

KILL YOUR DARLING

GENESIS 22:1-19 MARCH 16, 2022

Winston Churchill was one of the greatest leaders in the modern era. But he had many troubles on his way to becoming Prime Minister. His life was a roller coaster of adventure. He was a warrior, a political leader, a prisoner-of-war who escaped captivity, an author, and a lover of pets. He *created* the modern states of Jordan and Iraq.¹ But we know him best as the man who kept his country and the western world from the devouring jaws of Hitler's Third Reich. Those days were barely 5% of his 90 year life, but they were crucial, agonizing, history-making days, to which he is forever linked.

After more than 100 years, we've come to the main event of Abraham's life. Nothing would have greater gravity than Genesis 22. Most of us are familiar with the story, but that shouldn't lessen the weight of what God asked and the wonder of Abraham's obedience. This text is a telling diagram of what it means to obey and how Christian faith is carried out. But, while we're learning about those things, we have to come to the conclusion that God is acting strangely in this story. Why in the world would He ask Abraham to do something as repulsive as sacrifice his own son? Why does it seem like God had secretly added a condition to His unconditional covenant? If James tells us God doesn't tempt anyone,² why does this chapter seem to show the opposite? Something more is going on than God simply checking whether His servant was going to obey.

An article titled *10 Great Examples Of Foreshadowing In Movies* points out that in Martin Scorsese's hit *The Departed*, "the director expertly tells the audience who is going to get killed right before it happens by placing crosses around them."³ In our text, God isn't acting badly, He's *foreshadowing*. This is the dress rehearsal for a much more important sacrifice that would be made. God wanted us to see it coming, to know where it will happen, why it will happen, and to Whom it will happen. For thousands of years, He not only worked out the plan of redemption, He gave us clues to discover so we could understand what was taking place when He gave *His own* Son to die in our place.

So, this is not just a story about obedience, it's a story about Jesus. Hopefully tonight we can take up both of those threads and benefit from what they teach us.

Genesis 22:1 - After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he answered.

Abraham's obedience starts with a simple reply: "Here I am." That's the foundation of faith. Samuel would say it when God called to him. So did Moses and Isaiah. They didn't know what the next word would be from the mouth of God, but what came next didn't really matter. "Here I am! I'm ready to hear. I'm ready to be sent. I'm ready to follow." This call and response reminds us that God

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/apr/22/winston-churchill-imperial-war-museum-middle-east-legacy>

² James 1:13

³ <https://screenrant.com/best-examples-foreshadowing-movies>

does not ask us to do what He is unwilling to do. God identifies Himself in Isaiah 52 this way, "My people will know My name...that I am He who says, 'Here I am.'"⁴

We're told God "tested" Abraham. If we're honest, that makes us squirm a little. But there's an important distinction for us to keep in mind. There's a big difference between *tempting* and *testing*. The Devil *tempts* you, hoping to trap you and ruin you. God's testing never has your *failure* in mind. The purpose of His testing is to bring *good* out, not evil.⁵

Did you hear that one of the local businesses had their liquor license revoked last week after a sting operation? The authorities came, trying to catch people breaking the law. Big difference between that test and the guy who invented modern body armor, who filmed himself being shot to prove the quality of his product. God's testing is not a trap, it's a refining process, a proving.

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* points out a key to this: A test of [true] faith must defy logic. The test had to be something Abraham would *not* want to do. And here's what it was.

Genesis 22:2 - ²"Take your son," he said, "your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

The burnt offering was the way human beings could renew their broken relationship with God,⁶ but never had God accepted a *human* sacrifice. Now, He was *demanding* it. And not just any human. God could not be more specific. He singles out Isaac with four very clear descriptors.

This is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. The only-begotten Son of the Father, the Son of promise, born supernaturally, would have to be offered as a sacrifice in order for the relationship between God and man to be repaired. Just as only Isaac fit the description, *only* Jesus of Nazareth fits the list which describes the Messiah. There were *hundreds* of specific descriptors that God gave so that we might know the Messiah when He came. Jesus fulfilled them all, *perfectly*. And, not only was He the only One Who did all these things, God gave all that list to show us that there was only One sacrifice He was *willing* to accept. Just as God was not willing to receive Ishmael in Genesis 22, or some household servant, or a pile of riches, so too, only Jesus can pay the bill, no one else.

What must Abraham have thought? You can't mentally prepare for something like this. You can't get worse news than this. We're given a glimpse into his thoughts in Hebrews 11, a section of Scripture that teaches us about living by faith. There we're told that Abraham knew God was serious, but at the same time, he believed God *would* accomplish His promise through Isaac. And so, we're told, he came to the conclusion that God would *have* to raise Isaac from the dead.

⁴ Isaiah 52:6

⁵ W.H. Griffith Thomas *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/burnt-offering.html>

That doesn't make the job much easier, though. I remember once when our son, Ezekiel was a little guy he got a really bad wood sliver in the bottom of his foot. It was flush under the skin and he was in pain. So, we thought, "We've got to get this thing out." Which meant we'd have to try to fish it out. We knew it was going to get worse before it got better. Knowing the end didn't make the during any easier. And we weren't worried at all that we might *kill* our son!

Genesis 22:3 - ³So Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about.

In this diagram of obedience we see not only a readiness to obey, but, once the call comes in, that Abraham wasted no time. He rose early for what would be the worst days of his life. He takes the saddle, the donkey, and the ax. He taps two servants on the shoulder. He picks a suitable tree and felled it, breaking it down into logs for the job.

How much wood would you need to burn up a young man? Abraham would've had to calculate it. You barbecuers think about how much charcoal you need for a few burgers versus a few tri-tips. I can't come close to imagining what it would be like to build my child's coffin. That is still a *world* away from what Abraham is being asked to do.

Part of faithful obedience shown here is knowing when it *isn't* time to question God, but to just begin. One author put it this way: Abraham, the bargainer, is silent.⁷ The leading had been clear.

How does this show Jesus? We're reminded of His entry to Jericho on a donkey - how two of His servants were with Him in the courtyard of the high priest the night before the cross.⁸

Genesis 22:4 - ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

Obedience is about moving forward to where God has shown you. God has explained that the walk of faith will sometimes lead us to still waters, green pastures, and sometimes through the valley of the shadow of death. God does not promise us constant ease, but that He will constantly be present, showing us the way to go that leads to life and victory and reward.

We're reminded of Jesus here. We're told how He set His gaze on Jerusalem. He was determined to go to the place the Father was leading Him so that mankind could be redeemed. And here's the best part: It was the same place Abraham was heading. That "place in the distance," the "place God had told him about," is *the most important place in all the world!* Mount Moriah, where Abraham would build this altar, is the place God would later choose to have His temple built. This is the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem. And, though it's somewhat disputed, many scholars believe Christ was crucified about 750 yards from the very spot Abraham offered his son.⁹

⁷ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

⁸ John 18:15

⁹ <https://discoverthebook.org/moriah-and-golgotha-2/>

Genesis 22:5-6 - ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we’ll come back to you.” ⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac. In his hand he took the fire and the knife, and the two of them walked on together.

Abraham’s didn’t obey because he was afraid God would smite him. His obedience was rooted in hope. “We’ll come back, one way or another.” That hopefulness, that trust, effected his perspective. How did he think about what was going to happen? He said, “We’re going to go *worship*.” He didn’t say, “We’re gonna go do a terrible thing God is making me do.” No, Abraham trusted his Lord. He believed that God is good, that God is just, and God would be merciful.

How old was Isaac? We’re not told, exactly. He certainly wasn’t the little child that is sometimes depicted. Generally, scholars put him somewhere between late teens and 30 years old. He’s strong enough to carry enough wood to burn a whole human. Which means that he would’ve been strong enough to at least escape his old man. But, Isaac was submissive to his father, just as Jesus would be. He willingly carried the wood, just as Jesus would carry His own cross. Isaac wasn’t fooled or led into something without agreeing to it. In fact, he had started to piece it together.

Genesis 22:7-8 - ⁷Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, “My father.” And he replied, “Here I am, my son.” Isaac said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” ⁸Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Then the two of them walked on together.

Jesus and the Father had a tender, private conversation in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus asked about the plan. In both cases there was no rebellion, no complaint. But an earnest question.

Abraham could not reconcile the facts he found himself in. God planned the future around Isaac, but was also demanding that Isaac die that day.¹⁰ When he could not reconcile, he trusted the Lord. “The Lord will see to it. The Lord will provide.”

This gives us strength to obey. God will ask us to do things that are impossible or things we can’t understand. When that happens, we fall back into trust, rather than rebellion. We remember that God is good and He is trustworthy and He will provide what is necessary for our triumph. Without God’s provision, Isaac was going to die. Without God’s provision of a Savior, no human being has any hope for eternal life. All we can do is die, unless there’s a substitute made for us.

Genesis 22:9-10 - ⁹When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.

¹⁰ Bible Knowledge Commentary

Linguists explain that the knife being used wasn't a dagger, it was a *cleaver*.¹¹ Abraham wasn't just killing his son, he'd be *butchering* him. Isaac's name means "laughter," so we should note that he puts the *laughter* in *slaughter*.

Of course, that's exactly what happened at Calvary. Jesus wasn't laughing, but for the *joy* set before Him, He endured that horrible day. The King of kings was led like a lamb to the slaughter. It pleased the Lord to make Him an offering for us, leading to eternal rejoicing.

One commentary points out something interesting in this scene: There is no talk of *feelings*.¹² This is one of the most tense, dreadful passages in the Old Testament. And yet, as we see each angle playing out, what do we see? We see meticulous, methodical obedience. Sometimes obeying God isn't going to *feel* good. But we're to obey despite our feelings, like Abraham did.

Genesis 22:11-12 - ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He replied, "Here I am." ¹² Then he said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me."

Why did God wait till the last second to intervene? Cutting it close, don't you think? Remember, this was a dress rehearsal for the real show that would go all the way. But, also, it demonstrates to us the reality that sometimes the refining process is going to be more intense than other times. Think of how we use heat to melt different materials. We only need 33° to melt ice and make water. We need 622° to melt lead, about 1950° to melt gold. And then there's tungsten: 6192° to melt it.¹³

The Bible talks about us having hearts to stone. Sometimes God needs to melt a certain stoniness in my heart. Is it lead or is it tungsten?

Translators share a lovely insight that we don't want to miss. In verses 1 through 10, God is referred to by the more generic term *Elohim*. But from verse 11 on, it's always YHWH. The God of personal covenant. The God of provision. The God of mercy. And then we get our minds blown realizing that the Angel of the Lord here *is* Jesus, who would die on this very same mountain. God would not withhold His Son, Jesus would not withhold Himself, for our sake. He died so *you* could live.

Before we go on, notice this: Sometimes obedience means *not* doing something. "Lord, I'm all ready to do this thing for You. I built it all up and went to a bunch of trouble." But sometimes the Lord says, "Stop what you're doing." We need to be ready to *not* do as much as we're ready to do.

Genesis 22:13 - ¹³ Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son.

¹¹ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible*

¹² *CSB Study Bible Notes*

¹³ <https://www.metalsupermarkets.com/melting-points-of-metals/>

After all the strain of what happened, a sacrifice *still* had to be made! There was still a barrier of sin between God and man. Good intentions weren't enough. Something still had to die. And Abraham understood that. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. That's why Jesus had to die, to make a way for us to come to God. And only the substitute the God provided could do it.

In case we were missing the fact that God is foreshadowing, in the end Abraham did *not* receive the lamb he expected, but a *ram*. Different terms used. The *Lamb* was yet to come. But even in the ram we see a hint of God's plan. The word for ram in Hebrew can also be used for a mighty ruler,¹⁴ like Jesus, the King. The substitute God gave us was the strongest, the best, the Mighty One.

Genesis 22:14 - ¹⁴And Abraham named that place The Lord Will Provide, so today it is said, "It will be provided on the Lord's mountain."

Translators admit that where it says, "It will be provided on the Lord's mountain," the words might mean, "God sees or will be seen on the mountain."¹⁵ What a fantastic prophecy! God would see Christ's death on Calvary and accept it as full payment. At the same time, we can see the God Himself on the cross and realize He is a God of love, a God of mercy, Who did what is necessary to save us. It was all Him.

Notice Abraham's perspective. He wasn't resentful of what God asked him to do. This test of obedience didn't make him angry. He looked at his life and said, "God is good. He is a provider." That's the same God we're able to count on in our own lives.

Genesis 22:15-18 - ¹⁵Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶and said, "By myself I have sworn," this is the Lord's declaration: "Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your only son, ¹⁷I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the city gates of their enemies. ¹⁸And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed my command."

What's up with this? Was God not being as unconditional as He said before? No, the Lord was reaffirming. He's also pointing out that, even though His promises are sure, that doesn't mean we don't have to obey. The *opposite* is true. We can't just say, "Well, God is gracious and He can't be wrong, so it doesn't matter if I obey Him or not." We *must* obey. Jesus said, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."¹⁶ You can't have Biblical faith without obedience. You can't love God if you don't obey. If we don't obey God, He cannot come and make His home with us.¹⁷

So, God's promises were unconditional, but if Abraham wanted to receive them, he'd have to participate with obedient faith.

¹⁴ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h352/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

¹⁵ See *Alter, NET Study Bible Notes*

¹⁶ Matthew 19:17

¹⁷ John 14:23

Genesis 22:19 - ¹⁹Abraham went back to his young men, and they got up and went together to Beer-sheba. And Abraham settled in Beer-sheba.

Where's Isaac? He was undoubtedly with his dad, but, again, the Holy Spirit is foreshadowing for us. The next time we see Isaac, he will be receiving a bride. Jesus ascended from a mountain, and the next time we'll see Him is when He receives His Bride, the Church.

These two servants have an interesting part to play. They can teach us about obedience, too. What were they even doing? Seems like they were kind of just tagging along on this thing the father and son were doing. They probably didn't understand a lot of what was going on, but they were ready to serve, ready to go the distance. They trusted Abraham just like Abraham trusted God. We should trust our Master the same way.

I'd encourage you to study more through this section to see the many other ways it foreshadows our Lord and His sacrificial death on the cross in that very same place. And consider what it cost the Father and the Son to willingly choose to make that substitute on your behalf.

Meanwhile, today we are servants. God has called us and commanded us. It's not that we read this and think, "One day God may ask me to do something." He already has. The specific of His commands will depend on what roles God has given you. But we've already been called. We've already been commanded. We've already been given instructions and points of navigation. Are we going to obey? Obedience is often very difficult, sometimes unpleasant. But we must do it. Abraham did it quickly, meticulously, meekly, fully. Can I say I'm obeying God the way Abraham did here? That's not always an easy question to answer. What *is* much easier to know is that our God is full of grace, He is full of love toward us, full of power *for* us, and ready to walk with us as we move toward Him, putting this unique faith into motion, receiving indeed all He's promised.