father was right there, but Jesus was forsaken by His Father when He became sin for us.

E. ABRAHAM PASSED THE TEST WITH FLYING COLORS

Genesis 22:15-19 Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son-- 17 blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

Imagine how happy Abraham was after passing this test of trust.

F. PREPARING FOR THE NEXT CHARACTER: ISAAC

Genesis 22:20 Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, "Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: 21 Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, 22 Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." 23 And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah.

Here we see the first mention of the name of Rebekah who is going to meet her future husband Isaac in Chapter 24.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible. We must obey Him.

Whether you look at Joseph in prison, Moses and Israel at the Red Sea, David in the cave, or Jesus at Calvary, the lesson is the same: We live by promises, not by explanations.

2) If we trust the Promise Maker no matter what, the promise will be taken care of.

It is absolutely important for us to believe the promises of God. He wants us to do that. But it is more important and vital to trust the Promise Maker our God than the promises themselves.