

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 22:1-24

Topic

Abraham places his son, Isaac,
on an altar as a sacrifice to God

Title

"Altar Boy"

Introduction

The prophet Jeremiah went about for a time wearing a yoke upon his shoulders.

Hosea married a prostitute who was unfaithful to their marriage.

Ezekiel was told to build a clay model of Jerusalem outside his house. He then lay on his side for 390 consecutive days laying siege to the model.

The Lord told Isaiah to remove the sackcloth he was wearing and to take off his sandals. Isaiah obeyed and walked around "naked" for three years. (Since the Hebrew word for "naked" can mean partial nakedness, let's hope he wore a loincloth!).

What were these guys doing?

- Jeremiah was representing the slavery that Babylon would impose upon the people of Judah.
- Hosea was representing the Jews as being spiritual adulterers who were committing harlotry while God remained a faithful Husband to them.
- Ezekiel was representing the siege of Jerusalem and its ultimate fall.

- Isaiah was representing what it would be like for the people of Egypt when the king of Assyria led them away as prisoners

God's prophets were, on occasion, called upon to become living representations of God's Word so that others could not mistake or misinterpret the message God wanted to deliver.

Abraham's almost-sacrifice of Isaac is described in a similar manner. Commenting on it in the New Testament, in Hebrews 11:17 & 19 we read,

Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son...

Hebrews 11:19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him **in a figurative sense.**

The last phrase, "in a figurative sense," is the Greek word from which we get *parable*.

Men of God like Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Abraham became living parables of God's Word. Are **we** ever called upon by God to be living parables?

The apostle Paul had no problem describing Christians as living "letters" that are being "read" by all men (Second Corinthians 3:2). I don't see it as a stretch at all to say that, at least in certain circumstances, Christians **are** called upon to be living parables.

Two aspects of being a living parable are revealed in Abraham: *testing* and *telling*. I'll therefore organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Parables You Are Called Upon To Live Are A Supreme Testing Of Your Faith, and #2 The Parables You Are Called Upon To Live Are A Superior Telling Of God's Faithfulness.

#1 The Parables You Are Called Upon To Live
Are A Supreme Testing Of Your Faith
(v1-2)

Abraham being asked to sacrifice Isaac is perhaps the most intense living parable in our Bible. For him, however, this was first and foremost a severe **testing**.

Genesis 22:1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

God "tested" Abraham. We may not like tests in school, but if properly designed and administered they reveal what you know from having put in all the hard work of studying and preparing. There were tests I looked forward to. Tests can be a good thing.

Tests of faith are designed by God not so you will fail but so you will succeed. They prove that you are walking with God, looking to Him, trusting Him. Warren Wiersbe often says, "a faith that cannot be tested is not worth having."

"Here I am" reads like a person volunteering for a mission. It is reminiscent of Isaiah's famous statement, "Here am I God; send me."

We should have the understanding of Isaiah and Abraham that, in responding to God, we are offering ourselves to be sent by Him, to be used by Him. When I meet with God it is to make myself available.

Genesis 22:2 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."

This was a supreme test of Abraham's faith. Calling Isaac "your only son" reiterated to Abraham that *everything* God had *ever* promised to him was wrapped up in that boy living and producing children of his own. Were he to die, God's very words would be dead.

Today whacked-out individuals kill people and say, "God told me to do it!" We rightly judge their actions as something God would not request. But four thousand years ago - and I say this carefully - **everybody** around Abraham was sacrificing humans. The idea of sacrificing your firstborn son wasn't really strange in the surrounding cultures. In fact, some of the

peoples Abraham was encountering were probably wondering what kind of God he was serving who wasn't requiring the sacrifice of a firstborn child.

Still, Abraham didn't know the outcome. He only knew obedience.

I always think I would obey more if I knew the outcome! But that's not obedience at all.

Abraham knew God's Word to him was true and, so, he reckoned that if he were to offer Isaac on an altar as a sacrifice, then God would raise him from the dead.

Abraham and Isaac were called upon to be a living parable of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the Cross and His resurrection from the dead in victory over sin and death. They represented that although blood and sacrifice are essential to the forgiveness of sin, no human sacrifice can avail. Human sacrifice falls short of meeting the requirements. As we will read in a moment, God must "provide Himself the sacrifice," and He would in the Person of His Son.

God had promised Adam and Eve that He would somehow crush the devil but simultaneously He would suffer. Exactly how much these Old Testament guys could have known about God coming in the flesh, born of a virgin, as a man, to die on the Cross, is debatable.

In the almost-sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham everyone now had a living parable of God's substitution and sacrifice. God so loved the world that He would give His only begotten Son as a Sacrifice to Substitute for every lost descendant of Adam and Eve. When the time came God would not withhold His Isaac.

Trials and testings are common to the Christian. Remember that in them we are always living epistles and might sometimes also be called upon to be living parables.

#2 The Parables You Are Called Upon To Live Are A Superb Telling Of God's Faithfulness

(v3-24)

I want to shift our thinking to how this episode is a figure or a parable of Calvary where God **did** sacrifice His Son, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

Genesis 22:3 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.

Abraham is a type of God the Father setting apart His only begotten Son for sacrifice. In Romans 8:32 we're told that God "did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all."

Isaac is a type of Jesus Christ. We'll see he was a willing sacrifice. For one thing, he was no toddler. He was in his thirties, probably thirty-three. He had to willingly submit to being offered by his father. In John 10:17-18 Jesus said, "I lay down my life... No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself."

Genesis 22:4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.

Abraham and Isaac arrived at Mount Moriah "on the third day." Abraham left the day after God commanded him, and it took three days to get to Moriah, thus making a total of four days. This corresponds perfectly to Exodus 12:3, where the Passover Lamb was to be kept and examined for four days before offering it. Likewise Jesus Christ was examined for four days after He entered Jerusalem before being crucified.

Genesis 22:5 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."

Two men witnessed Isaac carrying the wood up the mountain but what took place between him and his father they were not permitted to see. Likewise at Calvary there were two men, the two thieves on each side of the Lord, but like all the spectators of that scene they were not permitted to behold what transpired between the Father and the Son on Heaven's altar. Three hours of darkness concealing from every human eye the divine transaction of the payment of our sins.

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Genesis 22:6 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together.

Isaac carried the wood and submitted willingly. Jesus, carrying His cross down the Via Dolorosa, was in perfect, willful submission to His crucifixion. His conclusion in the Garden of Gethsemane, that "God's will be done."

Genesis 22:7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Not every detail of a parable should be forced to fit something. Isaac was a type of Christ but he was still Isaac and he was starting to wonder what was going on.

Genesis 22:8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.

That was a bad translation! The words should read, "God will **provide Himself** the lamb." Whether Abraham knew it or not, this was a prophecy. Only God by coming in human flesh as a man could both satisfy the just demands of His holiness and simultaneously be a Substitute for the entire human race. If sin is to be forgiven, if men are ever to be saved, God must Himself **be** the Lamb.

Genesis 22:9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

Genesis 22:10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

Do not suppose that Isaac was bound so he would not escape. No, he was in willing submission. The Lord Jesus was likewise bound by soldiers even though there was no thought of His fleeing.

After his one question Isaac resumed the position and the character of the innocent, sacrificial lamb.

Genesis 22:11 But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am."

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Genesis 22:12 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

Awesome! What a rush of relief must have flooded their hearts.

Think, too, of the feelings of Jesus and His Father at that moment. The "Angel of the Lord" - that's Jesus in a pre-incarnation appearance. He and His Father were watching a living parable of what for them would be the reality.

Genesis 22:13 Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

Genesis 22:14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Why a "ram" and not a lamb? Abraham's statement that "God will provide Himself the lamb" carries more prophetic weight this way. If God provided a lamb right then, we'd think this was a prophecy that was immediately fulfilled instead of one looking down through the centuries to the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

In other words, the ram caught in the thicket by its horns was not what Abraham meant by his earlier statement concerning a lamb.

Human sacrifice fell short. It could not avail. A sacrifice still needed to be made. A substitute was still necessary. Without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of your sins.

"The Lord will provide" is *Jehovah-Jireh*.

- It commemorated the present in that God did provide a ram instead of Isaac.
- It also contemplated the future when God would provide Himself the Lamb.

Geography is important here, too. Mount Moriah is not a single peak but rather an elongated ridge with several peaks. The place where Abraham

offered up Isaac on Mount Moriah would later become the site of Solomon's Temple where offering was made for sin.

Just above the place that Abraham offered Isaac and the place where the Temple was located is Calvary - the very place where God provided Himself the Lamb as the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Genesis 22:15 Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven,

Genesis 22:16 and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son -

Genesis 22:17 blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.

Genesis 22:18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

God had already made these unconditional promises to Abraham. They were not contingent upon his works. His works were consistent, however, with his faith. The test proved his faith, it showed it, by his works.

Genesis 22:19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

Where was Isaac? Obviously, Isaac also returned with Abraham and the two young men. Hold that thought for a moment as we read the closing verses.

Genesis 22:20 Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, "Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor:

Genesis 22:21 Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram,

Genesis 22:22 Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel."

Genesis 22:23 And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother.

Genesis 22:24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah.

Underline the name "Rebekah." This genealogy shows us where Isaac's future bride is going to come from.

Isaac is curiously absent from Genesis from the time he was offered on Mount Moriah until he receives his bride.

Sound like anyone we know? After He died on the Cross Jesus Christ rose from the dead, He ascended into Heaven, and will be **physically absent from the earth until He receives His bride.**

He will receive His bride, the church, when He comes to resurrect and rapture us just prior to the seven year Great Tribulation.

People still get upset at God asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. They try to twist it to show God is cruel and capricious.

No, it was a superb telling, on a very human level, of God's plan before the foundation of the earth to save lost human beings. A few centuries later John the Baptist would identify Jesus by declaring, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

He knew that in Jesus God provided Himself the Lamb.

