

# **GENESIS 22 – ABRAHAM IS WILLING TO OFFER ISAAC**

## 1. (1-2) **God tests the faith of Abraham.**

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."

a. **God tested Abraham:** This was not so much a test to *produce* faith, as it was a test to *reveal* faith. God built Abraham slowly, piece by piece, year by year, into a man of faith. This test would reveal some of the faith God had built into Abraham.

b. **Here I am:** Abraham's quick answer to the call is a wonderful example of how the man or woman of faith should respond to God. When Abraham said, "**Here I am,**" it meant that he was ready to be taught, ready to obey, ready to surrender, and he was ready to be examined by God.

c. **Take now your son, your only son Isaac:** Significantly, God called Isaac **your only son Isaac**, when in fact Abraham had another son, Ishmael. Since Ishmael was put away from Abraham's family ([Genesis 21:8-14](#)), as far as God's covenant was concerned, Abraham had only one son.

d. **Your only son Isaac, whom you love:** Counting from [Genesis 1:1](#), this is the first mention of **love** in the Bible. This first mention comes in the context of the love between father and son, connected with the idea of the sacrificial offering of the son.

i. Every phrase of God's command to Abraham was like a knife.

- Take now your son.
- Your only son Isaac.
- Whom you love.
- Offer him there.
- As a burnt offering.

e. **Offer him there as a burnt offering:** God told Abraham to offer him as a **burnt offering**. This was not an offering that was burned alive, but one with the life first taken by sacrifice and then the body completely burnt before the LORD.

i. Abraham lived as a sojourner, a pilgrim, in the land of Canaan. The priests of many of the Canaanite gods said their gods demanded human sacrifice. The people of Canaan found nothing especially strange about human sacrifice, but Abraham had believed Yahweh was different.

ii. With this command, Abraham might have wondered if God, the God of the covenant and creator of heaven and earth, was like the pagan gods the Canaanites and others worshipped. By the end of this story, Abraham knew that God was *not* like the pagan gods that demanded human sacrifice. In truth, He was just the opposite.

iii. How would we react if God told us to do such a thing? Many years ago, Jack Smith, a columnist for the L.A. Times, wrote about this Biblical incident. He said he would have told God to mind his own business. That's what the world always says to God.

f. **Offer him there as a burnt offering:** This test was difficult in yet another aspect, because it seemed to contradict the previous promise of God. God had already promised *in Isaac your seed shall be called* ([Genesis 21:12](#)). It seemed strange and contradictory to kill the son who was promised to carry on the covenant when it had not yet been fulfilled in him. It seemed as if God commanded Abraham to kill the very promise God made to him.

i. Abraham had to learn the difference between trusting the promise and trusting the Promiser. We can put God's promise before God Himself and feel it is our responsibility to bring the promise to pass, even if we have to disobey God to do it. Trust the Promiser no matter what, and the promise will be taken care of.

ii. "Brethren, there are times with us when we are called to a course of action which looks as though it would jeopardise our highest hopes... It is neither your business nor mine to fulfill God's promise, nor to do the least wrong to produce the greatest good. To do evil that good may come is false morality, and wicked policy. For us is duty, for God is the fulfillment of his own promise, and the preservation of our usefulness." (Spurgeon)

e. **To the land of Moriah... on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you:** There was a specific *place* God commanded Abraham to go, a particular spot where this would happen. God carefully directed each detail of this drama.

## 2. (3) **Abraham's immediate response of faith.**

**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.**

a. **So Abraham rose early:** There is no sign of hesitation on Abraham's part. Abraham **rose early in the morning** to do this. It must have been a sleepless night for Abraham.

i. Abraham's obedience showed that he trusted God, even *when he did not understand*. Sometimes we say, "I'm not going to obey or believe until I understand it all," but that is to put myself on an equal standing with God.

ii. Abraham's obedience showed that he didn't *debate or seek counsel from others*. He knew what to do and refused to use stalling tactics.

iii. Abraham's obedience showed that he trusted God, *even when he did not feel like it*. There is not a line in this text about how Abraham felt, not because he didn't feel, but because he walked by faith, not feelings.

iv. "But there is not a word of argument; not one solitary question that even looks like hesitation. 'God is God,' he seems to say, and it is not for me to ask him why, or seek a reason for his bidding. He has said it: 'I will do it.'" (Spurgeon)

v. God trained Abraham over many decades, bringing him to this place of great trust. In just the last chapter, God asked Abraham to give up Ishmael in a less severe way. God used that, and everything else, to train up Abraham and build great faith in him.

b. **Saddled his donkey**: The phrasing suggests that Abraham did this work personally; he **saddled his donkey** and **hesplit the wood**. Though he had plenty of servants to do this for him, Abraham did it himself, even in his old age. Perhaps this was because he was filled with nervous energy.

i. "He was a sheik and a mighty man in his camp, but he became a wood-splitter, thinking no work menial if done for God, and reckoning the work too sacred for other hands. With splitting heart he cleaves the wood. Wood for the burning of his heir! Wood for the sacrifice of his own dear child!" (Spurgeon)

c. **Went to the place of which God had told him**: In wonderful, trusting obedience, Abraham went right to the spot **which God had told him**. He did this even though it would have been easier in Abraham's eyes if God had asked Abraham to lay his own life down instead of the life of his son Isaac.

## B. Abraham's offering of Isaac.

### 1. (4-8) Abraham journeys to the place of sacrifice with Isaac.

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

a. **On the third day**: Abraham came to the place on **the third day**. The region of Moriah is associated with Mount Moriah, which is modern-day Jerusalem ([2 Chronicles 3:1](#)).

i. Abraham had three long days to think over what God commanded him to do. This made the test even more severe. "To be burnt quick to death upon the blazing fagot is comparatively an easy martyrdom, but to hang in chains roasting at a slow fire, to have the heart hour by hour pressed as in a vice, this it is that trieth faith; and this it was that Abraham endured through three long days" (Spurgeon).

b. **I will go yonder and worship:** This is the first use of the word **worship** in reference to God in the Bible. The Hebrew word *shachah* simply means, *to bow down*. While Abraham and Isaac did not go to the mount to have a time of joyful praise, they did go to bow down to the LORD.

c. **And we will come back to you:** Abraham was full of faith when he spoke to the young men who were with him. He believed that both he and Isaac would return; that **we will come back**, and he told them so.

i. This does not mean that Abraham somehow knew this was only a test and God would not really require this of him. Instead, Abraham's faith was in understanding that should he kill Isaac, God would raise him from the dead, because God had promised Isaac would carry on the line of blessing and the covenant.

ii. He knew *in Isaac your seed shall be called* ([Genesis 21:12](#)), and Isaac had yet to have any children. God had to let him live *at least* long enough to have children. "If Isaac shall die, there is no other descendant left, and no probabilities of any other to succeed him; the light of Abraham will be quenched, and his name forgotten" (Spurgeon).

iii. [Hebrews 11:17-19](#) clearly explains this principle: *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.*

iv. Abraham knew anything was possible, but it was *impossible* that God would break His promise. He knew God was not a liar. To this point in Biblical history, we have no record of anyone being raised from the dead, so Abraham had no precedent for this faith, apart from God's promise. Yet Abraham knew God was able. God could do it.

d. **Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son:** Isaac received the wood for his own sacrifice from his father, and he carried it to the hill of sacrifice.

e. **He took the fire in his hand, and a knife:** Abraham took the knife up the hill. He didn't leave it behind or pretend to forget it. This was a further demonstration of his obedience, and of his trust that if necessary, God would raise Isaac from the dead.

i. "That knife was cutting into his own heart all the while, yet he took it. Unbelief would have left the knife at home, but genuine faith takes it." (Spurgeon)

f. **The two of them went together:** This literally means *the two of them went in agreement*. Isaac did this knowingly and willingly. The phrase is repeated twice for emphasis.

g. **My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering:** Abraham knew God would provide a sacrifice, but where? Where was the lamb? That question had been asked by all the faithful, from Isaac to Moses to David to Isaiah, all the way to the time of John the Baptist when he declares: *Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* ([John 1:29](#))

i. At this time, Abraham didn't know *how* God would provide. He still trusted in the ability of God to raise Isaac from the dead, but he wouldn't stop trusting just because he didn't know *how* God would fulfill His promise.

ii. We have a remarkable picture of the work of Jesus at the cross, thousands of years before it happened. The son of promise willingly went to be sacrificed in

obedience to his father, carrying the wood of his sacrifice up the hill, all with full confidence in the promise of resurrection.

## 2. (9) Isaac willingly lies down on the altar.

**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.**

a. **Then they came to the place:** Apparently, even on Mount Moriah there was a specific place God told Abraham to stop, because this was the **place** to do this.  
b. **Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac:** At this time, Abraham was more than 100 years old and Isaac would have been able to escape his coming death had he chosen to. Yet he submitted to his father perfectly. In remembering Abraham's faith, we should never forget *Isaac's* faith.

i. Some Jewish commentators think Isaac was in his thirties at the time of this event. "The younger man, perhaps five-and-twenty — so Josephus thinks — possibly thirty-three years of age, and, if so, very manifestly the type of Christ, who was about that age when he came to die" (Spurgeon).

c. **Upon the wood:** As an obedient son, Isaac laid down on the wood, ready to be sacrificed.

## 3. (10-14) God's merciful reprieve.

**And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 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." 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. 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."**

a. **Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son:** We must believe Abraham was completely willing to plunge the knife into Isaac, because his faith was in God's ability to raise Isaac from the dead, not in God's desire to stop the sacrifice. Abraham didn't think this was a drama or a mere ceremony.

i. "Notice the obedience of this friend of God – it was no playing at giving up his son: it was really doing it. It was no talking about what he could do, and would do, perhaps, but his faith was practical and heroic." (Spurgeon)

ii. One may say, "It's not fair or right. God told Abraham to do something and then told him not to do it. If God really wanted to test Abraham, He should have made him plunge the knife into his son's chest."

iii. Yet God often takes the *will* for the *deed* with his people. When He finds them truly *willing* to make the sacrifice He demands, He often does not require it. This is how we can be martyrs without ever dying for Jesus. We live the *life* of a martyr right now.

iv. But, “Often there are believers who wonder how they may know the will of God. We believe that ninety per cent of the knowing of the will of God consists in willingness to do it before it is known” (Barnhouse).

b. **Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him:** With this, God emphatically showed Abraham that He was *not* like the pagan gods worshipped by the Canaanites and others, gods that demanded human sacrifice and were pleased by it. God strongly and clearly demonstrated that He did *not* want human sacrifice.

c. **You have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me:** Abraham displayed his heart towards God in that he was willing to give up his only son. God displays His heart towards us in the same way, by giving His *only begotten Son* ([John 3:16](#)).

i. When God asked Abraham for the ultimate demonstration of love and commitment, He asked for Abraham’s son. When God the Father wanted to show us the ultimate demonstration of His love and commitment to us, He gave us His Son. We can say to the LORD, “Now I know that You love me, seeing You have not withheld Your Son, Your only Son from me.”

d. **Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son:** All the while, God still required a sacrifice. God didn’t call off the sacrifice. Instead, He required that there be a substitute provided by God Himself.

e. **Abraham called the name of the place:** The naming of the place was significant. Abraham called it **The LORD Will Provide** (*Jehovah Jireh*); **In this mount, it shall be provided.**

i. Abraham didn’t name the place in reference to what *he* experienced. He didn’t name it *Mount Trial* or *Mount Agony* or *Mount Obedience*. Instead, he named the hill in reference to what *God* did; he named it *Mount Provision*. He named it knowing God would provide the ultimate sacrifice for salvation on that hill someday.

ii. Earlier, Isaac asked his father where the sacrifice was, and Abraham answered, *God will provide for Himself the lamb* ([Genesis 22:8](#)). In naming the place *Jehovah Jireh*, “Abraham says nothing about himself at all, but the praise is unto God, who sees and is seen; the record is, ‘Jehovah will provide.’ I like that self-ignoring; I pray that we, also, may have so much strength of faith that self may go to the wall” (Spurgeon).

iii. **As it is said to this day:** Apparently, Moses meant even in his own day, men looked at that hill and said, **“In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”** Abraham, and later Moses, recognized that God *did provide*, and it pointed to the ultimate sacrifice when God would provide Himself. “God provided a ram instead of Isaac. This was sufficient for the occasion as a type; but that which was typified by the ram is infinitely more glorious. In order to save us God provided *God*. I cannot put it more simply. He did not provide an angel, nor a mere man, but God himself” (Spurgeon).

iv. This event is also a prophecy of Jesus’ rising from the dead on the *third day*, as [1 Corinthians 15:4](#) says *He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*. This is one place where the Old Testament indicates the Messiah would rise again the third day. It says so through the picture of Isaac. Isaac was “reckoned dead” by Abraham as soon as God gave the command, and Isaac was “made alive” (risen) three days later.

v. Isaac’s life as a picture of Jesus becomes even clearer:

- Both were loved by their father.
- Both offered themselves willingly.
- Both carried wood up the hill of their sacrifice.
- Both were sacrificed on the same hill.
- Both were delivered from death on the third day.

#### 4. (15-19) God reconfirms His promise to Abraham in light of his faith.

**Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 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—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. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.**

- The Angel of the LORD called to Abraham:** This would seem to be the voice of God the Son Himself, the unique *messenger* or **Angel of the LORD**. The message following seems to be in the first person (**By Myself I have sworn**). Jesus the Messiah, God the Son, was uniquely present at this remarkable event.
- You have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son:** For the third time, God refers to Isaac as Abraham's **only son**(previously in [Genesis 22:2](#) and [22:12](#)).
- Blessing I will bless you:** Abraham knew the **blessing** that comes to those who trust God's promise, and trust it so completely that they will take action on that belief. Trusting in God's power to raise his only son from the dead, Abraham received this great **blessing**.
- I will multiply your descendants:** Abraham's obedience was based on trust in God's promise to bring descendants through Isaac ([Genesis 21:12](#)). Therefore, God repeated and emphasized that promise after Abraham's remarkable obedience.
- As the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore:** According to Morris, by rough calculations, the number of stars in the sky and grains of sand on the seashore are the same: 10 to the 25th power.
- In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice:** The promise to bring forth the Messiah from Abraham's lineage was also repeated (earlier in [Genesis 12:3](#)). The Messiah – **the only son** of God the Father – would fulfill this promise of blessing to **all the nations of the earth**.