

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“The Test Of Faith”

Genesis 22:1-24

2002

Introduction

So far in our study of Genesis, we have observed three great tests in Abraham’s life:
 Chapter 12 - to **Submit** to God’s call to leave his land & family
 Chapter 13 - to **Separate** from his nephew, Lot
 Chapter 17 - to **Surrender** his plan about Ishmael and to trust God to do a miracle

Growing up on Oahu, I remember that on the first day of every month at noon, sirens all across the island would begin to wail. Every time it happened, I would scan the skies over the Koolaus for Japanese zeros. If you were listening to radio or TV the programming would be interrupted and a voice would say, “For the next 30 seconds we will be conducting a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. This is a test, and only a test!” The funny thing is, those wailing sirens, no matter how predictable and scheduled, caught me by surprise every single month!

1 Peter 4:12-13 “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.”

James 1:2-5 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

I The Testing Of Abraham

We are not told the exact time of this ultimate test in Abraham’s life, only that it came after the events of chapter 21. But most scholars believe that somewhere between 10-20 years had elapsed since chapter 21 making Isaac somewhere between 13 and 23 years old. For quite a few years, Abraham and Sarah enjoyed their son of promise. And true to his name, he has brought laughter into their tent and joy to their hearts!

But suddenly and unexpectedly ...

Deut 13:3 “The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

The King James Version uses the word, “tempt”. But this is not an accurate translation of the Hebrew word *Nacah*, which means, “to test or prove.”

James 1:13-15 “For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

Illustration:

Satan tempts us – God proves us.

Satan wants to crush us – God wants to strengthen us.

Prov 17:3 “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.”

1 Peter 1:6-7 “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Weight lifting:

When you lift weights, the objective is to lift enough weight to create micro-fissures in your muscle tissue. And as that muscle tissue heals and fills in the gaps, your muscles grow and increase in size!

God converts the crushing weight of Satan’s attacks into something we can barely lift at times, so that our muscles might be strengthened.

A. God commanded him to take his son: [Verse 1-2a]

1. His only son, Isaac, whom he loved

God recognized Ishmael as the offspring of Abraham’s flesh. But as far as the covenant promises were concerned, God recognized Isaac as the one and only son of Abraham.

And when God asked Abraham for the ultimate demonstration of love and commitment, He asked for Abraham’s son.

Application:

When the Father wanted to show us the ultimate demonstration of His love and commitment to us, He gave us His Son.

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.”

2. And go to the region of Moriah (a hill in Palestine)

Mount Moriah is the very place where in later years King David bought the threshing floor of Ornan as a place for the site of the temple, (1 Chr 21:18). On that very place where Abraham offered Isaac, the temple of Solomon was built, (2 Chr 3:1). Today there stands in that very place the Al-Aqsa Mosque, near the Dome of the Rock, which was built over the great rock that formed the altar upon which Abraham offered Isaac. It is from this rock that the Muslims believe Mohammed and his horse ascended to heaven.

And it was on this very mountain, 2,000 years later, where Jesus Christ offered Himself up as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

B. God commanded him to **sacrifice** his son [Verse 2b]

The question that is often asked at this point in the text is, “How could a God of love command Abraham to offer up his only son as a sacrifice?”

Illustration:

For family devotions, Martin Luther once read this account of Abraham offering Isaac on the altar in Genesis 22. His wife, Katie, said, “I do not believe it. God would not have treated his son like that!” “But, Katie,” Luther replied, “He did.” (Wiersbe, W. *The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers*.)

Is 53:10 “Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.”

1. He was to be a burnt offering

In the OT law there were 7 types of offerings that were required:

- 1) The sin offering, 2) the guilt offering, 3) the burnt offering, 4) the peace offering, 5) the grain offering, 6) the heave offering, and 7) the red heifer offering

Burnt offering = The burnt offering was the only offering that was to be wholly consumed by fire. It was an expression of devotion, commitment and complete surrender to God.

2. On the **mountain** God would tell him about (again, this is a specific mountain)

It isn't hard to imagine the questions that must have been swirling through Abraham's mind as he considered this shocking request of God. If Isaac was to be a burnt offering – wholly consumed by fire, then how could God's promises ever be fulfilled? Wouldn't the promise of God die along with Isaac in the fire of God's testing?

Application:

The Christian life is full of paradoxes and apparent self-contradictions. Abraham gained his son by giving him up to God. We get ahead in God's eyes by putting ourselves behind others (Matt 23:11; Phil 2:5ff). We lead by serving; we save our lives by losing them (Matthew 16:25). God's ways are certainly not man's ways.

Illustration: Story of Rick and Fran Ellis from Massachusetts

Came to Kauai 6 years ago for their last vacation together.

Rick had contracted Hepatitis C and was dying.

Fran was consumed by fear at the thought of losing her husband.

She cried out loudly, “God is taking my husband!”

In that brief moment, the Holy Spirit gave me a word for Fran:

“Don't let God take Rick from you; give Rick to Him.”

And when she still couldn't give Rick to God and enjoy the remaining time with a heart of gratitude, I suggested we get a shovel right away and bury him behind the church.

(2020 Update: God blessed Rick and Fran, allowing him to live for many years!)

Are you in the midst of a test? Is something that is important to you at risk? Is it being taken from you? A job? A dream? A friendship? Your finances? Don't let God take it from you; give it to Him!

II The Obedience Of Abraham

A. He got up **early** the next morning [Verse 3]

He didn't debate with God or ask for a second opinion. It doesn't appear that he even consulted his wife, Sarah! He simply obeyed!

John 14:21 "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

Ps 119:60 "I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands."

1. He saddled his donkey and cut wood for the **offering**
2. He took two servants and Isaac with him
3. He set out for the place God had told him about

B. He saw the place in the distance on the **3rd** day [Verse 4-5]

Here again, we have a foreshadowing of Christ:

Just as Jesus was given up as dead after His burial, but raised to life of the 3rd day (1 Corinthians 15:4), so too was Isaac reckoned dead by Abraham during that three-day journey.

1. He left his servants with the donkey, saying:

a. "**We** will worship"

b. "And then **we** will come back to you"

We will worship --- **we** will come back!

These words are not simply a twisted example of positive confession.

They are the product of Abraham's growing faith in the promises of God.

Somewhere in the silent struggle of that awful night when this word first came to him, the Lord strengthened Abraham's heart to believe that even if Isaac was offered up as a sacrifice to God, God had the power to raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

C. He **prepared** for the sacrifice [Verse 6-10]

1. He placed the wood on Isaac's **shoulders**

Again it is no coincidence that Isaac carries the wood for his own sacrifice.

John 19:17 “Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).”

2. He carried the fire and the knife
3. He answered Isaac’s question regarding the lamb: *“Where is the lamb?”*
 - a. “The Lord himself will **provide** the lamb”

Where is the Lamb? That question had been asked by the saints throughout the ages, from Isaac to Moses to David to Isaiah, all the way to the time of John the Baptist when he declares:
Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (Jn 1:29)
4. He built an altar and arranged the wood
 - a. At the place God had told him about

At every step in the process Abraham must have hoped for some change of plans, some alternative course of action – another way besides the way of sacrifice!
Matt 26:39 “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”
5. He **bound** Isaac and laid him on the altar

At this time, Abraham was about 120 years old, and Isaac would have been somewhere between 13 and 23 years old. Certainly old enough and strong enough to make his escape if he had chosen to. Yet he submits to his father perfectly. As an obedient son, Isaac lays on the wood, ready to be sacrificed.

Is 53:7 “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”
6. He took the knife to **slay** his son

Abraham’s faith in God was genuine, but the ultimate test of faith is not simply believing the right things, but acting on those beliefs.

James 2:20-24 “You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.”

“The faith a man has in his heart justifies him before God, but the faith a man demonstrates by his life justifies his claim to be saved before men.”

III The Divine Intervention

A. The angel of the Lord called out from heaven and said: [Verse 11-12]

1. "Do not lay a hand on the boy"
2. "Do not do anything to him"

God halted the sacrifice of Isaac for two reasons:

1. The sacrifice of Isaac would produce no benefit for others.
The lamb must be "without blemish," without sin, innocent (Is 53:9).
2. Abraham's faith was tested and approved!

3. "Now I know that you **fear** God"

Fear = Yare' = "To have a wholesome dread of displeasing God"

Ps 112:1 "Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands."

Ps 25:12, 14 "Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them."

a. "Because you did not **withhold** your only son"

Withhold = Chasak = "To spare, preserve, or hold back"

Rom 8:32 "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

B. God provided a **ram** for the burnt offering [Verse 13-14]

1. Abraham **sacrificed** the ram instead of his son

If you're observant, you may have noticed that Abraham stated that God would provide a lamb for the burnt offering. However, it wasn't a lamb caught in the thicket, but a ram!

The ram would could not provide the once and for all sacrifice that Abraham prophetically spoke of in Gen 22:8. That high calling was reserved for the God's own dear Son, Jesus Christ!

1 Tim 2:6 "... who gave himself as a ransom for all men -- the testimony given in its proper time."

2. Abraham called the place, "The Lord Will **Provide**"

a. "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided"

Provided = Ra'ah = "To see or appear" (*Jehovah Jireh*);

Abraham knew God would provide the ultimate sacrifice for salvation on that hill someday. The ram wasn't a mix-up of God's part. Rather it was God's way of communicating to Abraham that the true Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world was yet to come.

Gal 4:4-5 "... when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

- C. The angel of the Lord called out a 2nd time and said: [Verse 15-18]
1. "Because you have not withheld your only son"
 - a. "I swear I will surely **ble**ss you" - Heb 6:13-14
 2. "I will make your descendents as numerous as":
 - a. "The **stars** of the sky"
 - b. "The **sand** on the seashore"

Heb 11:12 "And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore."

According to recent findings, the number of stars in the universe totals approximately 10 to the 23rd power (a number that also approximates the sum of the grains of sand on the seashores).
(Ross, H. *The Finger of God*. Promise Publ., 1991, p. 153)
 3. "They will take possession of their enemies' cities"

Cities = Sha` ar = "Gates"

It was common to pronounce a blessing by saying, "may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies." Gen 24:60

Because if you had control of your enemy's gates, then you had control of the entire city.

Application:

The mind has often been described as the gateway to the soul. In 1 Cor 2:16, Paul tells us "We have been given the mind of Christ!" But we also have a responsibility to guard the gates of our mind. That's why it is so important for us to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"(2 Cor 10:5).

4. "Through your offspring all nations will be **ble**ssed"
 - a. "Because you have **obe**yed me"

Obeyed = Shama` = "To hear intelligently with the objective of obeying"

Gen 26:4-5 "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws."

The work of God begins with a promise, which must be accepted by faith. But ultimately this faith, if it is genuine, will be demonstrated by a life of surrender and obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Let me close by highlighting 3 lessons that we can glean from Genesis 22:

1. It foreshadows the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ:
 - a. Both Isaac and Jesus were their fathers' only legitimate sons
 - b. Both Isaac and Jesus were loved by their fathers - Lk 3:22; Jn 3:16

- c. Both carried wood up the hill for their own sacrifice - Gen 22:6; Jn 19:17
- d. Both offered themselves willingly and in humble submission - M 26:39,42
- e. Both were sacrificed on the very same hill known as Mount Moriah.
- f. Both were delivered from death on the third day - Heb 11:19; Jn 20; I Cor 15:4).

2. It informs us that, like Isaac, we are called to live our lives on the altar of sacrifice in absolute obedience and surrender to our Father.
Rom 12:1 “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.”

If God is asking something of you today, don't let Him take it from you! Give it to Him!

3. It reminds us that, like Abraham, life will be full of tests of our faith. These tests are designed by God to strengthen and mature you in your faith. And when you are in midst of life's various trials, remember -- it is only a test!

James 1:12 “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”

One final note:

Revelation 21:1-2 tells us that in his prophetic vision of the future, the apostle John “saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

Would you like to guess where this New Jerusalem and the heavenly Temple of God is going to find their final resting place?
On mount Moriah! From there He will reign over all creation ... and we will reign with Him forever and ever!

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