

GENESIS

Lesson 40

Genesis 22:1-18: Abraham is Tested

¹ Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

² 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."

³ 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. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 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."

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, ⁷ 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?"

⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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."

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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."

¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time, ¹⁶ and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Genesis 22:1-18 [NIV]

Abraham and The Lord

In this lesson, we examine the story of Abraham being commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham's only son. This narrative establishes Abraham as a true man of faith and is significant in Judaism, Islam, and the Christian faith.

Demonstrating true faith, Abraham set the faith standard for all of us. It also illustrates the depths of God's love for us in sacrificing his only son Jesus as a final sacrifice to cover all of our sins.

So let's now take a closer look at the scriptural text in order to gain a deeper understanding of this scripture as it unfolded in Abraham's day. We also explore what it tells us about those times with God when we don't understand what he is doing in our life.

¹ Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

² 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."

Genesis 22:1-2 [NIV]

As followers of Christ we are often surprised, perhaps even appalled, that God would ask Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering. However, when we feel like this we are looking at the text in today's thinking—whereas in Abraham's day, the sacrifice of a child as a burnt offering was actually common.

Moloch (Molech), a Canaanite god, demanded child sacrifice and required that a living child to be sacrificed by fire, typically laid in the arms of the god, a bronze statue, where the arms were extended over a large fire. Alternatively, the child was placed in the belly of the god, an open oven. Abraham would have been familiar with the practice, and it would of course have caused Abraham some trepidation, as following God's command would result in the loss of his only son—a son he loved very much and had waited one hundred years for.

Interestingly, hundreds of years later God expressly instructs the Hebrews coming out of Egypt in the exodus that they were not to sacrifice their children in the fire. (Leviticus 18:21)

Respond to the following questions:

1. Do we know what Abraham was thinking as, without hesitation, he began to make the necessary preparations for sacrificing Isaac? See Hebrews 11:17-19.

2. What is the significance of Mt. Moriah, the place God leads Abraham to build the altar for the sacrifice of his only son, Isaac?

Now let's examine the next section of verses.

³ 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. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 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."

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, ⁷ 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?"

Genesis 22:3-7 [NIV]

Abraham sets out to complete God's command. Taking Isaac, a couple servants, and the necessary wood for the fire, they head for the Moriah area. On the third day, Abraham sees the place that God wants him to use for sacrificing Isaac. Leaving the servants behind, he and Isaac carry the material for the fire.

Isaac will carry the wood on his back, and in verse 6, we note Abraham carrying something unusual.

3. What does Abraham carry, and how does he carry it?

This topic of discussion may seem like a trivial thing within a serious passage about Abraham's faith, however, it is a subject that is often overlooked in most studies. Abraham is carrying fire—fire that will be needed to create the sacrificial fire on Mt. Moriah. You can build an altar, place the wood and the sacrifice on it, but without fire, nothing will happen.

Let's take a moment to comprehend how fire would have been both created and carried in Abraham's time, as well as its appearance in scripture at other times.

4. Read the following verses about fire and note what each tells us:

- a. Isaiah 30:14
- b. Genesis 15:17

Rather than having to start a fire each time it was needed, firepots were created. It consisted of a pot suspended with leather straps or a chain, and it was employed to carry the fire once it was created. Similarly, censers for burning incense were also common. They were originally made from earthenware bowls and eventually evolved into carved silver or gold vessels. Typically, embers, hot charcoal, etc., would be placed in the bottom of the firepot; kindling would be placed on top of that, and then something very combustible, such as a bit of lamb's wool would be placed on top of that, easily lighting a small fire in the pot. As the pot was carried along, bits of wood or additional coal could be added to maintain the fire. The keeper of the fire held an important role in nomadic tribes, enabling them to move or migrate without ever having to start a new fire. Abraham would have been carrying one of these firepots along with Isaac carrying the wood as they went to the top of the mount. The only thing that they were missing was the "lamb for the burnt offering."

Isaac's question to his father in verse 7 is enlightening, as it sheds light on Isaac's understanding of the purpose of a burnt offering and how it was to be made. It also shows us how well Abraham had taught Isaac about the need for a sacrifice in the worship of God.

⁸ *Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.*

⁹ *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.* ¹⁰ *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."*

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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 22:8-14 [NIV]

Isaac knew a lamb was needed, and Abraham assured him God would provide one. We see in this passage that not only was Abraham preparing to do as God had commanded him, but that Isaac had complete faith in his father Abraham. Just as Abraham is about to make the sacrifice, God provides a ram as a substitute for Isaac. The act by God of providing the ram to die as a sacrifice, instead of Isaac, is celebrated even today in Israel, because without God's intervention providing a sacrifice in the place of Isaac, Abraham's descendants and God's promise would never have been fulfilled.

As an interesting aside, the shofar—the horn that is blown at the beginning of Rosh Hashana, the celebration of the Jewish New Year—is the horn of a ram. For the Jewish faith, it represents the ram that was substituted for Isaac.

Today, we as followers of Christ see the story of Abraham and Isaac as prefiguration of Christ, God's beloved and only son, offered as a final sacrifice for our sins. There are many parallels between Isaac and Jesus; here are just a few:

1. Like Isaac, Jesus was miraculously conceived.
2. Isaac carried wood on his back for the sacrifice, just as Jesus carried a wooden cross on his back.
3. Isaac's journey to Moriah took three days—a parallel to the three days that Jesus spent in the tomb before his resurrection.

Just as Abraham told Isaac that, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering," Paul tells us in Romans 8:32 that God did just that for us. He "did not spare his son, but gave him up for us all."

While there are many lessons from the story of Abraham and his faith, I personally believe the lesson we can apply today is that no matter the circumstance we find ourselves in, God is faithful. If we are in God's will and doing God's will, no matter how difficult or how incomprehensible our situation may seem at the time, God is always in control. God sees the world differently than we do, and we will succeed if we remain in his will—no matter what is happening in the world around us.

Abraham demonstrates to all of us how faith will persevere, even if we don't understand it at the time. As Isaiah 55:8-9 asserts, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time, ¹⁶ and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Genesis 22:15-18 [NIV]

Abraham was faithful, he followed God completely, and God blessed him greatly. Our reward is waiting for us in heaven and while we are on this earth, in this world, we are to be faithful in following God, just as Abraham was. God is faithful to complete all that He has promised us, just as He is completing all that He promised Abraham. In 1 Corinthians 1:9, Paul teaches us that "God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Being faithful requires us to be patiently enduring the challenges that we face each day as sinners living in a fallen world. This lesson reminds us of this again, as well as demonstrating the importance of enduring, as we approach the time of the second coming of Jesus our savior. There will be a time of great testing as Jesus' return approaches. From Revelation 13:10, "...This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people."

Let's re-commit today to follow Christ and not the world, and to patiently endure the challenges of this life as we seek God's will in everything we do. May God find us as faithful as Abraham when he calls us to our eternal home.

In Christ,

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