

Introduction

One of the greatest trials of my life: almost losing Amy when Kimberly was born

A. Abraham's faith was tested by God (READ 22:1-2)

1. The text tells us right out of the gate this was a divine test; it wasn't some trial Abraham fell into, or a test by Satan; the text says, **"God tested Abraham"** (1):
 - a. What is the purpose of a test?
 - 1) In academics, a test is designed to prove whether or not one has learned and understood what was taught
 - 2) In science, a test is designed to prove or disprove theories
 - 3) In medicine, tests are done to diagnose conditions, and to prove whether medicines and treatment are working
 - b. When it comes to spiritual matters, the Bible tells us that God tests His people with a two-fold purpose:
 - 1) One purpose is to determine or prove the genuineness of their faith
 - 2) The other purpose is to perfect their faith
 - 3) We see both of these purposes woven throughout Deuteronomy 8 where God explained to Israel why He tested them during their forty years in the wilderness after the Exodus (READ 8:2 & 8:16-18)
 - 4) So, we should expect that God's test of Abraham here has these same two purposes in mind, especially in light of what we've seen in Abraham:
 - a) We've seen times of great faith by Abraham but also times of wavering in his faith
 - b) And, this test will serve to both reveal the genuineness of his faith but also serve to strengthen him in his faith
2. It's hard not to be shocked by the nature of God's test (2): **"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"**:
 - a. One reason it's shocking is obviously because it involved child sacrifice:
 - 1) We know that child sacrifice was common in the ANE because the Bible describes it as passing one's children through the fire
 - 2) God also warned Israel against engaging in it (Deuteronomy 18:10)
 - 3) They didn't listen, and there were times in their past where they did it anyway (2 Kings 17:17; 21:6; 23:10; 2 Chronicles 33:6; 35:18)
 - 4) God obviously despised the despicable practice
 - b. It's also shocking because the child God called Abraham to sacrifice was Isaac:
 - 1) Isaac was the child God promised Abraham and Sarah, the one they waited 25 years for, and the one through whom all of God's promises and blessings would come, not just for Abraham and Sarah, but their descendants and all the nations of the world
 - 2) To sacrifice Isaac would mean giving up all of God's promises and blessings; it would make them all null and void

- 3) Did you notice how God goes from the more general term “**son**”, to the more intimate “**your only son whom you love**”, to the most intimate, “**Isaac**”?
 - a) According to one commentator, the structure of this verse with the imperative followed by successfully more personal and intimate direct objects, each preceded with the Hebrew word “**et**” (direct object marker) slows down the reading and accentuates the seriousness and very personal nature of the divine imperative
 - b) We can only imagine how each one of these words pierced Abraham’s heart more deeply as God repeated them, not just because it was his son, but because Isaac represented ALL that God had promised him
 - c) To Abraham, obeying God by sacrificing His son must have felt like he was being asked to give up everything that had been promised to him
3. Takeaway: as believers and followers of Christ, our faith will be tested:
 - a. The Bible says that Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness; but like us Abraham’s faith wasn’t perfect
 - b. Throughout our study so far, we’ve seen him exercise great faith, but struggle in that faith at times
 - c. As I noted earlier, God tests His people to prove the genuineness of their faith but also grow them in that faith
 - d. That is ultimately what we see here with Abraham, and it’s what we should expect as believers
 - e. The book of James says that we are to consider it joy when we face trials because the testing of our faith produced endurance so that we might be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (READ James 1:2-4)
 - f. Peter wrote that we should rejoice in trials because they are necessary in order for our faith to be proven and result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus returns (READ 1 Peter 1:6-7)

<p>B. Abraham’s faith was demonstrated through obedience and trust (22:3-10)</p>

1. We get our first glimpse into Abraham’s faith in his immediate response (READ 22:3):
 - a. He got up early in the morning with Isaac and two of his servants and saddled his donkey
 - b. He spent time splitting wood for the burnt offering
 - c. And headed out for the place God told him to go
2. We get our second glimpse into Abraham’s faith when he left his servants and headed up the mountain with Isaac (READ 22:4-6):
 - a. After three days, Abraham saw the place where God told him to sacrifice Isaac so he leaves his servants behind and heads up the mountain with just Isaac
 - b. Two remarkable things stand out in Abraham’s words to his servants:
 - 1) The first is that he saw his obedience to God as an act of worship
 - 2) The second is that he believed that both he and Isaac would return:
 - a) We might think that Abraham said this because he knew God wouldn’t allow him to go through with sacrificing Isaac
 - b) However, the Bible indicates something very different; Abraham believed that if he have to go through with sacrificing Isaac, God could raise him from the dead (READ Hebrews 11:17-19)

- c) This is also supported by the fact that Abraham was fully prepared to sacrifice Isaac as evidenced by him taking the wood, fire, and knife when he and Isaac headed up the mountain
 - d) Abraham was fully prepared to sacrifice Isaac if God didn't intervene
 - e) Now THAT'S faith!
- 3. We get our third glimpse into Abraham's faith in his answer to Isaac's question (READ 22:7-8):
 - a. It obvious at this point that Isaac wasn't aware of what was about to take place:
 - 1) The Bible doesn't tell us how old he was at this point, but the general consensus is that he was probably somewhere in his early to late teens
 - 2) His interaction here with Abraham, including the innocence in his question and the tenderness and affection in Abraham's words, suggests that he was fairly young
 - 3) He had to be old enough to carry the wood necessary for the burnt offering, but young enough for Abraham to bind and place on the altar
 - b. Some have accused Abraham of being deceptive in his response to Isaac but that's an unfair judgment:
 - 1) First off, would we really expect Abraham to tell his young son that he's about to kill him?
 - 2) Second, if Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead, why should we assume he couldn't believe God could provide an alternate sacrifice if He chose to do that instead?
 - 3) I'm certain there were a TON of different scenarios going through Abraham's head about how this could all play out
 - c. Before we move on, we have to address the double-nature of the foreshadowing in Abraham's answer:
 - 1) It clearly foreshadowed what took place in the immediate future when God indeed provided a lamb to sacrifice in place of Isaac
 - 2) However, it also foreshadowed what took place in the distance future at Calvary when God once again provided His own sacrificial offering in Jesus Christ
- 4. We get our fourth and final glimpse into Abraham's faith when it came time to carry through on the sacrifice of Isaac (READ 22:9-10):
 - a. If you're like me, you might find the casual nature of these three verses a bit unsettling, but they were probably written this way to emphasize Abraham's faith and obedience
 - b. So, we are left to imagine the kind of crushing mental, psychological, and emotional agony he must have been going through:
 - 1) He just spent days traveling from his home to some distant place to sacrifice his son; imagine what must have been raging through his heart and mind the entire time
 - 2) He then walked the final distance alone with his son, just the two of them alone in the wilderness, knowing what awaited them at the top of the mountain
 - 3) When he got to the spot, he couldn't just get it over with; instead, he had to spend the time constructing the altar with his own hands, with Isaac by his side, maybe even handing Abraham each piece of wood as he piled it on the altar
 - 4) I wonder how long Abraham held that last piece of firewood in his hand before placing on the altar, knowing what would come next--grabbing Isaac, binding him with ropes, placing him on top of the altar, and raising the knife to slay him--UNIMAGINEABLE!!!

5. Takeaway: genuine faith is demonstrated through obedience and trust in the Lord's provision, especially during the most difficult and trying times:
 - a. One of my favorite memory verses is Proverbs 3:5-6: **"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."**
 - 1) Trust in the LORD with ALL of your heart—not part of your heart, not most of your heart, but ALL of your heart
 - 2) Do not lean on your own understanding—we can't rely on our own understanding because it's faulty, it's unreliable; only God's understanding is perfect
 - 3) In all your ways acknowledge Him—this means to commit our ways to the Lord as the Psalmist says in Psalm 37:5
 - 4) If we do this, the LORD promises that He will make our paths straight
 - b. But, trust often requires obedience as seen in Isaiah 50:10: **"Who among you fears the LORD and OBEYS the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light TRUST in the name of the LORD and rely on his God"**
 - c. Many of you are probably familiar with the old hymn "Trust and Obey" which begins like this: "When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way! While we do his good will, he abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

C. Abraham's faith was an expression of his fear of the LORD (READ 22:11-14)
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1. We see here the primary purpose of God's testing of Abraham: it was to demonstrate that Abraham feared the LORD (12): **"now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me"**
 - a. The Biblical concept of fearing the LORD refers to acknowledging Him with the awe, respect, and obedience He deserves as God; but, it also reflects a healthy amount of fear (READ Exodus 20:18-20)
 - b. Ross: "The true worshiper fears the Lord; that is, the true worshiper draws near the Lord in love and adoration and reverence but shrinks a back in fear of such an awesome deity."
 - c. God was not looking for a human sacrifice (in fact, He despised them); rather, He was testing Abraham to reveal whether he genuinely feared the LORD
 - d. We see throughout the Old Testament that God has no interest in sacrifices and offerings when they are not accompanied by obedience and a genuine Biblical fear of the LORD:
 - a. Hosea 6:6: **"For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."**
 - b. 1 Samuel 15:22: **"Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. And to heed than the fact of rams.'"**
 - c. Psalm 51:16-17: **"For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."**
2. This doesn't mean God was not pleased with animal sacrifices; He obviously was because He provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice; but it was Abraham's fear that made it an acceptable sacrifice (READ 22:13-14):

- a. When Abraham looked up he saw the ram in the thicket, and he immediately recognized it as God's provision
 - b. He had gone up the mountain to worship the LORD and offer a sacrifice, and just like Abraham had shared with Isaac, the LORD provided the sacrifice
 - c. And, as before, we can't help but see the symbolic importance of this as it serves as a type of how the LORD provided for our needs at Calvary when He Himself provided the sacrificial lamb in Jesus
3. Takeaway: genuine faith is that which is accompanied by a Biblical fear of the Lord:
- a. We are to fear God rather than people (Matthew 10:28): **"But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Is"**
 - b. It is the fear of God that perfects holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1): **"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."**
 - c. Fear of God is one of the signs of a spirit-filled life and is what motivates us to be subject to one another (Ephesians 5:18-21): **"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."**
 - d. It's how we work out (e.g. perform or carry out) our salvation (Philippians 2:12): **"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;"**
 - e. It motivates us to share our faith (2 Corinthians 5:11a): **"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men..."**
- D. Abraham's faith was affirmed by God (READ 22:15-19):
- 1. God was obviously pleased with Abraham's obedience and trust:
 - a. **"...because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son..."** (16)
 - b. **"...because you have obeyed My voice..."** (18)
 - 2. As a result, God affirmed Abraham's faith by re-confirming His covenant once again
 - 3. Takeaway: God affirms genuine faith with His promises and blessings (READ Romans 10:9-13)

Conclusion

ROSS: "If we think of the comparison between Abraham's obedience and the obedience of New Testament worshipers, we may approach this message from another direction. The test of obedience for the Christian would not differ essentially. The Lord calls believers to obey his instructions, including sacrificing themselves and their possessions to him in fear and devotion. This step may require relinquishing some personal possession, ambition, or direction that seems clearly to be God's design. Although we cannot completely approximate the patriarchal event, the sacrifice of something dear to the heart could be as difficult and demonstrable as Abraham's sacrifice. Christ's requirements for disciples allowed no rival loyalties and no holding back. The Christian life became a life of worship in which the true worshipers feared the Lord and surrendered themselves to him...The one who fears God, that is, the faithful worshiper, will obediently surrender to God whatever he asks, trusting in God's promises of provision and blessing."