

## Genesis 22

This chapter contains what is perhaps the most disturbing story in all of Genesis, the near-sacrifice of Isaac. It is disturbing for multiple reasons including God testing Abraham, God asking Abraham to sacrifice his only son to prove his loyalty, Abraham's acquiescence to the request, and God's only at the last-minute reprieve. We will look at these issues.

First, testing. The chapter begins with the abrupt words, "After these things, God tested Abraham." What this tells us is that God is not sure of Abraham's sincerity in terms of his faith and obedience. While this may seem strange, it isn't. It isn't because Abraham's trust in God has not always been wholehearted. While Abraham was willing to leave his home, and go where God led, he was unwilling to trust in God's protection and provision such that he twice gave Sarah away to protect himself and laughed when God informed him that he would be a father in his old age. Now comes the true test. Will Abraham, sacrifice his only son, whom he loves, to prove that he trusts God.

Second, sacrificing Isaac. While we cringe at the idea of child sacrifice, this would not have been an unusual request from a god in the time of Abraham. As the rest of the Old Testament makes clear, child sacrifice was a common practice among the Canaanite peoples. The issue at hand though, is that Isaac is the heir to the promise. Abraham has already sent away his other son Ismael, and so Isaac is all that he has. To sacrifice him would be to place absolute trust in God, that God would once again provide a means for the promise to continue.

Third, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. By Abraham taking Isaac to the brink of sacrifice, he demonstrates that he is willing to trust God. This is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this story. Rather than trying to make a bargain with God, or even complaining to God, Abraham moves forward with the sacrifice. It is as if he has finally come to a place of absolute trust in God; that the miraculous gift of Isaac had elicited complete trust that God would provide what was needed.

Fourth, God's last-minute reprieve. What we need to remember about this story is that it is a test of faith with a reward at the end. God had no desire to have Abraham sacrifice Isaac. God wanted to see if Abraham was ready to continue the journey of blessing the world. Because Abraham proved faithful, God not only provided the sacrifice (a ram) to replace Isaac as a sacrifice, but God also reiterated the promise of the blessing and then blessed Abraham's brother with additional children.

**Reflection:** I was once taught that there are two kinds of testing. One is destructive testing; testing that destroys or damages what is tested (say front end crash tests). The other kind of testing is performance testing; testing to see if the product lives up to its expectations (testing a car on a test track). The kind of testing we find in this story is the latter kind. God does not test Abraham to destroy him or his son. God does this to see if Abraham is ready for the journey ahead; a journey that will not be easy. And Abraham is not alone in being tested. The people of God in the Exodus are tested by their time in the wilderness. When the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus after his baptism, Jesus is immediately driven into the wilderness to be tested to see if he is ready for his ministry. Testing is never easy or pleasant, but when it comes, remember that God desires us to pass the test and will give us what we need to do so.

Questions:

1. Has there been a time in your life when you have felt your faith tested? How did you respond?
2. How would you differentiate between being tested and the normal "stuff" that happens in life?