

Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac

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Text: Genesis 22:1-14

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Series: Genesis

Introduction: We are looking at **Genesis 22** at a very dramatic account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. We see the Lord Jesus Christ in shadow form in the sacrifice of the ram, and we see Isaac going free!

God is all about growing our faith. Often when we first come to know the Lord we think we have very strong faith, and then, when we are tested, we often fail. This is the apex of the test of Abraham's faith.

This evening we are looking at Genesis 22:1-14 (ESV) —

"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." 2 He said, "Take 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." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

9 When they came to the place of which **God had told him**, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." 12 He said, "**Do not lay your hand on the boy** or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing **you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.**" 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "**On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.**"

Introduction:

We've been going through the book of Genesis. What we come to in this text is the climactic point in the life of Abraham. It's acknowledged among scholars to be one of

the high points of ancient narrative. It's filled with complexity and love and horror and joy. It's riveting, it's dramatic, and it is *the last great test of Abraham's faith*. What we are going to find as one person put it, is that:

*Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible.*¹

There are three features to this story:

1. The **joy** of the call
2. The **horror** of the test
3. The **awe** of the Lamb

I. Faith begins and grows with God's call (vs. 2).

Genesis 22:2 (ESV) — “He [**God**] said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and **go** to the land of Moriah, and offer [**sacrifice**] him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

A. Abraham is **called** to **go**! Consider the similarity of the calls of Abraham. Both in his original call in Ur and in his call now, he is called to go and leave the familiar, the comfortable, and the stable. GO! Living by faith often means leaving our comfort zone because comfort zones often are idols.

- **Gen. 12:1**, “**Go** from your **country** ...to the land that I will show you”.
- **Gen. 22:2**, “**go** to the land of **Moriah**...on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

Comfort Zones are often Idols

How can I say this? Abraham's comfort zone was his *idolatry* in Ur. But having left that, he was prone like you and I to make the great blessing of God to him, namely his son by Sarah, to become an idol.

To jack up the stakes here, Sarah is up in age, and quite likely near death at this time. So if Isaac is gone, there is absolutely NO HOPE.

That's where God wants us. He loves to put us in situations where only He has the solution, and only He has the infinite power to do it.

God says, “Go Abraham! Leave your comfort. Leave your idols. Leave all that you've been depending on, and depend on Me alone.” That's God's call! It's not just a call of separation from the world, it is a call of separation unto God. We leave the world to embrace God.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be obedient* (108–109). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

- B. Abraham is not only called to go, but he's *called* to go **without knowing** exactly where he's going. God's going to show Abraham LATER. He's to go without knowing the final destination.
- **Gen. 12:1**, "Go from your country...to the land that I will show you".
 - **Gen. 22:2**, "go to the land of Moriah, and offer [sacrifice] him [Isaac] there ... on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Abraham is led step by step by God. He doesn't know how it will end. I'm not sure I'd want to get in a plane without knowing the destination. The only way I'd do it was if God were the pilot!

Often people say, "I want to become a Christian, but am I going to have to give up such and such". But God says, "Follow me, and I'll tell you where you're going later". In other words, the call is to follow and find God. God is the end and the ultimate goal of the call. He's not a means to happiness found somewhere else. Finding God is our happiness. He's not a means to anything else. He is the ultimate treasure.

Following Christ through the narrow gate strips us of all other pleasures. God gives many gifts, but they must remain blessings to us and not idols. God is always calling us to follow Him for His sake. He is the ultimate pleasure. ***Our pleasure in God should be so great that we would want to follow Him anywhere and lose anything as long as we have Him!*** This is what growth in faith is all about.

- C. Thirdly, Abraham is *called* to **offer up**. He's not only going, and going without knowing the final destination, but Abraham's called to sacrifice.

At the beginning of his walk of faith, he was called to offer up a lot. He was called to offer up his family. He had to leave behind his civilization, his status and reputation and become a stranger. He left behind his safety and made himself vulnerable. He had to leave his culture and his identity.

But now as Abraham nears the end of his life, he's asked to give up his son, his only son who he loves. He's asked to destroy the Son of Promise, by which all the promises of God for Jesus Christ will be fulfilled. It is through this little boy that the ultimate hopes of any salvation lie.

God is not being cruel, but to show the depth of the loss and the greatness of this offering to God. It was Abraham's only son, because Ishmael had been run off and is now gone. So Isaac now is the only heir left. God's truthfulness and integrity rest with this son living and procreating children that are as many as "the sands of the sea".

But this is the only son, whom *Abraham loved*. This had become the emotional center of Abraham's life. So what God is asking is that *every source of finite security and significance be offered up*.

The Essence of the Call

It seems fair that we should ask at this point, "What do we know about the call of God"? In **Romans 8:30**, Paul tells us that "those whom he called he also justified". That's important. Abraham was sovereignly called by God. That's important to know since the New Testament teaches us that he is the prototype of every believer. He's the father of the faithful. Abraham was called. All true believers in Christ are called by God. And it says everyone who God calls, He justifies. So there is this call to a relationship with Him that brings faith. So the call of God has to do with hearing God's voice and believing Him and following Him to something greater than this present world. We see this in Abraham's call, and in all of our calls. We are arrested by God's voice, and we leave our own ways and follow God's way.

And in **Eph. 1:18**, Paul says the way you're going to grow in maturity is to know the hope and the riches of the "hope to which he has called you". God told Jeremiah "I called you from your mother's womb" (1:5). For those who are saved, there is a sense in which God has been calling you since you were born. There are many different times in our lives where hear God's voice calling us into relationship with Him. But there comes a time of arresting and a time of surrender and a time of following Him.

What is this call?

What does it mean to be called by God? The call is best defined by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. **John 10:27**, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

It means that Christians are not simply those trying to live by a certain ethical pattern, but have been called by God and yielded to that call and become a true born again Christian through faith in Christ. God calls, and allows us to truly hear His voice. God justifies those He calls.

We might call this the "conviction" or drawing of the Holy Spirit in New Testament terms. The call of God is where the Spirit of God arrests the heart. It's not just a simple wooing. It is that of course. It is the love of God in our hearts. But it is something more jarring than that. There is an arresting of the soul. The Bible describes it in other places as the tearing or the cutting of the heart. There is a gripping of the heart by God.

And it's *not just a one time call*. Once a person is converted, the voice of God continues to call us into a deeper relationship with Him. We see this in the life of Abraham, and we see it in the Christian. Theologians have a term for this process of growing into deeper relationship with the Lord. They call it *sanctification*.

The call is leave that which is shifting and build on that which is firm

Why did Abraham leave Ur? It was the call. The book of Hebrews describes this call.

Hebrews 11:8,10, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.... 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer [architect] and builder is God.”

That means that Abraham looked at his life in city of Ur, all that he had, all his apparent security and comfort and he realized, without God, I have no foundations. This stuff isn't secure. Some day it will all be gone. I want something solid and lasting. I want real foundations for my life.

My Dad

I have to think of my father. He's been successful in the banking industry. He's retired and manages a golf course. Yet his life is fleeting. All the success and leisure will not help him in the presence of God. The city he lives for is the “City of Destruction”. It's coming to an end. Do you know God? Have you been called by Him?

Abraham's Comfort Zone No Longer Comfortable

Abraham looked to the idols of his day, and they offered him no lasting foundation, no real meaning in life. In other words, Abraham's comfort zone no longer offered him comfort. He saw his mortality. He was awakened to the frightening fleeting nature of the present world that we live in. And he sought a city that was not fleeing and that had eternal foundations.

All in this World is Passing Away

Our life is passing away. If your identity is my family, it's passing away. My good looks are passing away. My bank account is passing away. My job and occupation is passing away. My very life is passing away. There will come a day frightenly soon that some one will mention your name and say “Oh, he or she passed away”.

The essence of the call is that you are arrested and awakened to your own mortality and wretchedness. The Spirit convicts us or arrests us of “sin, righteousness, and judgment”.

Life has a way of stripping everything that we put our hope in. Your heart says, “you have to have **this** to be important, you need **this** to be happy”. The call of God is, “All you need is Christ”. Your friends, your looks, your job are all going to be ripped away. Sooner or later we lose everything, and all we have is God.

The call of God is this: “Follow me. In the end all you have is God! God says, “In the end all you have is Me!!” If you think you need anything else to be happy outside of God, that you would be crushed if you lost [fill in the blank], then the call is this: stop building your life on faulty foundations! We need to be “looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer [architect] and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

In the corruption of our heart we are mastered by so many idols and we are controlled by approval and looks and friends and money. The call is that all we need is Christ!!! So

we ought to offer up all that we count precious to God. That's the call. He's calling us all to Mount Moriah.

The call is to follow God to a place that He's going to tell us about later. Because it's not about getting to the Promised Land ultimately. It's about getting to God.

Some of you might say, I'll follow God, but only if He doesn't make me give up this or that. Or I'll follow Him if He helps me get this or that. The truth is in this scenario, your real God is that which you are not willing to give up or that which you cannot live without. The call is to leave our idols and find our forgiveness and fulfillment in God through Christ.

Abraham followed the call. He left family. But what about his only son, Isaac? Ishmael was his other son, but he was now out of the picture. The ultimate test of Abraham's faith is awful. It is objectionable to us on many levels. Abraham is called to sacrifice his only son.

II. Faith grows through Testing (vs. 3-10).

Abraham had many tests in his life that he failed.

- Remember under pressure in Egypt he lied about Sarah to spare his own life.
- Remember after God told him Sarah would have a child, he tried to get his servant Eliezer to be his heir.
- Then, he had Hagar bear him a child to be his heir
- Finally Sarah is with child at 90 years of age, and Abraham is around 100! Likely more than a decade goes by and Abraham is brought to the most significant test of his life.
- The more we grow in our faith, the more difficult the tests become.

Shoes Illustration: It's kind of like taking my little son Evan to shoes shopping. I'm not going to ask for a size 12 men's shoe. He's only a little tike. So he gets little tike shoes. God sends trials to test our faith that fit us. He's not harsh, but He is loving and kind and our compassionate heavenly Father. As a father pities his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. I'm not going to go out and get my son a size 42 suit jacket. Its gonna be size 4 or 5. I love my son. Our father loves us much more than that!

Flying Lessons Illustration: We are like a little eaglet trying learn how to fly. Sometimes eaglet will fall and flutter all the way to the ground, usually landing unsteadily. Other times, an eaglet will fall from the high height of the nest, fluttering his wings as fast as he can and before that eaglet hits the ground the father eagle swoops down with quickness and agility and brings that little one back to the nest for round two of flying lessons.

I want you to consider the HORROR of the trial. As we come to this passage, it almost begins to slow down. You get a close up view. It's like it's going in slow motion. We read in verse 3...

Genesis 22:3-10 (ESV) — “3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” 8 Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

9 When they came to the place of which **God had told him**, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.”

What is the horror of the test? Is it ultimately the three day journey where Abraham has to agonizingly consider sacrificing his son? Is it the climb up the mountain and the binding of Isaac? Yes!! We can feel the infinite pain of Abraham.

We see the horror in the very words of God's command to Abraham.

A. The Son of Promise.

Verse 2, “[**God**] said, “Take your son, **your only son Isaac**, whom you love...””

This is Abraham's ONLY son. His first son, Ishmael, the father of the Arab nations has by this time been forsaken and sent away. At this time this is Abraham's heir. This is the son of promise.

This is Abraham's future.

This is also the world's future. This is the seed of the Messiah. This is salvation!

B. The Son of Abraham's old age.

Verse 2, “[**God**] said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, **whom you love...**””

Abraham loved this son, for this was the miraculous son promised to him and Sarah in their old age. God made a barren woman to be with child. And now God was asking him to sacrifice his son.

and go to the land of Moriah, and offer [**sacrifice**] him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

C. The law of the first born. This was a spoken and unspoken custom in the ancient culture where the first born was to receive the entire inheritance from his father. He was to become the new patriarch and share it with his siblings. Today if there were land, we would split the land in two, three, four, or twelve pieces if necessary. It was not this way in Abraham's day. The first born received it all. He supported the rest of the family.

D. Abraham left the past, but is now called to leave the **future**. The test of his faith when he was called was to leave his past—his home, his civilization, his culture, his comfort zone, his familiar surroundings. But now Abraham is called to leave his future. The promised Messiah is to come through Isaac's loins.

E. The **horror** of this test...

What was so horrible about this test had to do with God's command for Abraham to sacrifice his son. God says that child sacrifice is murder and abomination. Abraham and later Israel and later the New Testament apostles would never have seen this as the abomination of child sacrifice and murder.

We need to see this as Israel would have seen it as they looked back on this. Isaac is the seed of Israel. If there is no Isaac, there is no Israel. There is no nation. Because the twelve tribes come from Isaac's son, Jacob.

To understand this we need to move forward to the Exodus. The tenth plague was the divine sword of justice coming down on the whole nation. And to show this divine justice, God sent the angel of justice to destroy someone in each of the houses if they did not have the blood of the lamb on the door posts. Who was that someone that was taken in death?

It was the first born. This is God's way of saying to Abraham, all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death. Abraham, you don't deserve to have a future. Your race is cursed with sin and you must pay the divine retribution.

Consider why the horror of this test was so great! Here was God requiring the death of the FIRST BORN, just like he would in Egypt.

And here, one commentator described Abraham as "utterly God forsaken". He was required to offer his son for divine retribution, but THIS son was the SON of promise whereby God would bring the Messiah and bless all nations.

So we come to the horror of the test: Is God just? Yes? Is God a justifier of the ungodly? Yes, but Abraham now has to trust God to be merciful and keep his promises.

F. Abraham passes with flying colors. Look at the great faith of Abraham.

- **Verse 5, "Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."**

- **Verses 7-8a**, “And Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here am I, my son.’ He said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’” 8 Abraham said, **“God will provide for himself the lamb** for a burnt offering, my son.”
- **We all know the story.** But I think by understanding exactly what happened, we might be brought closer to God and our faith strengthened.

III. The object of our Faith: the **Lamb** (vs. 2, 9-14).

Genesis 22:2 (ESV) — “He [**God**] said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of **Moriah**, and offer [**sacrifice**] him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’”

Genesis 22:9-14 When they came to the place of which **God had told him**, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’ 12 He said, ‘**Do not lay your hand on the boy** or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing **you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.**’ 13 And Abraham **lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram**, caught in a thicket by his horns.”

The Passover LAMB was a male lamb or one year old or a RAM, not unlike what we see here. How should we understand this? Let me give you one OT passage and two NT passages.

A. The Lamb at Moriah....

Where is Moriah?

2 Chronicles 3:1, “Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD [TEMPLE] at Jerusalem in mount Moriah,”

Moriah is where the Temple was built in Jerusalem. The city was in the valley, but outside the city on the Mountain which was known as Moriah, or in Jesus known as Mount Calvary. It that mountain range, Jesus was lifted up and crucified as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”.

We have two NT commentaries on this...

- **Hebrews 11:17-19**, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”

- **James 2:20-23**, “Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “**Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness**”—and he was called a friend of God.”

B. Abraham looked toward Someone GREATER than Isaac, greater than RAM.

What did Abraham believe? He believed God for Isaac (**Gen. 15:6**), but he believed God for Someone Greater than Isaac! Jesus says in **John 8:56**, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”

You see Isaac could not have atoned for the sins of mankind. Neither could the RAM. Abraham believed that there would be another lamb offered.

Look at **Genesis 22:13-14**, “And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “**On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.**”

Not “the LORD **did** provide”, but “the LORD will provide, as it is said to this day, “**On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.**” (vs. 14).

Conclusion: The apostles tell us we need to expect God to try our faith so that we will grow.

- **1 Peter 4:12**, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”
- **James 1:2-4**, ” Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness [patience] have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Have you learned how to fly like the eaglet? Until you learn how to fly, God’s going to keep pushing you out of the nest!! God’s testing of you is only because He wants to grow you in Christ!