

“Then Jesus answered and said to them... ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;’”

“And These Are They Which Testify of Me”

Sermons on Genesis
Chapter 22
Abraham and Isaac

With Study Questions

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Abraham and Isaac

Genesis 22

Preview:

What we will see in chapter twenty-two is God orchestrating the ultimate test, telling Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. With no apparent hesitation, Abraham obeys God and embarks upon a three day journey with Isaac and two young men to a certain mountain where he prepares to sacrifice his son. Abraham will stretch out his hand to slay his son when the Angel of the Lord grants a last minute reprieve. God instead provides a ram for the offering. Because of Abraham's obedience, God reinstates His covenant promise—that through Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed. The chapter ends with a record of the birth of children and grandchildren to Abraham's brother, Nahor.

I. Points of Difficulty

A Command to Kill

Without a doubt the greatest point of difficulty in this chapter is God demanding human sacrifice. This is both problematic and, as we shall see momentarily, essential to a proper understanding of how we unearth the person and work of Christ in this dramatic story.

If there is any reason why we should keep an arm's distance from the modern gnostics (found right in the bosom of evangelicalism), who continually "hear" the voice of God, it is found here. Charles Manson heard the voice of God telling him to kill also. How do we go about separating Manson from Abraham? And although the modern "hearers" of God's voice don't usually extend their fantasies quite as far as Manson or Abraham, there is no good reason, given their methodology, why they shouldn't. Let us seek the multi-fold answer.

First, there is no longer unmediated information coming from God to man. The only authoritative and infallible information we have concerning the will of God is found in Scripture. The purpose for the profound and prophetic interaction between God and these men and women of Scripture was to grant divine revelation to humanity. Peter indicates that the salvation, sufferings, and glories of Christ prophesied through people like Abraham, Moses, and David was to minister to us.

To them (the prophets) it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to

you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into (1 Peter 1:10-12—parenthesis mine).

And, as the author of Hebrews clearly declares,

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son* (Hebrews 1:1,2).

The Scriptures declare the authoritative and sufficient message to mankind. But this doesn't completely solve our problem. How could God ask Abraham to do something that seems to be contrary to His own law?

Secondly, God has the power over death itself. Not only could God justifiably condemn all men to death, He has the power to bring men back from death. This seems to be Abraham's take on the matter. The author of Hebrews gives us a peak into the story that is not clearly seen in the Genesis account.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, ¹⁸of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," ¹⁹concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Apparently Abraham was under the impression that God would raise Isaac from the dead. After all, Isaac was already a miraculous child, coming forth from a dead womb.

Finally, it was always the plan of God to stay the hand of Abraham. So even further, the moral tension is relieved.

Now God Knows

A second, and lesser, problem is found in verse twelve, where the Angel of the Lord says, "now I know that you fear God." How does this comport with an all-knowing God? This is simple language of accommodation. At times God speaks to us according to His infinite wisdom and knowledge. But like any good parent, at times He speaks to us according to our own feebleness.

II. Points of Emphasis

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ²Then 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
(Genesis 22:1,2).**

A Heart-Wrenching Request

It's no wonder that Hollywood would seize upon this story. What could be more heart-wrenching than to ask a father to thrust a dagger into the chest of his son. Although I desire to live a long life, it is also my prayer that I don't outlive any of my children. But here it is not merely Abraham being told of the death of his son—it is to be at his own hand.

A Test of What?

We are told that this is a test? A test of what? Faith? Yes. But what are some of the specifics of the test—what about faith? Is Isaac symbolic of false idols in our lives? Perhaps. But to focus on the “Isaacs” in our lives which must be sacrificed would belittle the true depth of the message. It is no doubt a tragically horrifying thought to any parent to sacrifice their child (and in this case his only child, Ishmael having been exiled). But is a parent's heartache at the giving up of something—even something so precious as a child—at the heart of this story? Or is it even deeper than this.

Killing His Hope

We must remember that Abraham was a Christian. He was the father of the faithful. And what is faith if it is not in God's promised Messiah, Christ the Lord? But what would become of the Messiah if Abraham were to snuff out the child through whom the promise was to come? Abraham's own salvation—the salvation of the world—was tied up in the birth and progeny of Isaac. As Calvin states,

For the great source of grief to him was not his own bereavement, not that he was commanded to slay his only heir, the hope of future memorial and of name, the glory and support of his family; but that, in the person of this son, the whole salvation of the world seemed to be extinguished and to perish.¹

Bad For Church Growth

So the test went beyond a father's affection and straight to a father's faith. Numerous are the applications, not the least of which is the temptation to pragmatically grow the church apart from biblical theology. The church growth experts would have no doubt chastised Abraham for his plan to destroy that which was necessary for the church to survive.

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. I.* (Baker Book House, reprinted 1993), p. 560.

Last week I received an invitation to an event called *The Gathering of Men*. It's stated purpose is to provide "An opportunity to investigate the Christian life and how it can impact your life." The man-centered nuance of this statement I can briefly overlook, realizing there is a certain element of truth contained in the words. But what struck me is what our office manager pointed out when she examined the profession of the speakers listed on the back of the flyer. There were two football coaches, a sociologist, two congressmen, an astronaut, three professional athletes, three business executives and a couple of authors. But not one theologian, pastor or seminary professor?

The Church Needs...

From time to time I am accosted by someone who tells me if the church doesn't start providing such and such,² it will not survive. But if such and such is not a mandate of the church according to the word of God, then we're seeking to make the success of our church, and of the Christian faith itself, dependent upon the craftiness of men over and against the word of God. At God's word Abraham was willing to put to death, not only something he loved, but what appeared to be his only hope.

This mountain would eventually be the place of the Temple of Solomon and the cross of Christ would not be far off.

An Act of Obedience

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. ⁴Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. ⁵And 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." ⁶So 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?" ⁸And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. ⁹Then 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 (Genesis 22:3-9)

² The suggestions are not things I would be against. Usually something like sports leagues, pizza nights, or service projects.

In a moment we shall examine this from the typological perspective and
But first let us observe how Abraham didn't hesitate
to obey but rose up early. Immediate obedience is generally easiest. To delay

Secondly, as if to pierce the heart of parents, we read of the dialogue of
Isaac had no expectation of the commanded event. For three days Abraham had
to ponder the killing of his son. Then to hear the innocence of his question must
e been overwhelming.

difficult and perplexing as this event must have been for Abraham, he still
realized that no sacrifice given by men would be satisfactory. God Himself

which distinctly intimated that God required a human sacrifice.³

Finally, Abraham binds his son and lays him on an altar, without his son
ication that Isaac was no small
boy at this time and his submission to his father is more than honorable.

A Reprieve

**his son. ¹ But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven
and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." ²And**

**him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not
withheld your son, your only from Me." ¹ Then Abraham
lifted his eyes and looked, and *him* a ram
caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the**

¹⁴ **P ; as it is said this day, "In the Mount of the L it
shall be provided" (Genesis 22:10 14).**

Isaac, as a sacrifice, is tied up with a knife dangling over his chest. The
much of an imagination to see the bindings as the bondage of sin. It would do
here we see the graciousness of God. The Angel of the Lord instructs Abraham
not to lay his hand on the boy. Abraham has passed the test. But does this mean

Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis*

that God does not judge sin and sinners? For immediately, as Abraham had said, God provides a ram. God would be gracious to Abraham and Isaac but not to the ram He Himself provided.

What God Provides

Abraham called the place, “The Lord Will Provide.” Jehovah Jireh is often the title people give to God because, or in hopes that, He will give us some article or circumstance we desire. But Abraham had in mind the provision of the sacrifice. For any and all provisions we give thanks. But the primary provision would be that of a sacrifice.

The Covenant Restated

Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, ¹⁶and 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.” ¹⁹So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba (Genesis 22:15-19).

A Unilateral Covenant

Here we see the covenant reinstated. Since we have discussed the details of the covenant elsewhere I will not do so again here. But something is notable and unique here. God had given this covenant unilaterally. That is, the promise of these blessings were sure because of God, not man. Yet here it appears that God is now promising the covenant blessings because of Abraham’s good works. Once again, similar to Abimelech (20:6), the good work of Abraham has to initially be credited to God.

A Covenant of Victory

Nicely does this covenant comport with a postmillennial view of history. The descendants of Abraham, in their full expression as Christians (Galatians 3:29) will enjoy ultimate victory in history and eternity. Though much blood would be, and will be, shed prior to the fulfillment of this promise.

Nahor's Kids

**saying, “Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: ¹“Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemu of Aram, ² “Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.”
² And Nahor, ²⁴ Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah (Genesis 22:20-24).**

Abraham's brother, Nahor. His notable grand-major factor in the chapters to come.

A Father And Son

Since the entire story revolves around a sacrifice, it should be obvious events: A father who loved, yet spared not his only son on the mountain of His very temple.

Only Two

surrounded by two thieves. The two men were left behind and the two thieves were of ill repute. There would be two witnesses, but Jesus' most faithful friends were scattered. There would be no confusion. The work of the sacrifice was not a cooperative effort between Jesus and His church, even its most faithful members. It was between Him and His Father.

Three Days And Sacrifice

and the resurrection. Abraham would have Isaac carry the wood for the sacrifice as Christ carried His own cross. In the same way God had predestined all the surrounding the sacrifice of his son. But here is where the similarities end.

The Dagger Not Withheld

For although we all breathe a sigh of relief when the dagger of God's justice is prevented from entering innocent Isaac, the nails, which carried the wrath of God due all sinners who would ever be saved is not prevented from slaying the truly innocent Son of God. God does provide for Himself a sacrifice. The provision is His only Son.

Let there be no confusion, when Jesus said, **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39)**, there could not have been too many stories that would have come more to the forefront of His thinking than this. Jesus, being fully God but fully man knew, in a way that would cause Him to have sweat like great drops of blood, that the dagger would not be withheld from Him. And my friends, it is precisely because the dagger was not withheld from His chest, that it is withheld from ours.

Questions for Study

How could God justifiably ask Abraham to s
2,3)?

What problem is there with those who claim to “hear” the voice of

3. What was the purpose for the prophets of old (page 2)?

According to Hebrews 11:17-19, what was Abraham’s expectation if
he were to sacrifice Isaac (page 3)?

5.

6. How is today’s church tested in a similar way (page 5)?

Explain some of the ways this event foreshadowed Christ (page 6).

8.

9. What does God primarily provide (page 7)?

10.

Christ (page 8).

What are some of the differences between this event and the cross