

The Triune God

*Who Does He Think He Is?
(Genesis 22:1-18)*

With Study Questions

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Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² Then 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." ³ 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. ⁴ Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. ⁵ And 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." ⁶ So 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?" ⁸ And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. ⁹ Then 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. ¹⁰ And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." ¹² And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me." ¹³ Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind *him* was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said *to this day*, "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided." ¹⁵ Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, ¹⁶ and 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 (Genesis 22:1-18).

Introduction

I was enjoying a fictional drama revolving around the boundaries a parent might be willing to push in their love for their child. As a parent and a husband, there may not be anything in my life where I would be more vulnerable to cross boundaries than the issue of the welfare of my wife and children. I was engaged. Then a scene hit me in this drama, when they chose to use a seventeen-year-old girl in parochial school (a religious school) to be, as it were, the voice of reason.

She had been questioning her faith so her parents, being Mafia members, and feeling unqualified to offer an apologetic for the existence of God, enlisted an old priest to straighten her out. In the midst of his failing miserably, the girl storms out and angrily, contemptuously, shares a Bible story with her father she had just learned in school—the story of Abraham and Isaac.

She was not altogether inaccurate in her presentation. God calls Abraham to kill his own son. He is not honest with his son regarding what he is going to do to him. And the main point of this entire enterprise is to prove Abraham's faith and love for God. Her conclusion—her takeaway—is that God is a deranged despot whom she hates. Remarkably, she doesn't say she doesn't believe in God. She hates God.

It is not difficult to understand how a secular audience would feel the same contempt for such a God as this. Who does He think He is, requiring such a hideous task? One would almost have to be inhuman to read a story like this dispassionately. Even Matthew Henry, the 17th century Presbyterian minister asked:

Must the father of the faithful be the monster of all fathers?¹

¹ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 52). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Adding to the difficulty of the horrid task is the utter randomness of the command. God offers no explanation-no rationale for it. Isaac had committed no crime. There is no record of his being an idolator. Unlike other sons in Scripture, where there is ample record of their disregard for man and God (Leviticus 10:1, 2; 1 Samuel 2:12), nothing like this is said of Isaac. He wasn't even to die as a martyr, defending the faith. There is nothing evidently utilitarian about this. It's like the fruit in the garden. A shallow reading leaves us a tremendous *what in the world?!*

Even still, what struck me in this scene was the great ease with which the writers scripted blasphemy from the mouth of this teen. With a defiant nobility she expressed her hatred for the God of Scripture. And all of this was framed in such a way as to present her as the wisest, bravest, and most virtuous person in the room.

One could almost feel the popular atheist, Richard Dawkins, rendering his applause in the shadows, for she all but quoted him directly. In his book, in *The God Delusion*, he wrote:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

Dawkins is not grabbing these attributes out of thin air. He has Scriptural references (at some, generally twisted, level) to justify all these indictments. And, at some level, if God were not God, these accusations would have merit. But what Dawkins does not recognize, what this girl (playing a part) did not recognize, what the world refuses to recognize, and even what many (if not all, at some level) Christians do not recognize is the true, sovereign, godhood of God. We can be so fickle and selective when it comes to our acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God-of God's control of history.

We are quite comfortable celebrating His sovereignty in bringing us, and others, into the world. The birth of a child is a joyous occasion. A

similar disposition is elusive when it comes to His taking us out of this world. But God determines both days and the means by which those events take place. He even calls our exit from this world something precious in His sight (Psalm 116:15).

What makes this a difficult story, when it gets right down to it, is a truncated understanding of the God who gives the command. Add to that the very short-term approach we tend to have regarding the existence of the human soul. Some 3,853 years have passed since this event. I don't think it is too risky to suggest that Abraham's and Isaac's current view of what happened on Mount Moriah almost four thousand years ago is that it was well worth it.

Let us also note that in this entire heart-wrenching test of Abraham's faith, he never once questioned God's divine right to give the order. This type of astonishing display of faithfulness is peppered throughout Scripture. Job declares,

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him (Job 13:15).

What manner of faith would produce the words from Paul,

For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain (Philippians 1:21).

Yet the world evaluates such a disposition as misguided. And their lack of willingness to acknowledge the godhood of God does not leave them in a state of neutrality, but in a state (as this drama clearly demonstrates) of increasing rebellion and hostility.

I think it is with some naivety that a view of the world has gotten legs in the Reformed community where what takes place in the world is to be understood as a common kingdom where God rules equitably (fairly or justly) through unbelieving men and women. This is achieved, it is supposed, via general revelation (what all people know by simply observing the created order) and men and women being made in God's image. We are, consequently, to avoid giving what happens in the world a lot of our attention. Scripture and history indicate quite the opposite.

The kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of this world do not form a fraternity, but a battlefield. Rushdoony hits on it:

...The City of God and the City of Man. Between these two forces there is unremitting warfare.²

Speaking of a godly wisdom—a wisdom from above—a wisdom found in Christ (Colossians 2:3), the Proverbs teach:

For whoever finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the Lord; ³⁶ But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death (Proverbs 8:35, 36).

The above passage is pregnant with application in terms of the current direction of the culture in which we live. What is not found in it, or any other passage in Scripture, is an argument for neutrality with the world.

I don't highlight this to justify the Christian's engagement in unrelenting frustration or to find comfort in some cozy nook of victimhood or hostility. I highlight this very common theme in Scripture that we may ever be aware of our environment and assertively access the God-given tools for this type of warfare—not the least of which is the faith of Abraham; the faith revealed in this chapter. And like Abraham, we might expect that the refinement of our faith may be a painful project.

A refined faith, according to Peter, is more precious than gold. And the method of refinement Peter compares to that which happens in a furnace (1 Peter 1:7). So, let's take just a moment to see if we can answer the anger of this seventeen-old-girl and an entire generation of young (and older) people who have grown very comfortable in their engagement of the hatred of, and contempt for, God.

But this is not merely an apologetic for the twenty-second chapter of Genesis. Recognizing that the most challenging messages are the most stretching as well, let us unpack a bit of this four-thousand-year-old event, seeking to arrive at the utter reasonableness of Abraham's response to the glorious faith-refining furnace to which God had called him.

² Rushdoony, RJ. *Thy Kingdom Come*. P. 185.

More At Stake

What is not readily apparent in the account recorded in this chapter is that there was more at stake than the parent's loss of a child. God had made a promise that through Abraham's seed, salvation would come to the world. So, the conundrum extended beyond God commanding Abraham to do something which, at face value, was in apparent conflict with God's own word (Genesis 9:5, 6). It also appeared to be in conflict with God's own plan. Abraham didn't merely have an emotional struggle; he had a theological struggle.

This promise of God-this covenant God had made with Abraham, would proceed through Isaac.

God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him (Genesis 17:19).

On the table of sacrifice was not merely Abraham's son, but Abraham's salvation-and the salvation of his son-and the salvation of the world! Calvin put it this way:

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.³

God's plan doesn't seem to be very efficient. It would appear that God had lost His way in His own plan!!! In God's preparation of Abraham to be the father of the faith (Galatians 3:6-9), Abraham had to defer to the infinite wisdom of God over his own understanding of the way the plan of salvation would unfold.

³ Calvin, J. (1998). [Genesis](#) (electronic ed., Ge 22:1).

If ever the **“word of the cross”** was **“foolishness to those who are perishing”** (1 Corinthians 1:18), it was here. But Abraham would not **“lean”** upon in his own, very limited understanding. He would rather **“acknowledge”** God and God would **“direct” [his] path”** (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

Sometimes the path God would have us on is very counter-intuitive. But the plot thickens.

What If...?

We are called to that same faith as **“sons of Abraham”** (Galatians 3:7). Yet the natural question arises—a question I’ve heard many times: what if God called you to such a task? Would you do it? How could Abraham have possibly concluded that this was appropriate? Are there not insane people to this day committing filicide (the killing of their own children) followed by the testimony that God had called them to it? And do we not universally agree that these people have lost their minds?

A Closed Canon

It is precisely here that we see the value and safety of a closed canon. Simply put, God no longer speaks to men the way He spoke to Abraham. He infallibly and inerrantly speaks to us through His word, which is sufficient to thoroughly equip us (2 Timothy 3:16).

Modern day prophets and apostles can be extremely dangerous. They generally limit their activities to grifting the vulnerable and elderly. But if we truly believe they are prophetic, they could just as easily command our government to invade Canada the way Saul was commanded, directly by the prophet of God (Samuel) to utterly destroy the Amalekites.

There was no question in the mind of Abraham regarding this divine revelation. He was certain. As Henry explains,

...he [Abraham] was infallibly assured that it was indeed a command of God and not a delusion.⁴

So, the ‘what if God asked you’ question falls flat.

⁴ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 53). Peabody: Hendrickson.

The Power of God

Nonetheless, God did command Abraham to do something unthinkable. We can speculate on the emotional hurricane in Abraham's heart, but we needn't speculate on the immediacy of his obedience. He **"rose early in the morning."** To what do we credit this unflinching obedience? The answer is twofold. One is a bit speculative; the other contained in the text.

First, is the former miracles Abraham had enjoyed. This was not his first rodeo. Abraham had heard God's voice before and even experienced God's cutting of the covenant (Genesis 15). But beyond that, God had already supernaturally brought life where there was no possibility of life when Sarah, at ninety, was told she would bear a child. It seemed so absurd that it was laughable (Genesis 18:12). In fact, the name Isaac means "he laughs." God had instilled a sense of confidence in Abraham based upon what He had already done.

Second (and this is connected to the first), Abraham was confident, not in his own righteousness, not in his own intellect, but in the power of God.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,¹⁸ of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called,"¹⁹ concluding 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).

Abraham might have been at the end of Himself, but there is no getting to the end of an Almighty God who holds the keys to eternal life. God has the power and right to begin and end our lives when He sees fit. And there is no one who can, in the final and eternal analysis, who can make better choices.

Conclusion

None of this works if we view God (as He is so often presented) as some sort of cosmic life-coach, whose primary job description is to ever cater to my emotional or even physical needs. Our perception and estimation of God, as limited as this might be for finite, fallen creatures that we are, is that He is the **“Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 1:8)**. It all revolves around God and in this we should rejoice, for the alternatives are sadly lacking.

And His call in our lives to trust Him, to have faith in Him, and to embrace with unflinching conviction the refining of that faith, as painful and challenging as it may be, is supremely precious. One way or another we all end up where Abraham must have been. All that we have to offer, all our ambitions, aspirations, skills, senses, and endurance will be reduced to nothing. We can't seem to figure it out. And that refined faith becomes the sole instrument by which we access eternal hope in Christ. It is precisely then and there that we see God is not one to be hated but worshiped.

I have a good friend who is currently going through the unthinkable. It is not entirely clear to me where he stands with God. I sought to encourage him with words from Scripture that I have found comforting. Having done everything he can to remedy his situation, which is not unfolding well, his response to me was that it means so much to lean on faith.

Speaking with a mutual unbelieving friend regarding this massive trial, this unbeliever asked, “How can you believe in God when this stuff happens?” My only answer was, “How can you not?”

Questions for Study

1. Have you noticed a disposition toward Christ and the things of Christ in your culture have moved in a certain direction? Explain (pages 2-4)?
2. How are Christians to view their engagement with the world (pages 5, 6)?
3. What was at stake in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac that is not readily apparent in the account? How did Abraham respond (pages 7, 8)?
4. If someone asked if you would do what Abraham was called to do, how would you respond (page 8)?
5. To what do you credit Abraham's unflinching obedience (page 9)?
6. What is necessary for the story of Abraham to make sense to us (page 9, 10)?