

## 8. Abraham's Test

### Old Testament Heroes

#### Genesis 22

Warm-up Question: Did you have a pop culture idol when you were growing up?

Alternate Warm-up Question: Share the moment when you first heard that you were going to have a baby.

<sup>1</sup>Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>2</sup>Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." <sup>3</sup>Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. <sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup>He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." <sup>6</sup>Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, <sup>7</sup>Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup>Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. <sup>9</sup>When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup>But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>12</sup>"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." <sup>13</sup>Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup>So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." <sup>15</sup>The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup>and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup>and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." <sup>19</sup>Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba (Genesis 22:1-19).

One of the greatest moments in my life was to be told that my wife Sandy was pregnant with our first child, Anna. We heard the news from an Arab doctor in Bethlehem. Sandy became pregnant with our first child when we were living in Jerusalem, Israel. I

remember the joy that flooded our hearts as we walked out of the doctor's office that morning as if it were yesterday. God had filled our hearts with laughter! We felt like we were walking on air as we made our way home from the doctor's office.

Imagine how it must have been for Sarah to tell Abraham that he was going to have a son when he was one hundred years of age! How would Sarah have known she was pregnant? In Sarah's day, there were no doctor's offices that would do a pregnancy test for her. The mind boggles at the thought of a ninety-year-old woman today, going into a doctor's office or a drug store asking for a pregnancy test kit! We know that she was past the age of child bearing and certainly past menopause at that age. How would she have known that she was pregnant? Surely it would have been at the first kick of the baby inside her womb. Imagine wide-eyed Abraham as he hears the news for the first time, that Sarah felt life in her womb where before everything was dead. How stunning would have been the revelation that God keeps His promises exactly on time—even when it is an utterly impossible situation. What wonder and awe would have filled his heart when he held Isaac in his arms for the first time. It seemed like forever that Abraham had waited on this promise that he would be the father of many nations, and here at one hundred years of age the promise was fulfilled. It is easy to imagine the three of them together in the tent with Isaac cradled in the middle and Abraham and Sarah laughing together as they started saying his name, "*Laughter*," laughing for joy at the miraculous power of God!

### **Abraham's Test**

Several years had gone by since Isaac, the apple of Abraham's eye, was born. Verses five and twelve tell us that Isaac was now a "boy." We are not told exactly how old Isaac is at this point. What we do know is that Isaac had been fully weaned, and that he was walking and talking at this point. The fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham had surely greatly boosted his faith. Every morning that he saw his son and Sarah, he was witnessing an awesome miracle of God. Faith grows when one trusts in God's Word and sees answers to their faith. Do not underestimate the power of sharing your testimony of what God has done in you and through you—never tire of sharing what God has done in your life.

New spiritual growth often comes at a time when one plateaus in their faith. God comes to us like a Vinedresser who prunes His vine occasionally in order for greater fruitfulness to come to His branches (John 15:1-2). The Lord uses trials or tests in order that His people will enjoy a new growth spurt in their faith. God designs each test for the purpose of shaping one's character and getting them off of the plateau to grow in grace again. Think of the testing that Peter the apostle went through when he had become too sure of himself. He was thinking that he had it all together and was able to stand in the midst of whatever was thrown at him. When Jesus told the disciples that the shepherd (Himself) would be struck and the sheep scattered, Peter's response was "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). The Lord allowed a test to come to Peter. Remember, he was asked three times if he had been with Jesus, and each time he denied ever knowing Christ. Jesus had told Peter that Satan had asked to sift the

disciple (Luke 22:31), and God allowed the test. How had Peter's test strengthened his faith? When he was restored to Christ, he was much more reliant on the Spirit's power than his own ability and strength of resolve. Abraham's test came after several years had gone by and no major challenge to his faith. Tests to our faith can also come after spiritual victories. After Elijah had won the victory in a spiritual duel over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, when he called down fire from heaven, he is suddenly brought into great spiritual oppression and depression. Jezebel's words laid him low to the point that he is convinced that he would not last to live another day (1 Kings 19:2). Godly leaders often experience bouts of oppression and depression in their work of pushing back the powers of darkness. C.H. Spurgeon, the great English prince of preachers was often given to bouts of severe depression. It is not uncommon for Christian leaders to experience times of great darkness and spiritual opposition to their work of making Christ known.

[What do you think God was seeking to accomplish in Abraham's character with this test?](#)

Imagine how Abraham would have doted on his promised son that God had miraculously given him. When Isaac was weaned from his mother's milk, Abraham had thrown a big party (Genesis 21:8). I'm sure people came from far and wide to see the miraculous boy that had been birthed by a ninety-year old woman to a hundred year old man. Don't you think Abraham enjoyed giving testimony to the power of our God to give miraculous answers to prayer? It is likely that when Ishmael, his son by Hagar, had to leave his household, that his attention had become even more focused on his son Isaac. When we dote too much on people or things, we have a tendency to lose focus on the God who loves us and wants to enjoy relationship with us. It is likely that Abraham thought more about the boy than the God who had given the boy. After all Isaac was the child of promise! It is understandable to think of how Abraham's attention and affections would have been keenly focused on this child. If we are to be servants of the Lord God, we are to be consecrated to Him. To be consecrated is to have open and empty hands toward the Lord. When we grip things or people too tightly, he uses tests and trials to release our grip from whatever we have become too focused on. Even the gifts that God gives us can become more important to us than He is.

[Have you ever felt that something or someone has become so important to you that nothing else mattered? Was this a good thing, or did it become a challenge to your faith? Have you ever been asked to give something up?](#)

Many years ago as a young Christian I had a good-sized garden where I grew potatoes, strawberries, and other vegetables. My pride and joy, though, was my tomato plants. I was working at the time as a commercial fisherman, but when I would get home, I would dash outside to see how the tomato plants were doing. One particular day when I was inspecting them after work, the thought came to my mind, "you care more for your tomato plants than me." It hit me that I had become obsessed with these tomatoes! I know it sounds silly, but I did not want to get carried away to the point where I was always thinking of these plants. I felt challenged by the Holy Spirit about it. I cut the tomato plants down after that. Another time when I saw myself loving things more than God was

a time when I worked my father's fishing boat on my own at nighttime. When my dad would get in from a day's fishing, I would go back out and work the boat alone. One particular night, I went to an area where our fishing rivals normally went to and caught so many fish and made so much money that greed started to replace my love for God. I saw it manifested in how much thought I gave to how I could maximize my fishing time to get the most fish. I lost much sleep after I got back to harbor thinking about how I could be more successful in my work. It wasn't long after that that God called me from my father's fishing nets to work with Him. What do your thoughts go to in your spare time? "A man's life is what his thoughts make it," Marcus Aurelius said. "Whoever or whatever is prompting your predominant thought will govern your immediate action. Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny."

We serve a God that has a special love for His people. He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness (Jeremiah 31:3). We are only at our happiest when our hearts are focused on Him., He has made us in such a way that He has shaped us with a void that can only be filled with Himself. Jesus said to those that were following Him:

"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:37).

When Jesus restored Peter after his three-time denial, He asked Peter as to how much he loved Him. The first time it was, "Do you love me more than these?" Then it was, "Do you truly love me?" and finally, "Do you love me?" We are to love Him with all our souls, mind and strength (Mark 12:33). Our possessions and things have a way of causing us to grip them too tightly. It is likely that Abraham's test was designed by God to pry open Abraham's fingers from an unbalanced love of Isaac. Perhaps you too have something or someone in your life that you hold too tightly. You might not even know that you are in a test; certainly Abraham did not know it was a test. When God told him to take his son, his only son, Isaac, and offer him as a burnt offering, he did not know that this was a test, and he did not know the outcome. Only we have the benefit of hindsight.

### **The Walk to Moriah**

What do you think would have been the possible scenarios running through Abraham's mind as he travelled the three days to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering?

He got up early the next morning (Genesis 22:3) and saddled his donkey. He cut up the wood ahead of time and made sure he had a sharp knife with him as he got two servants and his son together. I am sure he did not tell Sarah what the Lord had told him to do. It is way too easy to find reasons as to why a person should not obey God. Abraham needed no distractions to hinder him from doing what God had told him to do. God made it very clear which son was to be sacrificed. It was not to be Ishmael—this had

to be the promised son—the one in whom all the promises had been given, the son he loved so dearly (Verse 2). Think of the illogical nature of it all. How it went against the grain of all that he had been promised. He had waited so long for this boy and now he was to kill him—how crazy an idea was that? How he would have balked at the very thought of doing this to his beloved son! How would he explain it to Sarah when he came home with Isaac’s blood all over his clothes? How would he explain this to those that he had invited to the party he had held to commemorate the weaning of Isaac?

Abraham knew what it was like to offer a burnt offering. God had brought him from Ur of the Chaldees, a pagan city that performed child sacrifices. Think about how Abraham may have witnessed this type of sacrifice. To offer a sacrifice in Abraham’s day meant that the offering’s throat would be cut, the offering would be dismembered, and then the pieces would be totally burnt up on the altar. How this went against his natural senses! The very thought of cutting up his son upon the altar was repulsive to him. The three-day journey to Mount Moriah speaks of the same journey that the Lamb of God took from Galilee to Jerusalem to be the sacrifice for all men. I’m sure that Abraham enacted the whole scene in his mind over and over again as he journeyed the three days from Beersheba to Mount Moriah, which is the very site where Solomon’s Temple was built (2 Chronicles 3:1). Abraham, when he arrived at Moriah, may have been directed to Golgotha itself to build the altar. He had two witnesses that would watch from a distance the whole sordid affair of him pulling out the knife. He kept the servants at a distance so that they had no time to stop him from doing the deed. The worst part in his mind would have been that there was no reason for sacrificing his son.

Why was the timing of the angel’s intervention significant?

Have you ever wondered about God’s timing? What is the significance of the fact that God waits until the last moment before He intervenes?

<sup>17</sup>By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, <sup>18</sup>even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” <sup>19</sup>Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham had fully come to a place in his heart and mind where he had confidence in God’s abilities to fulfill his Word, and God didn’t need Abraham’s help to do it. Abraham told the two men servants that he and Isaac would go on to worship and then they would both be back.

Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? <sup>8</sup>And Abraham said, My son, **God will provide himself a lamb** for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together (Genesis 22:7-8 KJV).

The writer of Hebrews tells us that even in this bleak situation, Abraham trusted that God would somehow act righteously on his behalf and keep His promise to him, which

was that; “through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” We are told that: “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (Hebrews 11:17-19.)

What similarities can you see in the story of Abraham offering his son Isaac and the Father offering His Son on the cross?

Abraham was the forerunner of all those that would follow the way of entering into relationship with God through the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross. Abraham knew nothing at that time of what God would do in the future near Mount Moriah, but God wanted him to understand and even feel the pain of what sin would cost the Father in giving His only Son, the Lord Jesus, as the perfect sacrificial Lamb of God. The more a man can enter into seeing the pain of what it cost God to offer Christ, the more a man can abandon everything that brought Christ there in the first place. Hatred for sin is the result of seeing the cost to God for taking the place of Isaac and yourself at Moriah. This is one of the reasons I like to take people on pilgrimage to Israel. People are more easily able to enter into the depths of the love of God when they walk the way of the cross to the place where God provided Himself as the lamb that would take away all sin.

In one of Billy Graham’s evangelistic films, *Shiokari Pass*, a young Christian became a hero. He was working with a railroad company, far away from his fiancée. He worked hard every day and finally the time came to go back to his fiancée and marry her. On the way back home, just before the peak of a steep hill, the train suddenly shook hard and stopped. When the young man went to the front of the passenger car on which he was riding, he found that it was disconnected from the rest of the train. It then began to roll backward down the steep slope. Since he had worked on the railroad, he knew that there was a sharp curve behind them that the passenger car could not handle. It would be thrown off the tracks, killing the passengers. He tried to stop the car with the hand brake, but he failed. Our hero then remembered his favorite verse in the Bible: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” Although this man had everything to live for, he jumped on the train tracks and stopped the passenger car with his body. He literally laid down his life to save the lives of many.<sup>1</sup>

This is what God has done for us. The lamb that Abraham sees caught in the thicket, is a picture of something that God would do in the future for all those that will enter into the sacrifice of God Himself as the Messiah (Christ). For those of us reading and studying today, it is two thousand years in the past, but this once for all time sacrifice is as much for us as it was for Isaac and Abraham. Moses’ (the writer of the book of Genesis) words stretch to us today when he wrote of what God would do in the special place near Moriah in Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup>So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided” (Genesis 22:14).

The provision of God is for you to know Him through a once and for all time sacrifice for sin that delivers us from the guilt, shame and the wage that sin dishes out—death (Romans 6:23), which is separation from God and all that is holy, pure and loving. This is the awesome plan and provision of God—and on the mountain of the Lord, it was provided. This is the encouragement to us; that God keeps His Word to us. He has made a covenant, and cannot fail to keep His Word. When we take Him at His Word, our faith grows. When we believe Him, He stretches our faith so that it can grow to new dimensions, so that we are able to “give our Isaacs” to God. God will never require you to do anything that He will not give you the grace and ability to do. He is truly Jehovah Jireh, our provider. His grace is sufficient.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for providing your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be my substitute for sin. Help me to understand what it cost you to see your Son hanging on the cross in full payment of my debt of sin. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: [keiththomas7@gmail.com](mailto:keiththomas7@gmail.com)

Website: [www.groupbiblestudy.com](http://www.groupbiblestudy.com)