

A Sacrifice and a Sign

Genesis 22

Introduction - Review

Most of us can outline our lives on the basis of achievements. We seem to chapter our lives by graduating from high school or college; by getting married; by having the first child; by taking retirement. The life of Abraham, however, can be outlined on the basis of the tests that came into his life.

Major tests in Abraham's life

In our study of Genesis thus far, we have discovered three tests in Abraham's life. Let us review them briefly.

Abraham is told to leave home – Genesis 12

1. The first test is in chapter 12 of Genesis, when Abraham is told to leave his home of Ur of the Chaldeans.

This was a test because it meant he would leave all that represented security and stability. He would leave all of his family and friends. Yet, he took the test and passed it.

Abraham is told to separate from Lot – Genesis 13-14

2. The second test is in chapters 13 and 14 of Genesis, when Abraham is told to separate from his nephew Lot.

Abraham gave Lot his choice of the piece of land that he wanted. Lot selfishly chose the fertile region of the valley, and Abraham separated from him by going to the rocky regions of northern Canaan.

Abraham is told to trust God for a son - Genesis 15-21

3. The third test is in chapters 15 through 21 of Genesis, when Abraham is told to trust God for a son.

Abraham would wait nearly twenty-five years for this son. That test came and Abraham proved that his faith in God, though small, was true.

We, in fact, suggested that the amount of faith is not the issue, but rather, the object of that faith. In other words, you could have little faith in thick ice and survive or you could place great faith in thin ice and drown. The essential ingredient is wherein you place your faith.

A Sacrifice – The Final Test

Abraham's fourth test is the one before us today. We will, in fact, conclude our series on the life of Abraham with this. The test, in Genesis, chapter 22, is God asking, "Abraham, will you now give your son back to Me?"

Turn to Genesis, chapter 22, and look at verse 1.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

The word "tested" is a correct translation. Your text might have the word "tempted". The Hebrew word is "nacah," which should be translated something other than "tempt". God does not tempt us, He tests us to strengthen us. Satan will tempt us to weaken us. In this verse, it is indeed a test.

Continue to verse 2.

He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

God says essentially the same thing in four different ways, so there would be no confusion. In other words, "Abraham, take your son, your only son, the one whom you love and, in case you missed it, it happens to be Isaac."

I do not think Abraham was confused after God spoke to him. He will now encounter what is probably the greatest test of the four that have come into his life.

Practical lessons about testing

Before we go any further in the text, let me make some applications. We normally do this at the end of a discussion, but I want to make some applications at this point. Let me apply, from Genesis, chapter 22, what happens in our lives when we are confronted by testing. I will give several points that I think come from the text about testing.

A test may come after years of comfort

1. First, sometimes a test will come after years of comfort, or perhaps we could call it victory.

For thirty years, since the birth of Isaac, Abraham had been experiencing prosperity in the land. He had all of his prayers, in effect, answered. He had his son and he was prospering materially. He had thirty years of comfort and then, “bang,” that is when God says, “Now, Abraham.”

I can almost imagine that Abraham had probably thought, as you and I would have, “This is probably the last time I’ll ever have to trust God.”

Then, about the time we think we have that nailed down, God invades our lives with a test. It can come after years of comfort or victory.

A test may seem inconsistent with God’s promise

2. Secondly, sometimes a test may seem inconsistent with God’s promise.

Let me explain this. As you may remember, from Genesis, chapter 12, the promise was, “Abraham, I’m to give you a promise. It includes land; it includes blessing; it includes a seed; that is, a son.”

In Genesis, chapter 17, verse 19, God says, “Your seed, your son, will bear a son.”

That is the promise. Now, however, God comes along, in Genesis, chapter 22, and says, “Abraham, I want you to kill your son.”

Abraham is scratching his head thinking, “Now how is this consistent with the promise of God? If my son is to have a son, how in the world is God going to accomplish that if I kill my son?”

Herein lies one of the mysteries of God’s testing in your life and in mine. Sometimes it seems totally inconsistent with what we think God is supposed to do in our lives.

We have the promise. He says to you, “I want to conform you into the image of My Son.”

That is a process. We, however, often mistake it as a product. So we say, “Okay Lord, wake me up when it happens. Let me know when you’re finished.”

Then, we become very confused because somewhere between point A and point B, a test comes, and it does not seem to make any sense. We might think, “Lord, how could this conform me to the image of Your Son? Why is this happening? What are You doing?”

We fail to realize that the nature of testing means that sometimes “backward” to us, means “forward” with God. It may seem inconsistent.

Let me give an illustration of this, a rather facetious one. While preparing for the ministry, I would never in my wildest imaginations have taken Hebrew grammar or Hebrew exegesis. For one thing, the class lasted an hour and a half, and there are not many things that I would like to do for an hour and a half on a hard bench. For another thing, the class began at seven o’clock in the morning on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Well, three mornings a week I watched the sun rise through the window of my classroom. That was an exciting time in my life – as I am sure you can imagine. I would never have even suggested that this was a class that I wanted to take. However, after it was finished, I was glad.

You may be in a class; you may be right in the middle of a course that God has designed in the curriculum to prepare you for your ministry. It may be a ministry in the life of another believer; in the lives of your family members; in the church, or whatever. You would never sign up for this course; there is nothing about it that is attractive. In fact, you may never learn to love it, but the course in which God has enrolled you is not an elective. You cannot get an exemption from it; you cannot even audit it – when you take it, but you do not have to do the homework! You have to go through it. That is the nature of testing.

A test may involve your most prized possession

3. Let me give one more point about testing that I have discovered from Genesis, chapter 22. Sometimes a test may involve your most prized possession.

That which you value the highest is that which God may suggest you make a change to or that you give up. He is saying, “Do you really trust Me for this?”

Imagine waiting twenty-five years for a son, and then, for thirty years, watching him grow into adulthood, only to hear God say, “I want you to kill him. Give your beloved son back to Me.”

How much easier it would have been for Abraham, although I do not find it in the text, to say, “Lord, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you Ishmael. Let me put him on the altar.”

Oh no. Ishmael represented the past. God wanted that which represented the future. You and I have little trouble giving God our past. We say, “Lord, all of the sins, all of my life that I’ve experienced up to this point, I have no problem trusting You with that. You take all of that. But my future; my tomorrow? Huh uh.”

How much harder it is to give God something precious; something in the near future.

Jay Herndon is a missionary to a poor mining village in Ireland. He wrote a story that I recently read, telling of something that happened in that village. One cold evening, the company bus, filled with the men of the village after a long day of work, was returning from the mine. The road was slick with ice on that dark winter evening. To the left of the bus was a mountainous wall and to the right was a sheer cliff. It was a very narrow, dangerous road.

Suddenly, just a few feet ahead of the bus, the men could see the figure of a little boy. He was sitting in the middle of the road, with his back to the oncoming bus, playing in the snow. They knew, as an eerie hush fell over the bus, the driver would have to make a split second decision. To swerve or to stop would mean skidding and perhaps, destroying the lives of these men who were the fathers of the village. To continue forward meant the certain death of the boy, who was oblivious to the oncoming bus.

Jay Herndon wrote that after the bus stopped a few hundred feet beyond the crumpled form of the boy, the driver of the bus was the first one off. He ran back and picked up the lifeless form of his own son, and he buried his head in the boy’s coat and wept.

We have the dumb idea that Abraham is skipping up Mount Moriah, whistling songs, and acting as if this is a wonderful day in his life. Absolutely not! This is real. This is painful. He has been asked to

take a knife and plunge it into the heart of his own son. And though he believed God would raise him from the dead, it did not obliterate the pain; the confusion.

Imagine this happening to you. Would you note Abraham’s incredible response? Notice verse 3a.

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 wood for the burnt offering, . . .

Did you notice that he rose early? If there was ever a day I would have wanted to sleep in, it would have been that one. He rose early. And he is an old man, yet he split wood for the offering. I imagined, as I read this, how nifty it would have been for Abraham to not split the wood for the sacrifice and then, get up to the rocky part of Mount Moriah and say, “Oh Lord, guess what I forgot? I forgot the wood. I guess we can’t have the offering.”

Abraham, however, is actually preparing every detail so that this sacrifice can take place. Continue to verses 3b through 5.

. . . and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.”

Two points in Abraham’s response to this test

There are two points to note in Abraham’s response to this test:

1. First, his submission to the will of God.
2. Secondly, his surrender of his son.

A Sign – The Future Savior

Now we studied this passage as we were going through Hebrews, chapter 11, and I touched on something that I want to expand on for the remainder of our discussion today. The beauty of this passage is that it is an illustration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You might say, “Wait a second! Aren’t you reading a lot into this Old Testament passage? I don’t see it in here. Where are you getting that?”

My justification for that illustration comes from two New Testament passages. Turn to Hebrews, chapter 11, and look at verses 17 through 19.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

The Greek word for "type" is "parabole," from which we get our word "parable". He is a type; he is an illustration of Jesus Christ being killed and then, resurrecting from the dead. That gives us a clue.

Now, turn to Romans, chapter 4, and note verses 19 through 25.

Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.

(note the next two verses),

Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,

but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

These verses make it even clearer that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, just as in parabolic form, Isaac was raised from the dead. God considered that Abraham had literally put him to death, even though his hand never struck his son.

Isaac – a type of Christ

Now with this understood, let us go back to Genesis, chapter 22, and try to discover where Jesus

Christ is to be found. I have come up with several major areas where we can see Jesus Christ.

Seen in the symbols of death

1. The first is in the symbols of death.

Note verse 6.

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 the two of them walked on together.

Abraham and Isaac are carrying the symbols of death; that is, wood, fire, and a knife. Do not overlook the fact that Isaac was to be a burnt offering. Do not forget that Abraham was not to just strike him with the knife; he was also to burn him as a burnt offering. The Old Testament teaches that burnt offerings were for sin, so Isaac was to be offered up as an offering for sin.

Wood

One of the symbols of death is the wood. Look at verse 9.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Wood is never mentioned in the Old Testament burnt offering passages, but it is emphasized in these verses. In fact, it is mentioned five times. It is interesting that Isaac carries the wood up the hill, just as Christ, until he stumbled, carried the wood up the hill. Then Isaac was laid on the altar on top of wood, just as Jesus Christ was laid on the wooden cross and nailed to it. I think we can see Christ in the references to the wood in this text.

Knife

Another symbol of death is the knife with which Abraham was to pierce Isaac. We know that the Old Testament prophet Zechariah would say, in chapter 12, verse 10, that one day,

. . . they [the Jews] will look on Me [Jesus] whom they have pierced . . .

Jesus was pierced through with spikes in His hands and in His feet.

Fire

There is also the symbol of the fire. This symbolizes, throughout the entire Old and New Testaments, tribulation or judgment.

The first time “fire” occurs is in Genesis, chapter 19, verse 24, where it talks about fire coming down from heaven to burn up Sodom and Gomorrah. The last time “fire” is mentioned is in Revelation, chapter 21, verse 8, where it talks about those who have rejected the Lamb; rejected the sacrifice, being cast into the lake of fire, which burns forever. So fire, in these references, is a symbol of the wrath of God. And we know Christ endured the wrath of God, as it was typified in fire.

Seen in the submission of Isaac

2. A second area where we see Christ is in the submission of Isaac.

Look at verses 7 and 8 of Genesis, chapter 22.

Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

That is a double positive in the Hebrew, which is used for emphasis. It shows unity. Abraham did not tie a rope around his son and say, “Come on, obey me!” No! Isaac went along in obedience and submission to his father.

Can you see Christ in that? It is like a neon sign. Christ was “. . . obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Isaac portrays Christ in his submission.

Look at verse 9 of Genesis, chapter 22, again.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Notice that Abraham is a lot older than Isaac, but Isaac allows him to tie him up and put him on top of the altar. I think Isaac probably climbed up there on

his own accord. I doubt Abraham, being old, was able to lift a thirty year old son. Note the submission.

Continue to verse 10.

Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

Then Isaac said, “Stop!”

No. He never did. He might have closed his eyes, and I would imagine that Abraham was weeping, but he submitted to his father.

Seen in the prophetic announcement of Abraham

3. A third area where we see Jesus Christ is in the prophetic announcement that is so beautiful from Abraham.

Note verses 11 through 13.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

Now continue to verse 14 where we read the prophetic announcement.

And Abraham called the name of that place, The Lord Will Provide [Jehovah-jireh], as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the Lord it will be provided.”

This is future tense. This is the prophetic announcement of Abraham. He is saying, “One day God will provide the lamb.”

God did not provide the lamb in this, He provided a ram. He will one day provide a Lamb for the burnt offerings.

In John, chapter 1, verse 29, John the Baptist saw Jesus Christ coming toward him. Do you remember what he said? He said,

. . . Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

He is here! God had provided.

Seen in the setting of the altar

4. One more area, from Genesis, chapter 22, that we see Jesus Christ is in the setting of the altar.

This is really a discovery from the development of history, rather than from the text, and it is perhaps, one of the most powerful. In our previous discussion of Hebrews, chapter 11, you may remember this point.

Mount Moriah is really nothing more than a ridge of hills. It was the place where Solomon would build his temple, which would later be destroyed. And just a stone's throw from the temple and from the place where Isaac was offered, a city would be built called Jerusalem.

By the time of Jesus Christ, that ridge of hills was no longer referred to as Moriah, but had been given a slang Aramaic expression because of the way that one of the ridges was shaped. It was now called Golgotha, or "the place of the skull".

It is powerful to recognize the fact that the place where Isaac was offered as a type of Christ; offered as a burnt offering for sin, would be the very place where Jesus Christ would hang from the cross. Jesus was the burnt offering being given up as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The prophetic statement of Abraham had indeed come true. God had provided the Lamb.

Conclusion

Philip Bliss was a well known hymn writer of yesteryear. In fact, our hymn books are filled with his hymns. One day, he was traveling to Pennsylvania to be with some friends. He traveled by train and spent most of the time on the trip writing lyrics for yet unpublished hymns.

As the train was approaching Ashtabula, Ohio, it began to cross a steel and wooden bridge that spanned a several hundred feet deep ravine. The winter weather had shaken the moorings of this bridge, and when the train was halfway across, it gave way. The train plunged into the ravine below. The passenger coaches immediately ignited with fire because of the pot bellied stoves inside that burst into flames upon impact. Philip Bliss and his wife were never identified.

Everyone thought that all the belongings, including the manuscripts for the yet unpublished songs, had also gone up in flames. However, weeks later, a trunk belonging to Bliss was discovered. It

had been mistakenly placed on another train during an earlier stop in the journey. Inside the trunk, several manuscripts were found. One of them had the words to the song entitled, *My Redeemer*. The fact that the song was sung after Philip Bliss was in the presence of his Savior made these words more meaningful. He wrote,

I will sing of my Redeemer and His wondrous love to me;

On the cruel cross He suffered, from the curse to set me free.

I will tell the wondrous story, how my lost estate to save,

In His boundless love and mercy, He the ransom freely gave.

I will praise my dear Redeemer, His triumphant power I'll tell,

How the victory He giveth over sin, and death, and hell.

I will sing of my Redeemer and His heavenly love to me;

He from death to life hath brought me, the Son of God, with Him to be.

My friend, do you have that assurance? Have you been to Mount Moriah? Have you been to Golgotha? Have you been to the cross and accepted that burnt offering as your Savior? Has the death of Jesus Christ made a difference in your heart? Has the resurrection of Jesus Christ made a difference in your life?