

Ge 22:1 ¶ 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."

3 ¶ 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."

6 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.

11 ¶ 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."

15 ¶ 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.

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.

## Genesis Chapter 22 - The Sacrifice (?) of Isaac

Now, this is a disturbing story. If this doesn't bother you, then either you weren't paying attention when the fellow read it to you or you've heard it so much that you've stopped thinking about it as something that happened to real people.

Let's review what we've got here:

- 1) God tells Abraham to sacrifice (kill) his son
- 2) Abraham agrees and takes him on a three-day hike
- 3) It takes the voice of the Angel of God to stop him
- 4) Everybody talks about what a good fellow Abraham was for being willing to do this

Now let's look at what makes this "disturbing on so many levels," as the currently popular phrase says:

- 1) God told him to do it.
- 2) Abraham questioned God about destroying the cities, but here he doesn't argue or question at all.
- 3) Abraham doesn't say anything about what's happening to Sara
- 4) Abraham doesn't tell Isaac
- 5) Is this a good example for people to follow?
- 6) Doesn't this justify doing anything if you think God told you to?
- 7) How could a father do such a thing or be willing to do such a thing?
- 8) If we couldn't have followed through with this does that mean that we don't have faith?
- 9) What happened to Isaac at the end of the story?
- 10) Isn't this just an ancient story about child sacrifice that's been reworked or evolved into something else?

1. The biggest question, maybe, is what type of God would tell Abraham to sacrifice his son. We don't have much use for a God like that, and if you'll read the text closely, you'll see that our author wants us to realize that God never intended for Abraham to actually go through with it. The first thing that we're told is that whenever this took place, sometime when Isaac was between the age of 3 and 37, is that God "tested" Abraham.

The word used for test is sometimes translated as "tempted" and that is how your King James version actually reads. However, the word can also be translated as "to prove" or "to assay." The idea is that this is not a temptation to do something wrong but a challenge to demonstrate something, in this case, to prove to Abraham something about his faith. To assay something is to test it to show its purity or value, such as a metal ore back in the old mining days. Once again, we could read the text as "God assayed Abraham"

So, the story isn't about Abraham sacrificing Isaac, it's a story about God using a terribly challenging test so Abraham can learn about his own growth of faith.

For that matter, this story is often used as an example of how we can't put anything before God and how we must be willing to sacrifice anything for Him. But if it's a lesson about faith, then a fair question would be, what did Abraham have faith in? Having faith is something that requires a direct object to have any sort of value, so if this is a story of faith, faith in what?

Two of the basic concepts of Biblical study are "scripture prima" and "scripture interprets scripture." The first means that whenever we are studying scripture, then our primary source of information are the

scriptures themselves and not the commentaries or our own opinions or even The History Channel. The second means that when we seek to interpret or to understand scripture that we look first to how other scriptures have interpreted or understood the scripture we're studying.

As we've said before, if all scripture is indeed God-breathed and inspired, then if one scripture interprets another one, then that is in effect God Himself helping us to understand one scripture by interpreting it for us in another place.

Genesis 22 is interpreted for us in Hebrews 11:17-19

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.

Let's do a little analysis of this:

- A. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac,
- A. 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.

So, according to this, Abraham's faith was in two things:

First, Isaac was the one who would be the bearer of the seed

So, Second, even if he did go through with the sacrifice then God would have to raise him from the dead to fulfil that promise,

And, Third, there was no question that God could do that since Isaac had come to life from two people who were already dead as far as their reproductive abilities.

We're not told this in Genesis, but once again, when one scripture interprets another, then that's what we accept.

We could add a fourth thing: Abraham would also have to have faith in some of the characteristics of God:

- 1) that God was faithful and would keep his promises regarding Isaac.
- 2) that God was loving and wouldn't ask something like this that seems cruel and evil unless there was something good and loving to come out of it. (that's worded poorly and doesn't really say what I want it to, but it's getting late in the day)
- 3) that God was different from the local Caananite gods who were hard to please and impossible to predict and often were recipients of children sacrifices.

That might have taken some of the edge off the discomfort of the story:

To learn that 1) God never intended for Isaac to be the sacrifice

And 2) Abraham had the faith that if Isaac were to be the sacrifice then God was going to raise him from the dead.

Of course, there's still some things left in the story that make us uncomfortable.

Such as, didn't Abraham tell Sarah? She's not mentioned anywhere in this story but she's not dead yet, so where is she?

Well, in the first place, if Sara did know about what Abraham had in mind, do you think she'd have let him go on the trip? You Mommas know the answer to that.

It's time to learn about another basic concept of Biblical study: blanks and gaps. Remember that these folks are writing on expensive papyrus or etching in clay or carving in stone. They had to make their words count because it was a big deal to get them down.

A Blank means that the information that we would've probably added to a story was left out presumably because it wasn't important to the author's purpose in telling the story. So, Sarah may not be in the story because it's not a complete historical account or a family story, but it's a story about Abraham being tested to prove his increased faith. We're going to run into another blank at the end of the story.

One the other hand, a Gap is when the author leaves out some information for a purpose. One example will be when the author shows his disapproval of someone by leaving out information that's included about other people such as the details about their death and burial. A gap would be the same thing as a social snub or what we would commonly call "getting high-hatted."

It's not that Sarah wasn't important, her importance was already established when God made her a part of the covenant; it's just that she's not important to this particular story.

The same concept of blanks can apply to Isaac. We're not told about his reactions to be tied up to be the sacrifice and we're not even told about his coming back down the mountain because the story isn't about him; he's basically just a prop or a piece of scenery. Once again, it's not that Isaac isn't important, after all he's the child of the promise, the child of the seed; it's just that this story isn't about him any more than it was about his mother.

Anyway, let's see where we're at and where to go from here.

Notice once again that Abraham doesn't question or object, at least not that we're told about. That's not to say that Abraham wasn't troubled about it or didn't think about it. We're not told directly, "Abraham worrieth" but notice that he "rose early in the morning," something that we've seen Biblical people did when they were troubled. Notice also that he saddled his donkey and chopped the wood. Abraham doesn't have to chop his own wood and saddle his own donkey. He's a rich man, a rich hundred-year-old man, and he has servants to do that kind of thing. A person like Abraham chops his own wood when he needs to think things through and get rid of frustrations, just like we still do. We've not changed all that much in the past four thousand years, but today we might go for a drive in the country or play a video game or go jogging instead of chopping wood. Granny used to go fishing in the cement pond and say that she wasn't fishing for fish, she was fishing for figuring.

Another thing to notice: the similarities of the greetings and responses in verses 1, 7 and 11.

- 1) God calls Abraham by name, who answers, "Here I am."
- 7) Isaac calls Abraham by name, who answers, "Here I am"
- 11) the Angel of the Lord calls Abraham by name, who answers, "Here I am"

Perhaps we're to see a similarity of relationships with an earthly father and son and a heavenly father and an earthly son.

The Angel of the Lord – is considered by most to be the pre-incarnate Jesus. Notice that the first time the Angel speaks he tells Abraham that he didn't withhold his son from "Me" and the second time the Angel

speaks he quotes the Lord. The first time he speaks he equates himself with God and the second time he speaks for God. Jesus said that Abraham had seen his day (crucifixion) and had rejoiced. Maybe this is time that Jesus referred to. Maybe Jesus explained the concept of the substitutionary sacrifice that he would become to be a blessing for all the nations. Perhaps it's significant that the animal offered as a substitute for Isaac was a ram, a boy sheep, as Lisa Douglas would say.

The usual allegorical interpretation is as follows: Isaac is all of us, waiting on the punishment of death for our sins. We are bound in our sins just as Isaac was bound and on the altar waiting judgement, unable to rescue himself. Abraham is the judgement that we're all under, the judgement required from a perfect God who can't look upon sin. Before the sentence can be carried out God steps into the world in the form of Jesus and offers himself as a perfect and complete sacrifice, a substitute willing to take our punishment upon himself. Jesus is both the Angel of the Lord who stays the sentence and the ram who is sacrifice.

Once again, none of this is found in Genesis 22, that's the idea of progressive revelation. People weren't given everything at once, but the plan of God was slowly unfolded over the couple thousand of years it took to complete the canon.

Of course, if you're Jewish you don't accept this interpretation of the event, but see it as the story of the obedience of both Abraham and Isaac. In fact, the rabbis who wrote the Jewish commentary on the scriptures say that Isaac isn't mentioned at the story's end because he was taken to heaven for an extended visit as a reward for his obedience in going along with nearly being the sacrifice. They also wrote that Sarah dies from shock in the next chapter when Abraham returned home alone and she found out what had nearly happened on the mountain. It depends on your theological viewpoint as to whether these rabbis were inspired or just had good imaginations.

But if you'll notice the last few verses of the chapter you'll see that Isaac hasn't actually disappeared even though he's not mentioned. The chapter ends with Abraham learning about some of his long-lost nephews and nieces, including the great-niece who will marry Isaac. So the chapter ends not with Isaac's death but with a look ahead to his future wife.

Now, the question might arise, if we accept this account as true, then who are we to judge other people when they do something that we consider wrong and say that God told them to do it.

The question might also arise, would God ask us to do something like that today and if he did, would we?

The short answer to both would be that God wouldn't ask something like that and if anybody believes that He has, then that person needs some stronger medication.

The longer answer is that

- 1) God never actually asked Abraham to kill Isaac because we were told at the very outset that it was only a test. This was only a test. Had this been an actual emergency.....
- 2) God would not ask something like this today because we now have the complete revelation of scripture in which child sacrifices are prohibited and God doesn't contradict himself.

But on the other hand, although we won't be asked to offer somebody else as a sacrifice, we must also remember that we are not our own in two senses:

- 1) all of us are creatures created by God who continue to exist at his pleasure. When he demands that we give back the life that he gave us we have no right to object.
- 2) those of you who are Christians and no longer under the judgement still aren't in charge of yourselves, because now you've been bought with a price and are no longer your own.
- 3) if somebody isn't a Christian, then they're still not their own person because they're slaves of sin.

Any way you look at it, you're not as independent and as much your own person as you'd like to think you are and as you've probably thought yourself to be as a descendant of rough and tumble Mountain Frontiersmen Americans. You're a created creature who is accountable to the creator, and your either a slave of sin or Jesus and under the control and Lordship of one or the other. You only get to choose whose slave you'll be.