

Genesis 22

A student of famous illustrator and painter Gustave Dore had just finished a painting of Jesus and handed it to him for his critique. Dore studied it, his mind searching for the right words. At last he handed it back to the student. "If you loved Him more," he said, "you would have painted Him better"—Gene Geyer, *Windows of the Soul*, p. 172, Zondervan Pub., 1996.

That's a great statement. A person needs to know God before he can adequately paint Him with the brush, or even with words—with a verbal picture. In our continuing study of Bible characters, we are viewing a portrait gallery containing various pictures of the character of God.

Currently we are considering the life of Abraham, focusing on the apex of his life—the events leading up to and including Genesis 22. This chapter is extremely important to us! We will see here evidence of why Abraham is the father of faith. This chapter is also very critical to our understanding of Old Testament theology and the purposes of God in sacrificing His Son on the cross.

What a picture this is! The author paints Abraham, but in the shadows, we also see a sketch of God Himself. I guess we could say it's a self-portrait of sorts, but as we view the painting at this stage, it is unfinished. God began the painting by using the wonderful color and texture of Abraham's life, but over the centuries we see God has completed the written revelation and description of Himself in the Scripture (progressive revelation).

So Genesis 22 initiates the Master's portrait of Himself. This is a shocking view, but must be interpreted, or we might miss what is going on in this chapter.

Something very unusual happens here. Abraham (at age 100) and Sarah are experiencing the miracle birth of a son. He is named Isaac ("laughter"), because he has brought such joy to his elderly parents and all who heard of his birth. After several years of not hearing directly from God, however, the silence and laughter of the elderly parents is broken by words that

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seem to speak of judgment and even cruelty.

It seems that what God says to Abraham is calculated to hurt him and Sarah as deeply as possible. In fact, we could be tempted to call this an unfair test! But as we saw in [Part One of Abraham's story](#), this was the test for which God had prepared Abraham.

Gen. 22:1-2—Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 2] Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Obviously, we would be shocked to hear these words! But as I said last time, these statements make no sense at all unless we see them through Abraham's eyes. Even seen through those eyes, it ranks as the greatest test of his life.

In understanding this episode, it is essential to understand what the word "test" ("nagah") means—"to try, or prove, or to be approved." In other words, God was testing Abraham to prove/approve him as good. As F.B. Meyer once said, "God tries or tests us so that He might bring out the good in us." (We might add, "...and prove the good in us, or the need in us.") Clearly God tested Abraham because he was prepared.

We have studied Genesis 12-21 and discussed the lessons God taught Abraham in preparation for Moriah. We noted how Abraham was tested and prepared in the everyday experiences of his life, the same way we are made ready for the great tests we will face. Present events are preparing us, so we would be wise to learn our lessons well. We'll draw on them for future tests.

I encourage you to read through these 10 chapters and see how God prepared Abraham (and review [Part One](#) if you need to). Our problem, on this side of Calvary, is that we are offended that such a choice would be given to Abraham or any man.

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Gene Getz has said:

Never before and never since has God ever asked a man to do what He asked Abraham to do. For in His laws which He later gave to men, God specifically forbids human sacrifice. It is an abomination to Him. Abraham, however, lived before God ever said anything specific about human sacrifice. In fact, this Old Testament saint had often witnessed Canaanite fathers offering their firstborn offspring to pagan altars. It was a cardinal principle in those religions, a means of atoning for their sins. To Abraham, then, the experience was culturally related. If pagan deities who were nonexistent demanded such love, was it asking too much for the true God of heaven to require the same? Abraham had no way of perceiving as we do the inconsistency of the request with God's nature. He only knew God had spoken; he understood the request and he proceeded to obey. Today, because we have God's completed revelation in the Bible, we know that He would never ask any man to offer his son as a human sacrifice. But we also know that what God asked Abraham to do—then stopped him from doing—illustrates for all men everywhere the great love God has for all men"—pp. 138-139, Gene Getz, *Abraham: Trials and Triumphs*, Regal Books, 1976.

Genesis 22 is a wonderful picture:

"Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, **whom you love...**' I want to spotlight the word "love." This is used of a father regarding his only son, whom he loves with all his heart.

This is the first mention of the word "**love**" in the Bible. As we noted in the [first session on Abraham](#), a first mention is significant. When something is mentioned for the first time in the Bible, often the context in which it occurs sets the pattern for its primary usage and development throughout the rest of Scripture. With this principle in mind, let's look closely at the context:

The type of love first spoken of in the Old Testament is not of a man for his wife, country, or brother, nor is it even his love for God. It's the love of a parent for his child, spoken of in connection with the sacrificial offering of that only and loved son or child. So in relationship to the principle of first mention,

The deep love of a parent for his/her only child—yet willingness to give him/her up completely to God's purposes and will—is inferred to be representative of the *most complete and meaningful description of love.*

(Did you catch that?)

Genesis 22 profoundly illustrates **God the Father's anguish of soul** resulting from **offering His only Son**. On a theological note, it calls attention to the love existing among the persons of the Trinity.

In harmony with this:

The first mention of love in the New Testament is identical, calling our attention to **God the Father's love for His Son:**

Matt. 3:17—*And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Mark 1:11—*And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

Luke 3:22—*and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

We are introduced (in the first three gospels) to a voice from heaven declaring His love for His Son. But then, introduced to the gospel of love—John's—we are silenced with an awe when we see *his* first mention of love.

John 3:16—*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

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Three times God shouts from heaven that He loves His Son, but then we hear that He loves us (yes, us) so much that He is willing to sacrifice His only Son that we might be saved.

In the lives of Abraham and Isaac, we are given a beautiful picture of God as Father and God as Son, their love for each other and for us (Gal. 3:16; John 3:16). Genesis 22:2, in fact, makes sense when you tie it with John 3:16.

Gen. 22:2—*Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*

John 3:16—*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Certainly we must avoid excessive typology, but in this case there is a clear spiritual warrant for it in many places in Scripture—Heb. 11:17-19.

Gal. 3:16—*The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.*

Moving on to Genesis 22:3:

Scripture stresses that Abraham did not delay. "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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." This immediate obedience completely baffles Satan in our lives, because he isn't given time to sow seeds of doubt. He can't bring into the picture all kinds of opinions.

No, Abraham got up early and got going (Matt. 21:21; Heb. 3:12). He obeyed immediately, offering a beautiful example of how God expects every believer to obey Him, no matter how

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severe the test may be. Remember, Scripture makes it clear that only those who obey are called friends of God. We can be His children, without being His friends. John 15:14 — *You are my friends if you do what I command.*

Abraham asked no questions of God, once he was sure of His will. He chose not to debate or plead for God to change His mind. (Does this sound familiar? "Oh, God, I know it's not Your will for me to marry a non-Christian, but Lord, please change your mind.")

Abraham had such resolve that he gathered the wood from home. He probably didn't know if there would be wood available on Mt. Moriah, and he didn't want to get there and find none. He didn't want any possible excuse not to obey God!

v. 4—*On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.* The journey to Mt. Moriah was approximately 30 miles, and would have taken about two and a half days. It would have been one thing to offer a sacrifice 500 feet from the place where Abraham received directions, but it was totally different to have to wait three days.

It's easy to obey God in the glow of a recent revelation or spiritual experience; it's not so easy after the impact has worn off.

This walk to the mountain purified Abraham's action; it became an act of his will, not an emotional response. He determined, "Come what may, I will obey." Can you relate to the test that happens in the delay? Can you think of a time when you were ready to do something for God and then, a few days later, were rethinking if you could or would do what you said you would do? For example:

- You know you should break off an inappropriate relationship, but when you get together with the person, you can't.
- You purpose not to enter into demeaning jokes or language at work, but when you get there, you still do.
- You decide to practice some spiritual health habits, but you can't find the time or the

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discipline.

How can we change our inconsistencies in decisionmaking? The name of the mountain—**Moriah**

is helpful to us. It means "foreseen of Jehovah." The plan of God isn't put together at the last minute, jotted on Post-it notes. God knew the potential in man's heart when He created him; He was not taken by surprise by Adam's sin. The manufacturer of a watch knows that watch will run down, so part of the provision is a mechanism, or battery, to recharge/rewind the watch. Likewise,

God built into His plan of creation a plan of redemption

(Rev. 13:8).

Long before God put a sun in the sky, He made provision for the fall. Rev. 13:8 reveals, *All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.*

God has seen your struggles with obedience, and has provided a solution if you will move forward and

trust Him!

When we walk in obedience with resolve, God offers provision

in

the walk

, so just start walking.

Arrival at the Mountain

v. 5—*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."*

There are two key phrases in this verse:

- *"We will worship..."*
- *"...we will come back to you."*

Both are plural. **What does that tell us about Abraham and his faith?** Simply, he planned to participate in worship, and he planned on coming back with Isaac from Mount Moriah. Even

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though he fully intended to obey, he knew that both of them would come back together. He had learned beyond question that God's Word was true, and therefore one way or another his son would live—even if he was raised from the dead.

Heb 11:17—*By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18] even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring [Greek seed] will be reckoned." 19] Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*

Let's look at these phrases:

"We will worship..."

How could sacrifice be considered worship? How could the offering of your son be considered worship? Romans 12: 1-2 teaches of sacrifice as worship. *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*

2]
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

So whether in the New Testament, the Old Testament, or today, sacrifice and worship are always tied together. Certainly it may mean waiting or suffering, and it *will* involve dying to self, but in whatever form, we must offer our selves as a sacrifice to God.

Worship Principles

- Worship without offering ourselves as living sacrifices to God is not His will, nor is it worship.
- Worship is more than music and/or singing.

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- God sees beyond exterior words or actions and looks at the heart.
 - If worship is to be pleasing to God, it must include all we are!
-

Sacrifice, therefore, is a very accurate measuring stick of our worship. In fact, **our submission to God's will is the ultimate act of worship**

. Matt. 26:39b—...

My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.

Abraham and Isaac were going to worship God. They didn't have understanding, but they were believing, and were willing to sacrifice to do His will. That made their journey up Mount Moriah an act of worship.

"We will come back to you..."—Gen. 22:5b

Abraham believed both he and Isaac would return. God had told him that Isaac would become a great nation, and this could not happen if Isaac were dead. Therefore, Isaac must live. God Himself would provide a sacrifice.

Heb. 11:17-19—*By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,*

18] even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned" (Gen. 21:12). 19]

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

Gen. 22:6 *"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..."***

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This phrase is mentioned both here and in verse 8b. It must be intentional and significant. I believe the author wants us to know beyond question that Abraham was not compelling his son to go; Isaac was going willingly. Isaac was not a boy; we know this because he carried the wood. He was probably approaching his 20s, maybe even older. No doubt he was stronger than his father, but he submitted to Abraham's (thus God's) plan.

v. 7-9—*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?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. 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.*

Do you see how Isaac submitted? It is just like Jesus did.

John 10:17-18—*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*

Why would Abraham build an altar? No previous one would do; this was a new experience. Here again Abraham would proclaim who God was.

The wood was on Isaac's back, and he was bound, no longer able to free himself. If Isaac had previously misunderstood his father's intentions, he now knew what (who) the sacrifice was. Bound and laid on the altar, as Isaac gazed into his father's eyes, no doubt flowing with tears, he also saw the knife in Abraham's hand.

Never was such a loving father or obedient son put to such a test as this. Remember, Abraham obeyed God because he believed God. James refers to this incident in **James 2:21-24** —*W*
as not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?
22] Y

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ou see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

23]

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,"

[Gen. 15:6]

and he was called God's friend.

24]

You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

Abraham had imputed righteousness by faith alone, but his faith was tested by his works. God tested Abraham and he passed the test. Likewise, we will have tests to show the quality of our faith. Will we be obedient?

God's Intervention in the Testing

vv. 10-13a—Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11] But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

12]

"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."

13a]

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns...

Praise God! Abraham had demonstrated he believed, loved and trusted God...so much that he would not withhold his only son from Him.

God did provide a ram, but notice, *not a lamb*. The complete fulfillment must await the true lamb, the Lamb of God. The ram was offered as a substitute for Isaac, as Jesus was offered as a substitute for us.

The Implications of the Testing

This experience was proof of Abraham's faith. He truly is the father of faith, as I have tried to outline for you already.

Applications:

Testing is always for our good. It may involve something dear to us, but if we are faithful and believe God, He will be faithful to bring the test around for our good.

Testing will come especially to those who have reached maturity and have shown great faith and victory in the past. Abraham is the supreme example of this principle. Lot, on the other hand, didn't take advantage of small tests and thus was unprepared for any test of his faith. I pray you will remember not only that testing will come, but that in the test God will provide (strength, wisdom, insight, help, etc.).

This event is the preview of the ending of *religion* and the substitution of *relationship*.

v. 13b—

He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Religion is man's approach to God (or his god) through ritual; **Christianity** is God's approach to man, through relationship with His Son.

To fully understand this implication:

We need to understand the setting and context of Abraham's life. Child sacrifice was very common in this time period. (see [Elijah](#) and the prophets of Baal). Archaeology has revealed that child sacrifice was practiced by the Moabites, Egyptians, Babylonians and Assyrians. God's request to use Isaac as the sacrifice would have had this religious backdrop. Ironically, it was the first child that was always sacrificed for fertility rites.

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So when Abraham went to the mountain with his son, he would have been (apart from his faith in and relationship with God) a typical religious figure of his day, like so many who made great sacrifices/painful contributions to their gods.

The difference was that he came down the mountain radically different from religious men! God had taken on Himself the total responsibility of providing the sacrifice for Abraham. That's the big event; it's why God called Mt. Moriah, "the Lord will provide." Abraham went up the mountain thinking he had to provide the sacrifice, but God made the provision, not only providing the sacrifice, but breaking the back of the horrible practice of child sacrifice.

I'm convinced that beyond the first reason, God allowed Abraham to climb the mountain to show that his God was not pleased with human sacrifice. Once and for all, he illustrated that it is not through the sacrifice of those dear to us we are made acceptable in God's sight, but by a sacrifice of His blood; by one He will choose.

We see the parallel today through the **sacrifice of unborn children** and the **abuse** of children through every means imaginable. These types of sacrifice still go on because the god of this world demands it! The Satanic systems of this world revere and honor only the productive. If something/someone is not productive, it/he is expendable. Blind and worldly religionists, who have erected their own god of self-gratification and selfishness, sacrifice children and family because their system of values demands it.

The modern, technological, western world aborts unborn babies because they are inconvenient and interrupt our quests and allegiances to our gods of indulgence and selfishness. We also eliminate those on the other end of the age spectrum because they are not productive. The greatest sign of our degeneration, however, is how we treat children. The only way we will see the hearts of parents turn to their young is through repentance.

Luke 1:16-17—Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Finally, there is one more implication to this event:

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Mt. Moriah takes on particular significance. God had Abraham travel to the mountain for a specific reason. Mt. Moriah was the site (2 Chron. 3) of Solomon's temple (destroyed in 70 A.D.) and is now the great Dome of the Rock. Both Jews and Arabs revere this place, and most believe the temple will be rebuilt here just before Christ's return. This mountain was a shadow of what is to come. What's more, Mt. Calvary is less than one mile away

But there would be differences between the two mountains:

Moriah Represents the **end of** a religion. The trouble with all religions and sacrifices is lack of relationship to the lamb. It is just a victim, a scapegoat. Represents the **beginning of a new relationship.**

God

became

the Lamb.

Isaac carried the wood for his sacrifice and was

spared

Jesus carried His cross and was

killed

Here there was a cry from

heaven to earth

, to save the son of Abraham ("Abraham, Abraham").

Here there was a cry from

earth to heaven

("My God, My God"), but the cry did not save the Son. There was no intervention.

This became a

site of many animal sacrifices

for the Jewish people's sins.

This became the

site of one sacrifice,

once and for all, for all sins and all people.

Isaac

was spared and

eventually died.

Jesus

died but

rose again

on the third day.

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Moriah was the

future site of the temple.

Calvary no longer has significance, because

we are

the Holy of Holies;

God lives in us

and will return to set up a new kingdom and a new earth, where

we won't go to a place to worship.

We'll go to a person to worship for eternity.

So what Abraham experienced in a shadowy way, less than one mile away, was made clear, actual, universally relevant, totally personal.

Application Questions

1. How is your faith developing?
2. Can it stand severe tests?
3. Are you mature enough to give up even something you love for a higher devotion and love for God?
4. Around which mountain are you orienting your life today: Moriah or Calvary?

Whatever your test or trial, I can promise that if you choose to believe God's promise and keep your eyes on Him, He will provide. His provision may not be what you desire. Your trial may take your breath away and leave you crying in disbelief, or maybe even

agony. But ultimately, your only hope is in God and His provision. Trust Him; He will provide.

Going Further

1. Read Gen. 22:1-9. Prepare an interview with Abraham's two servants who stayed at the foot of the mountain. Imagine how they would respond to a local interviewer as they waited for Abraham and Isaac's return, and as they wondered how the sacrifice would be carried out. Remember, the only information they had is given in vv. 2-5.

2. Read Gen. 22:1-19. Prepare an entry in Abraham's journal dated the night before he left with Isaac and the two men for Mt. Moriah. Try to see this situation through his eyes, catching some of the dilemmas and questions, but also the motivation that enabled Abraham to go through with the probable sacrifice.

3. Read Gen. 22:1-19. Write a prayer that Isaac might have prayed after he and his father returned from Mt. Moriah. Try to capture some of the feelings Isaac might have had before the sacrifice was provided, while he himself was on the altar, and when his father was stopped by the angel from killing him. What thoughts might have gone through his mind when this was all over with?

Chorus:

God will provide,

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His compassions are new every morning

He knows our needs

and He will provide

He will provide

When the test seems too hard

And you question why

He would let you be tried

Count it pure joy

He's investing through your testing

To mature your life and make you complete

(Taken from Gen. 22:8; Lam. 3:22-23; and James 1:2-4)