

God Tested Abraham

The Binding of Isaac, Part 1

Genesis 22:1-5

July 28th, 2024

I. Introduction

Our expectation of a sweet and easy ending to Abraham's story vanishes with the first verse of Gen. 22: "Now it came to pass after these things"—after all the trials and tribulations of Abraham's life, of his sojourning in a foreign land, of the war with regional kings, after all his family strife, after his intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah, after his rough time in Gerar, and after the birth of the promised son and the seemingly happy resolution of it all—after all of these things, now "God tested Abraham." All of what we've read so far is nothing compared to what's about to happen.

- Calvin: *"Other temptations with which the Lord had exercised [Abraham] may have wounded him, but this inflicted a wound that was worse than death itself."*

II. The Text — Gen. 22:1-5

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 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." 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. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 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."

The Lord calls Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a _____ offering. This is a particular kind of sacrifice which Abraham is commanded to make of his beloved son. It is well-known from the biblical laws of sacrifice. The burnt offering, in distinction from other types of sacrifices, is one which neither the offerer—the one making the sacrifice—nor the priest partakes in. Instead, all of it is devoted to and consumed by the Lord. The burnt offering is a "gift-offering *par excellence*." It is a sacrifice intended to express the worshiper's devotion and reverence and love of the Lord.

III. Purifying Trials

Biblical trials test or prove the heart of a man. They test what is inside of him by forcing it to the surface for all to see. They test our character and our faith. In describing the way God uses trials, Scripture uses an image drawn from metallurgy (Prov. 17:3; 25:4; 2 Tim. 2:20-20). Analogous to the ways metals are purified, so also are we purified from our impurities by being tried in a furnace and cleansed of what is dishonorable.

The Lord uses trials by fire in order to test the hearts of His people, in order to see what is in them; He already knows, but now _____ know and now the world knows. As we see go through these trials, we get to exercise our faith, relying upon God, and we also get to confess and forsake all the impurities that bubble up to the top—the doubting and grumbling and envy and anger; we get to confess it and forsake it. Through this process, we are made more useful to our Lord and more holy—more like Jesus.

IV. The Burnt Offering

We will consider the gravity of this trial—of this *burnt offering* required of Abraham—and how it worked him over the fire. There are four dimensions to this offering that we will consider this morning. Each dimension would have challenged Abraham, and provided him with an opportunity to know what's in his heart, to deal with it, and to submit himself to his Maker.

First. The first dimension of this trial was the _____ of his beloved son. How did this try Abraham's heart? It asked of him: "Do you love your son more than you fear the Lord?"

Second. Abraham did not have to simply face the possibility of losing his son, but he himself would be the _____ of this loss. He is being asked, not only to give up his son, but to kill his son. How would this particular aspect have tried Abraham's heart? This dimension in particular would have brought with it a horrendous shame and stigma. It's one thing to lose a child, it's quite another to lose a child by your own willful action.

Third. Add to these the fact Isaac is the _____ son. Bound up with Isaac was Abraham's hoped-for future: the future promised to him by the Lord. In Isaac, every good thing promised by God was invested as a guarantee. To lose him would mean the disappearance of the promises of God. In ch. 12, Abraham was called to cut himself off from his past. He did this obediently. But now he is being called to give up his entire future—and, what is more, a future for his kids. Isaac was the one through whom Abraham's descendants would be named. But this future that Abraham was being called to give up was not limited to just his household. All the nations were to be blessed in Abraham—through Isaac—and ultimately in Jesus, the true Son of the promise. By sacrificing Isaac, therefore, Abraham would be giving up his own future, the future of his children, and the salvation of the _____.

Fourth. There is still a final layer that threatens to swallow all of this up: it is the fact that God is the One who commanded this whole thing. By giving this command, God appears to be full of contradictions, and the way out is not immediately clear. The Lord God required of Abraham the death of the boy whom God had given to him—the death of the boy in whom God Himself had bound up all of these things, including the salvation of the world. One commentator describes this part of Abraham's trial in these words: "Abraham was led into _____." He is forced to choose, it seems, between disobeying God and cutting himself off from God.

This mightily challenged Abraham's faith. It asked of him: "Do you trust the Lord so firmly that you believe that somehow, someday, God will remain true to His Word, even if the son of the promise—the one upon whom it all rested—was slaughtered?" This was the ultimate question posed to Abraham by this trial.

V. Conclusion