

# Abraham: The Father of the Faithful

## Lesson 9: The Supreme Test: Offering Isaac on Moriah -- Genesis 22:1–19

There are passages in Scripture we approach the way we approach a hospital room where someone we love is dying: quietly, carefully, almost holding our breath. Genesis 22 is one of them. For twenty-five years Abraham waited for Isaac. He is the child of laughter, the son of the promise, the boy on whom every word God ever spoke to Abraham now depends. And the chapter opens with a sentence that takes the air out of the room: “After these things God tested Abraham.” Then comes the command no parent could hear without their heart stopping. Take your son. Your only son. The one you love. And offer him as a burnt offering.

We have to say plainly what this passage is and is not, because some who read it are deeply troubled, and they are right to be. God does not delight in human sacrifice. He calls the sacrifice of children detestable, a thing that never even entered His mind (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 19:5). God never intended Isaac to die, and He never let it happen. This is not God asking for blood. This is God testing the heart of the father of the faithful, and, as we will see, providing the sacrifice Himself. Hold both of those truths, or the chapter will frighten you for the wrong reasons.

What stuns you, if you read slowly, is Abraham. He rises early. He says nothing of his anguish to the servants. He tells them, “We will worship and come again to you,” we, both of us, as though he already trusts that somehow Isaac will come back down that mountain. When Isaac, carrying the wood for his own sacrifice up the hill, asks the question that must have pierced his father like a blade, “where is the lamb?” Abraham answers from the depths of a faith we can barely fathom: “God will provide for himself the lamb, my son.” He raises the knife. And heaven interrupts.

“Do not lay your hand on the boy.” A ram is caught in a thicket; the substitute God provided takes Isaac’s place on the altar; and Abraham names that mountain “The LORD will provide.” But do not miss where this happened, or whose shadow falls across the whole scene. A father and his beloved only son, climbing a mountain in the region of Moriah, the very hills where Jerusalem would one day stand, the son carrying the wood of his own death on his back, the father willing to give him up, and a substitute dying in his place. Two thousand years before another Father led His own beloved Son up a hill outside that same city and did not stop the knife, the gospel was being whispered on Mount Moriah.

**Group Discussion:** Genesis 22 troubles many sincere readers, because God commands something He elsewhere condemns. It helps to remember that God never intended Isaac to die, that He stopped Abraham’s hand, and that He provided the sacrifice Himself. With that in view, why do you think God would test the father of the faithful in such an extreme way, and what does the account reveal about the kind of trust God was drawing out of Abraham?

**Personal Reflection:** God asked Abraham to lay on the altar the one thing most precious to him, the very gift God had given. Is there something in your life, even a good and God-given thing, that you have come to hold more tightly than you hold God Himself? What would it cost you to place it on the altar and trust Him with it?

*Read Genesis 22:1–19*

## Study Questions

1. The chapter opens, “After these things God tested Abraham” (v. 1), and the command is framed in the most costly terms: “your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love” (v. 2). What does it mean that God tests His people, how does this differ from tempting someone to evil (James 1:13), and why is this rightly called the supreme test of Abraham’s faith?
2. God’s tests are meant to prove and refine genuine faith, not to destroy us. When hard trials come, do you tend to see them as God refining and strengthening your faith, or only as obstacles and misfortunes to escape? How might viewing a current trial as a test from a loving God change the way you walk through it?
3. Abraham rose early to obey, told the servants “we will come again to you” (v. 5), and assured Isaac that “God will provide for himself the lamb” (v. 8). Hebrews 11:17–19 explains that Abraham reasoned God was able even to raise the dead. What does this reveal about the nature of a faith that obeys God beyond what it can understand or see?
4. Abraham obeyed even though the command seemed to contradict everything, because he trusted God’s character and power more than his own understanding. Is there a costly obedience you have been withholding because you cannot see how it could possibly work out? What would it look like to trust God beyond your understanding there?
5. Twice the passage points to God’s provision: “God will provide for himself the lamb” (v. 8), and then the ram caught in the thicket dies in Isaac’s place, so that Abraham names the place “The LORD will provide” (v. 14). What does the provision of a substitute teach about how God meets us in our extremity, and about the principle of substitutionary sacrifice that runs through Scripture?
6. God called Abraham to surrender his most precious treasure back to Him, and only then did Abraham receive him again. What is the “Isaac” in your life, the good gift you are tempted to treasure above the Giver? What would it mean, this week, to lay it on the altar and hold it with an open hand?
7. This account disturbs many readers because God commands what He elsewhere calls detestable: the sacrifice of a child (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 19:5). How do we understand this passage rightly, recognizing that this was a unique, never-repeated test, that God never intended Isaac to die, and that He Himself stopped Abraham’s hand and provided the ram? How would you help someone who finds this story troubling?
8. Faith sometimes has to trust God’s good character even when a part of His Word or His providence is hard to understand. When you encounter something in Scripture or in your life that troubles or confuses you, do you bring the question honestly to God while still

trusting His goodness, or do you let it quietly erode your trust? How can you wrestle honestly and faithfully at the same time?

9. A father climbs a mountain in the region of Moriah with his beloved only son, who carries the wood of his own sacrifice, and a substitute dies in the son's place, while God swears that through Abraham's offspring all nations will be blessed (vv. 6–18). How does this scene foreshadow God the Father, who "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32; John 3:16), how does the provided substitute point to Christ the Lamb of God, and how does Abraham's obedience here show the kind of faith that is completed by works (James 2:21–22)?
10. Look back across this whole account. You have watched the supreme test of faith, a father's anguished obedience, God's provision of a substitute, and the long shadow of the cross falling across Mount Moriah. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this part of Abraham's story. What is the single truth about faith, surrender, or God's provision in Christ that you most need to carry into this week?

### **Now or Later**

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 11:17–19, by faith Abraham offered Isaac, considering that God was able even to raise him from the dead; Romans 8:32, He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all; John 3:16, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son; James 2:21–23, Abraham's faith was completed by his works when he offered Isaac; 2 Chronicles 3:1, Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared