

Genesis 22

Abraham began following God's leadership in Genesis 12, at the age of 75. He frequently built altars to worship God and always did what God told him to do. While it took 25 years for God to fulfill His promise to give Abraham a son through Sarah, Abraham's life could be described as "walking by faith" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). Moses wrote of Abraham's faith in 15:6, that it compelled God to consider Abraham a righteous man. It will be in this command, of chapter 22, that Abraham's faith will be completed. God will command Abraham to do something that He has never commanded anyone else: sacrifice his son. It will be an act which only God Himself will ever perform with His own approval. God had seen a life of faith in Abraham; He had seen that Abraham had already given himself to God. This act of obedience will make that faith complete. In Jewish writings, this story is often called the *Akedah* for the Hebrew word "bound" found in 22:9.

It is odd that a text which uses "love" for the first time in the Bible (22:2) will also use the word "enemies" (22:17) for the first time. It is also interesting that the first use of the verb "love" is not of God's love for man or man's love for God, nor of a husband's love for his wife nor of a wife's love for her husband. It is a father's love for his son; apropos for the overall theme of the Bible! As you read through the text, highlight the number of times Isaac is considered, either by name (6 times), by "son" (10 times), or by "only child" (3 times). Also consider the number of times the verb "to see" is used, especially considering Abraham names the place "Jehovah sees."

TRANSLATION - 22:1-5:

1 Then it was after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I!" **2** So He said, "Take, please, your son, your only child, whom you love, Isaac, and go, yourself, to the land of Moriah, and sacrifice him there for a sacrifice, on one [of the] mountains which I will say to you."

3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled the donkey and took two young men with him and Isaac, his son. Also, he split trees [for] the sacrifice and arose and went to the place which God said to him.

4 On the third day, also Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place from a distance. **5** Abraham said to his young men, "Remain, yourselves, here with the donkey and I, myself, and the young man - let us go thus and let us worship and let us return to you all."

WORDS:

"Tested" (verse 1; 36 times) means to "tempt, try, or test." This is its first occurrence. God will not lure man into doing something morally wrong. However, He will put man's faith into the fire to make it more pure. "Please" (verse 2) is the particle found 405 times, rarely in the mouth of God toward man (Gen. 13:14; 15:5; 22:2; Exo. 11:2; Isa. 7:3). It appears that God acknowledges the great challenge He is setting before Abraham. The adjective "only" (12 times) is used to describe Isaac here (22:2, 12, 16), but clearly, Isaac is not Abraham's "only" child or son. Therefore, God must mean "only" in a special sense, the only child of promise, the only child through whom the promise would be fulfilled. "Love" is found 217 times; this is the first use of this word in the Bible. "Sacrifice" is used twice in the same verse; one is the verb, the other, a noun. The verb is used 894 times and can be understood in a physical way as "to go up, ascend, or bring up." It can also refer to offering a sacrifice. The noun (286 times) denotes the burnt offering, which was completely consumed on the altar. Incidentally, a modern, related word to "burnt offering" is *holocaust*.

"Saddled" (verse 3; 33 times) can mean to "saddle, bind, buckle, wrap, twist (a rope), or imprison." "Split" (51 times) can mean to "split or break open." "Worship" (173 times; 23 times in Gen.) was first used in 18:2 and 19:1. In those two texts it was used in its literal sense: "to bow down." Here it is used in its predominant, theological sense of "worship," that is, to give honor to God through some act required by God which shows one's faith.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Moriah is only found one other place, in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the location for the city of Jerusalem. We do not know the relationship between that location and this location, but apparently, it was at least in the general area. It is interesting that 2 Chronicles 3:1 locates the place as the same place where David bought a possession, but it does not link the site to this site of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

COMMENTS:

We do not know how long after the preceding events the story of this chapter occurs. Isaac is considerably older now, with the same word "young man" referring to him (22:5, 12) as well as to Abraham's servants (22:3). Now God wants to "test" Abraham (not *tempt* Abraham). It is not out of order for God to *test* man's faith, just as God did with Adam and Eve in the garden. The desire is to see if man will love God supremely; His desire is pure and holy. To *tempt*, as Satan does, is with an impure desire to get man to sin. The end result of God's testing is that man's faith is stronger.

God softens His astounding command with the word "please," as if God understands the magnitude of His command to Abraham. Note that God describes Isaac in increasingly more familiar terms. Isaac is Abraham's son. Count the number of times "son" is used in the text through verse 19. Isaac is Abraham's "only child." Clearly Abraham had Ishmael, but Isaac was the child of promise, the son through Sarah. Additionally, Ishmael has been driven out, leaving only Isaac. He was the son whom "Abraham loved." God acknowledges the depth of feeling that Dad had for his son. He is "Isaac," the one who was named after both Abraham's and Sarah's laughing response to God's promise.

The sacrifice was to be a *burnt offering*. He was to be set on fire and totally consumed in the flames. This is the only specific type of offering in Genesis; therefore, the oldest type of offering. A human sacrifice was not inherently sinful, but God will make it sinful under the Law of Moses. It was practiced in other ANE religions, but God will state a principle in Exodus 32:33 that makes the human sacrifice theologically untenable. Of course, as this event proceeds, we see that God never intended to allow Abraham to follow through with it anyway.

"Here am I" is the only word (in Hebrew, the phrase is one word) uttered by Abraham to God (cf. 22:11). Abraham was able to follow through with the command because he had a higher love for God, illustrated in verse 3, in that Abraham arose *early* in the morning to start his obedience. He saddled the donkey. He took two young servants. Last of all, he split the trees (wood) to take to the sacrifice. Then they all left. We can only speculate why God did not tell Abraham to perform the gruesome act immediately, why He made Abraham travel a distance of three days before he could fulfill his obedience. We assume it was because God was giving Abraham ample opportunity to change his mind.

After three days of travel, Abraham came within eye-shot of the mountains of Moriah, a distance from Beer Sheba of about fifty miles. Abraham left his servants in order to go further to "worship." Abraham did not tell the servants that he was sacrificing anything. He used a more general word, "to bow down," in its theological sense: "to worship." It is fascinating that Abraham seems to include Isaac in the *return* as he says, "let *us* go, let *us* worship, and let *us* return." Just what does Abraham expect to happen?

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Perhaps other ANE religions, even his father's, were practicing child sacrifices at this time. If so, this command might not have come as a surprise to Abraham. However, God had clearly and repeatedly promised that He would bless Abraham with a family, specifically through Isaac, most recently in 21:12.

Contemporaries of Moses - God will require the firstborn to be dedicated to Him, and "redeemed" with money given to the tabernacle in the Law of Moses (Exo. 22:29; 34:20).

The idea of God testing Israel is found throughout the Law (Exo. 15:22-26; 16:4; 20:18-20; Deut. 8:2, 16). However, it is not spiritually possible, nor correct, for man to test God (Exo. 17:2, 7; Num. 14:22; Isa. 7:12).

The Law forbade child sacrifices (Lev. 18:21; 20:2). Man has to pay the penalty for his own sins (Exo. 32:33) or allow God to deal with the problem of sin in His own way.

Later Hebrew writers - All Israel should have learned from Abraham's example that complete obedience to God is the sum of man's response to God and nothing short is pleasing to Him. God continues to test Israel throughout her history: Judges 2:21-22; 3:1-4. In 2 Chronicles 32:31 and Psalm 26:2, we see some motives for God's testing.

Israel, at least certain individuals, practiced child sacrifice: 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6. King Josiah stopped the practice, at least for a time (2 Kings 23:10). See also Jeremiah 19:5 and Ezekiel 20:30-31; 23:36-39.

NT writers - There are many parallels between this account and the theme of the Bible as God sacrificed His Son, His only Son (John 1:18; 3:16), Whom He loves, Jesus (Matt. 3:17). In Romans 8:32, Paul says that God did not spare His only Son but offered Him for all mankind. As here, we have the ram substituted for Isaac's life (22:13), so Jesus will be offered for all mankind (Rom. 5:18-19). The word for this substitution is "vicarious." See also 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Romans 4:25.

Jesus' brother, James, says that God does not *tempt* man into sin (1:13). Thus God "tested" Abraham.

TRANSLATION - 22:6-19:

6 So Abraham took the wood of the sacrifice and put [it] on Isaac, his son, and he took by his hand the fire and the knife and the two walked on together. **7** Then Isaac said to Abraham, his father, and he said, "Father." And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?"

8 So Abraham said, "God will see to it, the lamb for the sacrifice, my son." And the two walked on together.

9 Then they came to the place which God had said to him and Abraham built there the altar and he arranged the wood and he bound Isaac, his son, and he put him on the altar above the wood. **10** Then Abraham extended his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. **11** Then the messenger of Jehovah called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham! Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

12 He said, "Do not extend your hand against the young man and do not do to him anything because now I know that the fear of God you [have] and you will not withhold your son, your only child from me."

13 Then Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw and behold a ram afterwards was seized in a thicket by its horns and Abraham went and took the ram and sacrificed a sacrifice instead of his son. **14** Abraham called there that place, "Jehovah sees," which he said, "Today in the mountain, Jehovah will be seen."

15 Then the angel of Jehovah called to Abraham a second [time] from heaven, **16** And He said, "By me I swear, declares Jehovah that because which you did this thing and you did not withhold your son, your only child, **17** that to bless, I will bless you and to multiply I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which [is] on the edge of the sea and your seed will possess the gate of its enemies. **18** And in your seed will be blessed all the nations of the earth because which you obeyed My voice."

19 So Abraham returned to his young men and they arose and walked together to Beer Sheba and Abraham returned to Beer Sheba.

WORDS:

"Knife" (verse 6) is not used frequently (22:6, 10; Judges 19:29; Prov. 30:14, where it is used in parallel with "sword," thus a large knife). It is a butcher's knife. "Lamb" (verse 7; 47

times) was often used in sacrifices under the Law of Moses. “Arranged” (verse 9; 75 times) means to “lay out, set in rows, stack, draw up in battle formation.” We saw it first in 14:8. “Bind” is only found here in the OT and gives its name to the incident itself: *Akedah*. “Slaughter” (verse 10; 81 times) is used generally to describe the slaughter of animals for sacrifice (Lev. 1:5, 11). “Withhold” (verse 12, 16; 28 times) means to “withhold, keep back, save, refrain.” We saw it first at 20:6. “Seized” (63 times) means to “seize, grasp, take hold of.” “Possess” (verse 17; 232 times) means to “inherit, take possession, take away property.” “Enemies” (verse 17; 285 times) is found here for the first time.

GRAMMAR:

“To bless I will bless” and “to multiply, I will multiply” are infinitive absolutes, followed by the imperfect, the Hebrew emphatic construction.

COMMENTS:

Leaving the two young men sitting, wondering what their master was doing, Abraham loaded Isaac with the wood, took the fire, and the two “walked on together,” a phrase used three times in the text: 22:6, 8, 19. The fact that Isaac could carry a load of wood and also ask the type of question he asks argues that Isaac was probably in his late teens, if not early twenties. Isaac recognized something was missing from their worship. They had the wood and the fire, but there was no lamb.

Abraham responded with words of faith: “God will see to it, the lamb, my son.” I remember in junior high school when I was worried about something (which I certainly no longer remember), that my mom responded with those same words. Wouldn’t it be great if every mom was able to instill in her children’s hearts the essence of these words of faith: “God will see to it.” What was Abraham thinking? What was Isaac thinking? The terse and tight nature of the text does not expound on these questions, but it does compel us to ask them.

When they arrived at the place where God had commanded Abraham to perform this sacrifice, Abraham built his altar, as was his custom (in Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, Beer Sheba). He laid the wood on the altar and then he bound his son, his only son, whom he loved, Isaac. While the text is about Abraham’s faith, we marvel that the son trusted his dad that he would allow himself to be bound to be sacrificed, without a fight. The words Moses chose to use help us picture an animal sacrifice; the knife was a large knife used to butcher animals and the verb used means to “slaughter” an animal, for the sacrifice. Abraham’s intention to follow through with God’s command was complete. Suddenly, the angel of Jehovah God called out of the heavens with a two-fold use of Abraham’s name, out of urgency. See comments at 16:7 for a discussion of the “Messenger / Angel of the Lord.” Abraham responds with his typical humble response: “Here am I.”

God acknowledged that Abraham was intending to follow through with the sacrifice. He told him not to do what he was going to do. “Now I know,” God said, that “you have fear of Me and you will not withhold your son, your only son.” The word “Fear” is not a verb, as it is often translated, but a noun, as if it is something we can possess in our hearts. This “fear” is the deep love and respect for Jehovah God that compels one to obey God, regardless of its cost. That is the type of love that God has for mankind, a love that compelled Him to give His Son, His only Son, for everyone.

The fact that God says, “Now I know,” should not be interpreted to mean God is / was otherwise ignorant. Such a God is not worthy to be trusted! Rather, the word “know” carries another connotation, that of “seeing” or “experiencing” the obedience of Abraham. The Bible teaches, actually, that God knows everything, even the unmade choices of man (Psa. 139:1-18; John 21:17; Rom. 11:33-36).

Immediately, God caused a ram to get stuck in the thickets by its horns so that Abraham was able to offer the ram on that altar instead of his son. This is the first *substitutionary* sacrifice in the Bible, a ram for a son. The Law will command these sacrifices and Jesus will become the ultimate substitutionary sacrifice for humanity. However, this is not a

sacrifice for *sin*; there is no need for atonement. It is out of thanksgiving and Abraham named the place “Jehovah sees” from the statement he made to Isaac about God providing the lamb for the sacrifice: “Jehovah will see to it.” The name also reflects the idea that man can see God’s gracious gifts.

Beginning in verse 15, the messenger makes a second speech to Abraham. This will be the last divine speech to Abraham. In this speech, God recognizes Abraham’s obedience. The messenger emphasizes the solemnity of this promise in four ways. First, He says God “swears” by Himself, the highest type of oath there could possibly be. This is the only divine oath in the stories of the patriarchs. Second, He states, “declares Jehovah” (a phrase found 364 times in the OT). Third, God emphasized His blessing of Abraham. Fourth, God emphasized the number of Abraham’s offspring, as the stars of the sky and sand of the seashore.

Since Abraham had not “withheld” his son from offering him to God, God would certainly bless Abraham (the impact of the Hebrew emphatic construction) and He would certainly multiply Abraham’s seed. Eventually, Abraham’s family would possess the “gates of their enemies,” a figure of speech to refer to conquering the whole city. “Gates” were locations in which court was held and business was transacted. To “possess the gates” was to control the city (cf. 24:60).

After this last speech, Abraham returned to his servants, likely with Isaac, although he is not mentioned, and they all return home to Beer Sheba.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Abraham was able to offer his son to God because Abraham had already given his heart to God. If our hearts belong to God, everything else will follow. In Abraham’s case, he learned what kind of blessings follow when one gives his or her heart to God. He was able to offer a ram instead of his son. The promise that nations would be blessed through Abraham was found in 12:3 and 18:18. God’s oath to Abraham will be reiterated again in 24:7; 26:3-4; 50:24.

Contemporaries of Moses - Israel needed to learn that God will *always* see to their needs, even when they offer the best of the flock. But few Israelites were able to walk by faith as “Father” Abraham did. Moses refers to this oath of God in Exodus 32:13. God’s oath to Abraham is the foundation for Israel taking the Promised Land (Exo. 33:1; Deut. 1:8). The Ten Commandments were given to Israel so they would possess fear of God (Exo. 20:20). Obedience like Abraham’s would be crucial for Israel to possess and remain in the land (Exo. 19:5; Deut. 11:13).

Later Hebrew writers - The psalmist seems to allude to this promise in Psalm 72:17. God will utter other oaths; see Isaiah 45:23; Jeremiah 22:5; 49:13; Amos 4:2; 6:8. Jeremiah (4:2) says that mankind will “bless themselves” in God. In Micah 6:6-7, the prophet asks if it would please God if he offered God his firstborn; the expected answer is “no.” The offering of the lamb will be picked up by Isaiah the prophet as he foresees a future vicarious offering (53:7-10). The promise that Israel would be as numerous as the stars of heaven was fulfilled by the time of King Solomon (1 Kings 4:20).

NT writers - The oath to Abraham is referenced in Luke 1:73; Acts 3:25. Christians also could learn from Abraham’s strong faith in God. Christians are considered the children of Abraham, when we express the same obedient faith as Abraham (Gal. 3:8-9, 26-29). The Hebrew writer discusses the oath God swears by His own nature (6:13-18). In Hebrews 11:12, 17-19, the writer praises Abraham’s faith in that Abraham expected God to fulfill His promise through Isaac, even though God had commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. Do we have such faith in God? If not, why not, since we live on *this side* of the events of the cross? James uses this event to show that it was Abraham’s obedience which completed or fulfilled his faith (2:20-23). The picture of Jesus as the “Lamb,” a favorite with John (35 times; with 32 times just in Rev; see John 1:29), while primarily based on the Passover Lamb (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7), also has this incident in the background. The innumerable multitude of Abraham’s descendants, fulfilled in a spiritual way in Christ, is seen in heaven (Rev. 7:9).

TRANSLATION - 22:20-24:

20 Then it was after these things that it was reported to Abraham, saying, “Behold Milchah gave birth, even herself, to sons to Nahor, his brother: **21** Uz, his firstborn, and Buz, his brother, and Chemuel, father of Aram, **22** and Chesed and Chazo and Phildash and Jidlaph and Bethuel.” **23** Now Bethuel gave birth to Rebekah. These eight Milchah bore to Nahor, the brother of Abraham. **24** Even his concubine and her name [was] Reumah and she gave birth, even herself, to Tebach and Gaham and Tachash and Maachah.

WORDS:

“Concubine” is found 37 times, here for the first time. We note that Hagar was not referred to as Abraham’s “concubine.” However, the concubine seemed to be considered a true wife, albeit, with a secondary rank to the first wife.

COMMENTS:

Some time around Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, he is told that his sister-in-law, Milchah, has given birth to eight sons. The primary, if not sole reason for this paragraph is the introduction of Rebekah, who will become Isaac’s wife in chapter 24. Nahor has Bethuel and Bethuel will have Rebekah, the only daughter mentioned in this brief genealogy. Along with the four born to Nahor by his concubine, Reumah, Nahor will have twelve descendants, as Ishmael and Jacob.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Abraham will send his servant to his family to find a wife for Isaac in chapter 24. We are already introduced to the genealogy of Rebekah here in this paragraph. She is, in fact, a member of Abraham’s extended family.