

Gen. 22:1-19

We have before us a terrifying and horrible story!

Is God instituting child Sacrifice?

Critics of God and the Bible point to this story in an effort to portray God as a perpetrator of "cosmic child abuse."

First this, they say, and then Jesus on the cross. The Bible says that God tortured and killed His own son!

Are they right? Yes, in a way, God has done that.

But in saying these things in this way they distort the story. There is a deeper truth at work.

This story is part of a larger story. In fact it is an essential part.

This moment on the mountain of Moriah in the land of Canaan stands as one of the towering events...

in the most important story in the history of the world.

It looks back on the God who created the world and has shown Himself to be just, holy, and fearsome...

and merciful, gracious, and loving.

We have seen that God is the faithful God who makes promises and keeps promises.

This moment looks forward to what this just and loving God who keeps His promises will do...

that the promises God keeps are not those that we want...

Not promises of money, or more stuff, or a comfortable life, physical healing... all the things we think we want.

No, God continually surprises us by promising to meet our real needs, and then keeping those promises.

This God who meets Abraham on Mount Moriah is not doing what Abraham wants, but what He Himself wants.

He is using suspense, symbolism, and foreshadowing to show Abraham... and through Him Moses, and through them us...

That God, who is our provider, has prepared to meet our deepest, most eternal need.

God provides for our greatest need.

All of the events we have read of thus far in Abraham's life have prepared him for this moment.

This, of course, is true of God's working in our lives as well. We are works in progress... always.

God is teaching, molding, preparing... as He was doing with Abraham.

In Gen. 12-14 Abraham is made to leave his country, his family, his security...

"from your country" = culture, language, familiar surroundings

"from your relatives" = most important relationships

"from your father's house" = security, career, who he was... his identity.

Following God always involves leaving something:

Moses from the wilderness to Egypt

Israel from Egypt

David from his sheep

The Prophets... Jeremiah, Jonah

Jesus' disciples... Fishermen, Matthew... and then Paul

You and me... family, career, religion, being a part of a community

Abraham, God says, will "be blessed to be a blessing to all the families of the earth."

12:4 "So Abraham went forth" = He obeyed.

Travelling... through famine

Egypt, mistakes, war

Gen. 15-16 God has to adjust Abraham's understanding, his plans for his future

15:2-3 He didn't understand how God would fulfill the promise God had made.

15:4-18 God made His covenant promise to Abraham in blood

16:6 "He believed in the Lord, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

His promise to Abraham was for Abraham to have a future and a hope beyond the grave.

He still didn't understand.

Then came Sarai's bad idea, and Hagar's child, Ishmael... who we are going to learn is not the son of the promise.

Gen. 17 God changes Abraham's name, his very identity... and reiterates His promise.

17:1-5 Abram = exalted father

Abraham = father of a multitude... heir to an "everlasting possession"

17:9-14 Circumcision, the sign of the covenant... and Abraham obeys

17:15-22 A son for Abraham and Sarah... Isaac, "laughter"

In Gen. 18, Sarah learns of this and laughs in disbelief.

But, three chapters later a year has passed and Abraham has learned more of his own weakness and God's fearsome power.

After all this their child Isaac is born... the son of the promise, the beginning of the fulfillment of everything.

Sarah laughs now in joy and amazement... God is so good and powerful and faithful... to her and her husband.

You might think that Abraham will now experience a time of completion, relief, rest.

But, as so often happens in God's dealing with us, when you think that... you are wrong.

God has something else in mind.

You see Abraham, if you thought all this was a test of faith... It doesn't compare to what is about to come.

I. The God who promises puts us to the test. vss. 1-2

At the outset of this story we are told, "God tested Abraham"

You don't test me. I don't test you. But, the Lord "tests" each one of us. To the student of the Bible this comes as no surprise.

Hebrews 12:5-11 "Discipline" = scourging, pain, hardship, training, teaching, correction... every son He receives.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 Passing the test requires attention to what God says.

And, what a test! For 25 years Abraham waited for the birth of Isaac, and then removed Ishmael from his house.

Now only Isaac, Abraham's growing boy, is left to him, Isaac the son of the promise. God has said so.

All God's promises to Abraham rest on this son, Isaac. no doubt he is the most precious thing in Abraham's life.

And now... "take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac"

Why did God have to put it that way? Is He being cruel?

I think part of the lesson for Abraham is that he must have nothing in his life more precious than God.

It is interesting how often God's tests com in the areas that are most precious to us.

Maybe it is because God does not want us to have idols more precious to us than He. (vs. 2)

Previously, when God dealt with Abraham, He told him something of what He was doing.

Abraham had some idea of where things were going, what to expect.

Not so now.

Worse yet, this is a test in which God apparently acts in a way totally contradictory from everything Abraham knows about Him.

You might imagine the questions that Abraham now had to struggle with...

questions you may have had to struggle with:

"God, are You good?"

"...righteous? just? loving? Will you be faithful to me?"

This is what real tests cause us to do... to ask these questions of God... and yet, while we ask... to cling to Him in faith.

Which is what we discover Abraham does as he journeys and obeys.

II. "God will provide a lamb." vss. 3-8

Imagine what Abraham must have gone through during these three days...

days full of both silence and questions, and without any answers...

Why? Why would God be testing him? Hasn't Abraham passed enough tests already?

What about me? Does God test me?

He does.

And, why?

Well, He does not stretch us beyond what we can bear, but in His love and wisdom He brings us into situations...

In which He can teach us to trust Him more and lean on Him harder... to forsake our idols and love Him more completely.

We find in vs. 3 that there is not a hint of Abraham doubting or questioning whether or not he would obey.

"So, Abraham rose early in the morning..." = There seems to be no delay. (Gen. 20:8, 21:14)

Abraham's obedience is immediate and persistent.

Abraham trusted God even though he did not know what God was doing.

22:5 "we will worship and return to you" = Abraham rightly sees what he is doing as worship. Obedience is worship.

And, he is confident that they both would be back.

How could Abraham be so confident? **Heb. 11:17-19**

He did not know how God was going to keep His promise, but Abraham knew God was going to keep His promise.

We are in exactly the same position, daily.

God has made many promises to us. Scripture is full of them.

But, we know little of the events in between now and the fulfillment of the promise.

22:7 Isaac's question. He wasn't stupid. "Where is the lamb..."

22:8 "God will provide for Himself the lamb..." = He was guessing, hoping, but he did not know.

But, recall, God called Abraham His prophet (Gen. 20:7), and as such Abraham is saying more than he knows.

In this statement we find that the provision that God makes is ultimately for God Himself.

What God demands, God provides. This is true for us as well. There is no other way.

Because, on our own, you and I are completely incapable of meeting God's demands.

So, on this three day journey, amidst all the struggles of soul, Abraham is thinking, "God has to do it."

And, this is the essence of surviving God's testing.

"God, it is beyond me. You have to do it. You have to provide." And, this is always true. There is no other way.

Abraham now comes to the end of his journey and the completion of his obedience in this test.

And, he finds an amazing lesson, a truth about God, that meets him at the end.

III. "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." vss. 9-14

22:9-10 He was fully prepared to carry out the Lord's command. He was going to do it! Kill his son for God.

22:11-12 God stops him, and we are meant not to miss the urgency of God's speaking, "Abraham, Abraham!"

So, when things are at their bleakest and blackest... God breaks in.

God's timing is always perfect and the darkest times in life are always before God acts in providing for us.

22:12 "now I know that you fear God" What is God saying?

Is He saying that before this he really did not know that Abraham feared him?

Is God revealing that he does not know the future, especially where human decisions are involved?

No. The rest of Scripture contradicts either conclusion, and the language demands neither.

"now" = primary use = at the present moment, in the present situation.

God is not saying that He didn't know before. He is saying that He is in the present knowing.

"I know" = Hebrew perfect tense = completed action = God is stating an absolute fact about Himself.

No more will ever be added to God's knowledge.

This present situation is an illustration of God's knowledge that Abraham fears Him.

Abraham feared God when he couldn't feel God there,

when he didn't experience His love,

when it was beyond him to understand what God was doing.

What God is saying here is not a new discovery for God. It may be for Abraham, but not God.

What God is doing is using this statement of fact as a foundation for His provision and repetition of the promise.

It is because Abraham fears God that God provides a sacrifice in the place of his son.

Isaac is saved by grace (God did not have to do it) through faith (Abraham's faith displayed in His fear of God)

in a God who provides a substitutionary sacrifice (the ram).

22:13 "Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked..." = the hope that comes with the words of God spoken to our deepest need.

He would not have looked without God's words, and what he saw was exactly what he needed... A sacrifice...

And, the ram was a perfect sacrifice, caught by its horns so as to not damage the animal at all.

Why did Abraham need a sacrifice? Why was a sacrifice important for worship?

It is because Abraham and Isaac were both sinners. It was the sacrifice that covered their sin.

The people of Israel are going to learn this through Moses, and this text is preparing them for the lesson.

In this sense Isaac deserved to die, as do we all.

So, we read this sacrifice is "in the place of his son." = a substitutionary atoning sacrifice, a perfect ram.

God has provided a lamb.

22:14 So, Abraham called the place, "God will provide." = Jehoveh-Jireh = God provider

Even when He asks everything of us, He provides everything for us.

And, God is the true owner of it all in the first place; Isaac, Abraham, and ram.

Abraham is learning about God (discipleship). God did this all to reveal Himself to Abraham.

And, in it we can begin to see into the great plan of God... the goal of this promise.

For, "as it is said to this day" (vs. 14)

What day? Moses' day. This story was originally written for that people wandering in the wilderness.

"In the mount of the Lord it will be provided." = what mount? This mount, Moriah.

What will be provided? A substitutionary atoning sacrifice of a perfect lamb in our place to pay for our sins.

And so, if we would wait at this place, on this hill, down through the centuries...

A city would grow up, a temple would be built.

2,000 years later God would finally visit His people in person...

And on this mountain that eternally perfect Lamb, Jesus, would offer Himself...

Not caught in a thicket, but arrested and tried in a the Temple.

Not laid on an altar, but nailed to a cross.

On this very mountain He would be sacrificed as our substitute so that we could worship God.

We deserved to die for our sin.

"On this mount it will be provided" = Now it has been provided. God's Messiah meets our deepest need.

IV. Our obedience confirms the promise of God. vss. 15-19

"The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time." = Apparently, God has more to say.

22:16 "By Myself I have sworn..." = the only time in the Bible where God swears the divine oath "by Himself."

This recalls God's covenant ratification of Gen. 15 when God had Abraham arrange a sacrifice...

and God walked the bloody path all by Himself while Abraham watched.

So, now God reiterates His promise to Abraham... but there is something new here, something stunning.

God now connects His promise to Abraham to Abraham's obedience. It is impossible to miss.

The statement of promise is now bracketed by, and conditional upon, Abraham's obedience. (Gen. 22:16, 18)

The logic here is inescapable: Why does Abraham receive and remain in the promise? Because he obeyed.

Why did he obey? Because he trusted and feared God.

Rom. 11:20-23 **1 Cor. 15:1-2**

Col. 1:21-23 **1 Thess. 3:7-8**

So, I am saved by grace through faith, but obedience flows out of faith, and if there is no obedience, there is no faith.

And without faith there is no way we can participate in the promise of God because we will not accept His provision for sin.

Thus, faith in God always involves obedience... because God is God. If you believe God, how can you not obey Him?

If we believe that He is who He says He is we will obey Him. This is what it means to "fear" God.

And, God sometimes gives us no other reasons to obey Him. Abraham's obedience came before he knew what God would do.

And, so, God demands our best, but promises even better.

He required complete devotion and obedience from Abraham, but still God gave better than He got.