

Genesis 22 is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Old Testament. Abraham had been living in Beersheba, *in the land of the Philistines* (21:32-34). We're simply told that it was *some time later* that God tested Abraham (22:1). It may well have been quite a few years later. The account of Isaac's birth was in Genesis 21. Then we read in Genesis 22 that Isaac is old enough to carry the wood for the burnt offering (22:6). Isaac is now a young man.

What makes Genesis 22 remarkable is that *God tested Abraham* (22:1). And there are times when He will test you and me. Testing is part of His providential care for us. That's what we read about in 1 Peter chapter one. The trials of life that we must endure are part of God's refining fire. But, like Abraham, we can't always understand what's happening. God was testing Abraham's faith. We know that, but he doesn't. He can only go on in faith. It's the same for you and me.

It's the test that astonishes us. Actually, it shocks us. 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."* Put yourself in Abraham's shoes for a moment. How would you feel if God were to ask this of you? This is a test of the highest degree. And, to help us see its significance, consider how God has been working in Abraham's life.

God called Abraham to leave *Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan* (11:31). In 12:2, 3, God promised to make Abraham *into a great nation and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you*. But, on several occasions, Abraham threatened the fulfilment of God's promise. Two kings wanted to have Abraham's wife, Sarah, for themselves. In Egypt it was Pharaoh. Later, it was *Abimelech king of Gerar* (12:11-13; 20:1-5). Both times, Abraham claimed that Sarah was his sister. And on both occasions, God intervened and rescued Sarah.

In Genesis 15 God made a covenant with Abraham. Abraham had complained to the LORD that he was childless (15:2, 3). The LORD then affirmed His promise to Abraham. He would indeed have a son and he'd have countless descendants (15:4, 5). Genesis 15:6 is a verse speaks into the life of Abraham and into our lives too. *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

Again, Abraham took things into his own hands. Both he and Sarah were getting old. They had no children. With Sarah's prompting, he had a son with Sarah's maidservant, Hagar (Genesis 16). But this son, Ishmael, was not the son of promise. Then, in chapter 17, God reaffirms His promise to Abraham. He and Sarah would finally have a son. They were to name him Isaac (17:19), which means, 'he laughs'.

Sarah then urged Abraham to get rid of Hagar and her son from within the family. She wanted to be sure that Ishmael could *never share in the inheritance with... Isaac* (21:10). And so we come to Genesis 22.

Isaac is, then, Abraham's long-awaited son, the son whom God had promised to him and Sarah. 'Laughter' filled Abraham's house. Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah was 90.

In the fullness of time God's promised Son was born. When the angel brought the good news to Mary, she asked (Luke 1:34), *"How will this be... since I am a virgin?"* The angel's answer was much the same one that Sarah had received, *"nothing is impossible with God."* (Luke 1:37, Genesis 18:14).

We can see why the Lord Jesus could say John 8:56), *"... Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."* Abraham rejoiced at the birth of his son, Isaac (Laughter). And he looked forward to the day when God's promise would be fulfilled in his Seed, Jesus.

But now, God says (22:1), *"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."* This was not Satan tempting Abraham, as he had tempted Job. God was testing him.

Suddenly, God's many promises to Abraham are threatened again. But this time it's not Abraham or Sarah who endangers their fulfilment. It's God Himself. For, if Isaac were to die Abraham would have no descendants. There'd be no blessing to all of the nations. Surely, Abraham would have thought of this as he took Isaac up to the mountains. The life of his son, his child of promise, was about to be taken from him.

*How could God ask Abraham to take his one and only son whom he loved up a hill and offer him as a sacrifice? What kind of God would require anyone to be sacrificed in such a terrible way?*

God was opposed to killing, for we are made in His image (Genesis 9:6). *"You shall not murder"* will later be one of the Ten Commandments given to Israel (Exodus 20:13). Israel was to be separate

from the pagan Canaanites among whom they lived. Abraham was now surrounded by people who sacrificed children to their god, Molech (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:29-31). Their method of sacrificing their children as a burnt offering was horrible. You and I would find it totally repulsive. And now, Abraham is being asked to sacrifice his son.

It was an enormous sacrifice that God was asking of Abraham. One writer notes, *'No more fiery crucible for faith can be imagined. The cost to Abraham was everything.'* Imagine what was going through Abraham's mind as he and Isaac walked to the region of Moriah. And yet, Abraham never questions God about this. As recorded in Genesis, he simply obeys God. The depth of his obedience is seen in the fact that he, Abraham, was to sacrifice his own son. This was Isaac, the son whom he loved (22:2).

On the third day, they arrived at the place God had appointed for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (22:4). Abraham had had three days during which time he could consider what God has asked him to do. Those three days gave him time to persevere, as his faith is sorely put to the test.

Abraham and Isaac left the servants who'd come with them, telling them (22:5b), ***"We will worship and then we will come back to you."*** Is this wishful thinking by Abraham? No! He trusts in the God who will provide. According to Hebrews 11:17-19, Abraham expresses a type of resurrection faith. ***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, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*** But very soon, Isaac noticed that something was missing. 22:7, ***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?"***

How could Abraham answer this question? Should he have told Isaac that he is the lamb for the burnt offering? In what is a key verse in this chapter, Abraham replies (22:8), ***"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."*** And we're left wondering, 'Did Abraham really believe what he'd said to Isaac?' We can only note that Abraham believed God and is ready to obey Him.

Come forward 2,000 years to the Lord Jesus, tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew chapter 4). After fasting for 40 days, He was facing death from starvation, Satan tempted Jesus to doubt God. 'God might not deliver Him. Jesus ought to test God. There was no bread there for Him to eat, only stones. Turn the stones into bread, for God had turned from Him.' But the Lord Jesus resisted Satan with God's Word. Matthew 4:4, ***"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"***

And so Abraham was tested when he was asked to give up his son. The apostle James notes that Abraham's obedience is the outworking of his faith. (2:21-23), ***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.*** Note that Abraham's faith is demonstrated by his obedience. It is never the other way. Obedience to God does not lead to faith. Obedience cannot earn God's grace. James makes it clear, in 2:23, ***"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.***

In 22:9, 10 the narrator takes his time to tell us how Abraham prepared for the sacrifice. ***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. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.***

The tension is rising. Abraham had his knife in his hand, ready to slaughter his only son. Suddenly, an angel gives an urgent cry from heaven. ***"Abraham! Abraham?!"*** (22:11). When Abraham responds to this cry, the angel continues (22:12), ***"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."***

Abraham looked up and saw that God had provided a lamb, a ***ram caught in a thicket*** (22:13). ***He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.*** (22:13b) In 22:14a

we read, *So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide*. What a great word of faith. The name of the place is explained in 22:14b. *And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

The ram died. Isaac lived. And because Isaac lived, Israel would become a great nation. As one commentator notes, *"The ram "instead" of Isaac. The ram "instead" of Israel*. And we can add, *"The ram instead of you. The ram instead of me. For, if Isaac (the son of promise) had died there would be no nation of Israel, no tribe of Judah, no King David and no promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.*

This account of Abraham and Isaac would be remembered when Israel recalled the first Passover feast in Egypt. God judged Egypt. *The LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt* (Exodus 12:29). But He passed over the Israelite's houses where the doorposts were covered with the blood of a spotless male lamb (Exodus 12:13, 5). A lamb died instead of the firstborn in Israel. They were saved by the blood of the lamb. And a lamb died instead of you and me. John the Baptizer, on seeing the Lord Jesus, said (John 1:29), *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* Jesus is our sacrificial Lamb.

Earlier, in this message, we asked: *How could God ask Abraham to take his one and only son whom he loved up a mountain and offer him as a sacrifice? What kind of God would require anyone to be sacrificed in such a terrible way?* The answer is: Our God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What He had asked of Abraham, He asked of Himself. He stopped Abraham from slaughtering Isaac. But He led His One and Only Son, the Son whom He loved, to be sacrificed on a Roman cross. On a hill outside of Jerusalem, not far from where Abraham very nearly sacrificed Isaac, the Lord Jesus paid the price for our sin.

What kind of God is our God? Genesis 22:1 and 14a. *God tested Abraham... So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide*. The writer of Genesis is encouraging God's people as they are about to enter the Promised Land, Canaan.

Just as God provided for Abraham, so too He would provide for His people, Israel. We read in 22:14b, *And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."* The *day* in this verse speaks to Israel, ready to enter Canaan. God tested Abraham. God provided for Abraham.

The God who tests us is the same God who provides all that we need to endure. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:13, *God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

God has provided the way for us to be restored into a right relationship with Him: through the sacrifice of Jesus, 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."* Jesus, the Lamb of God was slain for you and for me. Because of sin we were once enemies of God. We read in Romans 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Recall again how James refers to Abraham in his letter. James 2:23b, *"Abraham... was called God's friend*. Can you and I be called a friend of God? Yes, we can! It's the same way for us as it was for Abraham. We are to trust in the Lord. But in our day, we trust that the Lord Jesus died in our place. When He rose from the dead, He rose to guarantee our new faith relationship with God through Him.

The Lord Jesus commenced His ministry among us with these words (Mark 1:15), *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* The way of salvation, the way to get right with God is to confess that we have sinned. We confess that we fall short of God's standard of absolute perfection. And, having confessed our sins, we place our faith in Christ.

We read in Romans 5:9-11, *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

God, not Abraham, provided the way for us to know God, to get right with God and be called God's friend. Only God could pay the price. He did that by providing His One and Only Son, His beloved Son, *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*. (John 1:29).

For family devotions, Martin Luther once read this account of Abraham offering Isaac on the altar. His wife, Katie, said, "I do not believe it. God would not have treated His Son like that!"

"But, Katie," Luther replied, "He did."

In Genesis 22:12 the angel said to Abraham, “... ***you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.***” This is the same language that the Apostle Paul uses in Romans 8:32. ***He [God] 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?*** Dale Ralph Davis notes that *what God stopped Abraham from doing, He Himself did. He did not hold back His own Son, but gave Him over for us all. God tests servants, but God gave His Son.*

How is God testing you today? We all have our trials in life. It may be the sickness of a relative or friend. Maybe you are enduring the pain and suffering of a broken friendship, the end of a relationship. You worry about your finances, your children, world peace, or, just simply your future. These trials are not signs that God has left you alone. Yet they test your faith, there’s no question about that.

It’s not good enough for someone to say, ‘Everything will look better tomorrow.’ That’s just ‘cold comfort’. Nor is it enough to say, ‘Keep your chin up, there are others who are worse off than you.’ Rather, our tests and trials are given to us to prove our faith. 1 Peter 1:7, ***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 honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.*** Amen