

## Genesis, Part 21

If you were to make a list of the ten greatest chapters in the Bible, then Genesis 22 would have to be on that list. One reason for that is this is the first time human sacrifice is even suggested. God makes it clear that human sacrifice, a common practice among the Canaanites, is wrong. Yet it also reveals that God requires a life be given up to save sinners, but there are none among the children of men qualified to make that sacrifice. God's son is the only one qualified.

In the birth of Isaac, we see a similarity to the birth of Christ. Both births exhibited miraculous qualities. We shall see in Genesis 22 a picture of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross with one major exception: God spared the life of Isaac but not the life of His own son, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all..." (Rom 8:32).

We have been speaking of Abraham as a man of faith justified by his faith, but James makes a statement concerning this incident that seems contradictory to that and to statements Paul has made regarding faith and being declared justified.

**James 2:21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

And then we have Paul saying this:

**Rom 4:1** What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Who is right? James or Paul? Both are right! But we must understand that both are speaking of faith. Paul is speaking of justification before God. It was by faith alone apart from works that saved Abraham, and that faith was demonstrated way back when Abraham, then called Abram, answered

God's call to leave his home and go to some strange place God would show him. That is when he was declared righteous before God.

James is speaking of the events that we are about to study when Abraham took his son Isaac up on Mt. Moriah and was prepared to sacrifice him, as God had called him to do. That was an act of works that demonstrated his faith, *not to God* who already knew where Abraham's heart was, but to mankind. Abraham's works (the "sacrifice" of Isaac) justified (proved) his faith to himself and to us! Paul is speaking of faith in Abraham's heart, as seen way back in Genesis 15, whereas James is speaking of Abraham's *works resulting from that faith* depicted in Genesis 22.

### Testing

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

That translation "tested" is rendered as "tempted" in some translations. The word means to test and that would be the preferred translation. Satan *tempts* men to bring out the worst in them; God *tests* them to bring out our best and build our faith. The most severe tests come from the Lord, yet the greatest blessings accompany them. Very often we fail to learn the lesson these tests were designed to teach. In such cases, we can expect to have to "repeat the class," so to speak, until we are successful, before moving on to the next test. Through this process, we become stronger in our faith because we have faced some issues, used our faith to deal with them, and seen God lead us through the crisis. We learn that what Romans 8:28 says is true.

**Rom 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

And likewise, Philippians 4:13 is also true.

**Phil 4:13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

God wants us to understand that if we place our faith in Him, anything is possible for us. We can't build physical strength without exercising our muscles. They are weak at first, but after many visits to the gym, they

become stronger – we become stronger. It is the same with faith; we must go to “God’s gym of testing” and “exercise” our faith muscles to build spiritual strength.

**Heb 12:7** It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup> For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

“Discipline” is a poor translation here in the ESV. That word translated as “discipline” does not refer to punishment for some offense. It is *paideia* / *pahee-di-ah*/ which is usually translated as chastening, nurturing, or instruction and refers to the whole training and education of children for the cultivation of mind and morals. From this Greek word, we get our English word “pedagogue” which refers to a teacher, especially a strict one. The idea in the Hebrews passage is not one of punishment but rather teaching, correcting, and cultivating the mind and morals. That is what God does in our testing for growth or our chastising when we are in a state of carnality. Its purpose is to yield “the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (v. 11).

Abraham is facing just that sort of test.

### **The Test**

**Gen 22:2** He said, “Take 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.”

Many years have passed since our previous chapter. The Jewish/Roman historian Josephus says Isaac was 25 when God tested Abraham

concerning his son. Another Jewish tradition says Isaac was 37. Right after this chapter, we are told that Sarah was 127 when she died (Gen 23:1). Sarah was 90 years old when Isaac was born. That means 37 years elapsed between Isaac's birth and her death. Isaac is called a "lad" in some translations ("son" here in the ESV), and this has caused some misunderstanding of Isaac's age. He was not a child but a fully grown man and likely between the ages of 30 and 33 at this time. Two pieces of reasoning point to that age. The first is this incident takes place near the time of Sarah's death, as seen in the very next chapter. The second is that this whole episode is a foreshadowing of the Cross with many similarities, as we shall see. Christ was in his early thirties when He died, so it is reasonable to assume Isaac was a similar age if not the same age. But he certainly wasn't a young "lad".

"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love." Notice how this plays on the heartstrings of Abraham – and of God Himself. The Lord Jesus Christ is the "only begotten Son" of God the Father. Isaac is described by God as the son whom Abraham loves, and Our Lord Jesus said, "The Father loves me." Both fathers love their sons, their "only" sons.

Abraham was told to take his beloved Isaac to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering. Though the exact location of this "land of Moriah" is not specified here, it is almost certainly Mt. Moriah, one of the mountains of Jerusalem then called Salam. Mt Moriah is Temple Mount today. Golgotha, where Christ was sacrificed, is right next to Temple Mount and really part of the same ridge. Christ died on the same mountain where Abraham was to offer Isaac, and very likely Abraham built the altar on the same spot.

"And offer him there as a burnt offering." The burnt offering was the offering until the time of the Mosaic Law, and then sin offerings and trespass offerings were given. The burnt offering speaks of Christ.

Abraham was being called to make a human sacrifice offering, and if you had been there and asked him about what he was about to do, he would have replied that it was wrong. He would have further stated that though he had been taught it was wrong, God was asking him to do it, and he had been following God for fifty years, and He had never failed him. He might have said, "I don't understand this, but I believe that if I go all the way with

this, God will raise Isaac from the dead.” Isaac was the son of the promise, and he had to somehow live to fulfill that promise.

**Gen 22:3** So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Abraham responded without hesitation to the unexplained and unexpected command of his God. Early in the morning he hastily split some wood. The scarcity of wood in Canaan made this preparation necessary. He then set out with two servants and his son for Moriah. The length of the journey would guarantee that Abraham was not making any spur-of-the-moment decision (22:3).

**Gen 22:1** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.

On the third day, the mountain was in sight. Notice that it took three days to get there. It was on the third day that Abraham would “receive Isaac back alive” – back from the dead, so to speak.

**Gen 22:5** Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”

The servants were left behind as Abraham announced for the first time the purpose of his trip. He and Isaac would go to Moriah to worship. “I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” Implied is “we” will return to you, and some translations state it that way. Abraham was expressing his confidence that somehow Isaac would survive this experience. The writer of Hebrews asserts that Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead.

**Heb 11:17** By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be

named.” <sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

The transaction that was about to take place was to be between the father and the son, between Abraham and Isaac. And like this time, God also shut man out at the Cross. At high noon, darkness came over the Cross, and man was shut out of the transaction. The darkness was like night, a time when man could not work, and symbolized that man had no part (works) in salvation. During those three hours of darkness, the Lamb of God was offered. It was a transaction between Christ and the Father. Man was outside and not a participant. The picture is the same here with Abraham and Isaac when they left the two men behind.

**Gen 22:6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.

The wood was laid on Isaac’s back – and Christ carried His own Cross. This is an indication that Isaac was no longer a small child. Abraham carried the container of hot coals and the knife. The fire speaks of judgment, and the knife speaks of the execution of judgment.

**Gen 22:7** And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

When Isaac inquired about the sacrificial lamb, Abraham responded: “God will provide for himself the lamb.” The Hebrew literally reads, “God sees before him the lamb for the sacrifice.” But in verse 13 we will see that God provided a ram to sacrifice in place of Isaac. A ram is not the same as a lamb. The lamb was not provided until centuries later when John the Baptist said of Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Abraham is here speaking prophetically.

**Gen 22:9** When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

At the designated spot Abraham built an altar. He arranged the wood. He bound Isaac and laid him on the wood. He raised his knife to slay his son. So determined was Abraham to carry out the divine directive, that Isaac was as good as dead. Once more it is obvious here that Isaac was not a mere “lad” but was grown enough to have successfully resisted his father had he desired to do so, but Isaac is doing this in obedience. “Not my will but thy will be done,” was what was spoken by Jesus, as He went to the Cross to fulfill the will of God.

**Gen 22:10** Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

It looks like God is going to allow Abraham to go through with slitting Isaac’s throat. This is a real crisis in Abraham’s life. He has been brought through four definite crises, each of which was a real exercise of his soul.

1. He was called to leave all his relatives and friends in Ur of the Chaldees and go where God would lead him. He lingered in Haran but eventually did obey.
2. Then there was the test with Lot his nephew. Abraham loved Lot, but the time came when he had to separate from him.
3. Then we have the test with his son Ishmael by Sarai’s handmaiden. Abraham loved the boy and cried out to God when he was called to send Ishmael and his mother away.
4. And now Abraham comes to the fourth great crisis, a supreme test. Abraham does not fully understand what he is being called to do, but he does know that God told him, “In Isaac, your seed shall be called.” Abraham believed God and even if he sacrificed Isaac, God would raise him from the dead (Heb 11:19). And as far as Abraham is concerned, he was willing to go through with the sacrifice.

And with a knife poised over the throat of Isaac and torn between love for his child and obedience to God, Abraham faced agonizing choices. Step by step, faith and hope triumphed over fear and doubt until the knife was raised to slay his son. In this way, he showed he was willing to put God’s

call above every other commitment and emotional attachment, and at that moment the test ended.

**Gen 22:11** But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>12</sup> He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now, I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

God, in His omniscience, already knew that Abraham feared Him. God knows whether you are genuine or not, but your neighbors and your friends do not know. They can only know by your works. Faith has to produce something to be a witness for itself to the world, thus James could say, "Faith without works is dead."

God tested Abraham, and He will test any person whom He saves. We are going to be tested to build our faith and to make us serviceable to Him. Abraham was given the supreme test, and God never had to ask anything of him after this.

**Gen 22:13** And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

From the Garden of Eden to the Cross of Christ, the substitution was a little animal that pointed to His coming. God would not permit human sacrifice, but when His Son came into the world, His Son went to the Cross and died for us.

**Rom 8:32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

The Cross became the altar upon which the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world was offered. If God gave His Own Son for us, would He withhold anything from us?



**Gen 22:14** So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

Abraham names the place, that same ridge where Solomon’s Temple was built, that place where Abraham offered Isaac – where the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, *Jehovah-Jireh* the Lord will provide.

**Gen 22:15** And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven <sup>16</sup> and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son

Technically Abraham didn’t offer Isaac, that is kill him and burn the offering, but he went far enough that God can say, “Because you have done this and have not withheld your son.” Abraham trusted God and went far enough that his faith is obvious to you and me today. God already knew! Now the entire world knows. Abraham was *justified before God by faith*, but he was also *justified before men by his works*. He demonstrated that he had faith.

“...And have not withheld your son, your only son.” Notice how God once more plays upon this theme because He gave His only son for us.

God is making it clear that there will have to be a “man to stand in the gap,” a man capable of becoming the Savior of the race if anyone is to be saved. Abraham said God would provide a Lamb, but they found a ram and offered it. The Lamb was provided 1900 years later. God stayed Abraham’s hand because it would have been wrong, but He did not spare His own Son but gave Him up freely for us all.

**Gen 22:17** I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

“In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Some translations say, “In your seed....” What seed (offspring) is God talking about here? Paul gives the answer in Galatians.

**Gal 3:16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

If we go back in Galatians to 3:8 we see this:

**Gal 3:7** Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

When did God preach the Gospel to Abraham? When God said, “In your offspring (seed) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,” and that seed is Christ. This is the Gospel as it was given to Abraham.

### **Progressive Revelation and Faith**

In the doctrine of progressive revelation, it is proposed that over the ages God progressively revealed His plan for the redemption of fallen mankind and the recovery of what was lost by Adam. Israel was given fewer details of the plan than was later given to the “*musterion*,” the Church. The patriarchs were given fewer details than what Israel was given through the Law of Moses, and so on. But all dispensations and generations were given enough information to make a faith decision based on whatever was revealed, and that act of faith rendered them righteous in the eyes of God.

There are indications in Scripture that the main characters were aware of certain moral and worship requirements from God, but no specifics were given in the text of exactly what was revealed or how it was revealed to mankind. For example, it is clear from the Cain and Able incident that God had demanded some form of a blood offering. But there is no explanation in Scripture of how and when that requirement was revealed to mankind beyond the vague references to God making animal skins to cover their

nakedness. The blood offerings must have had some sort of context and meaning for Abraham and for those who went before him, but the Scriptures don't give us those details. There is no indication in the text that the blood offerings were for forgiveness. The sacrifices could have been an offering of thanksgiving and praise, but one thing seems certain, and that is blood sacrifices were God telling man that He is Holy and the only way to approach Him was through a blood sacrifice, which of course is a picture of the ultimate blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the Cross.

**Jer 7:22** “For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. <sup>23</sup> But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’”

What the Lord is saying is, “The mere sacrifice was not so much what I commanded; it is the sincere submission to My will that gives to the sacrifice all its virtue.” His design was only to remind the Jews of their sin and to show them the way of reconciliation. The heart attitude of repentance needs to precede the physical act of sacrifice—and most importantly, God detests sacrifices that are offered inappropriately.

While Abraham was saved by faith, exactly what that faith was directed toward is not explained. We can conclude that at the minimum it was simply faith in that voice Abraham was hearing and obedience to what God was telling him to do, but it is clear that revelations from God consisted of more details than the Scriptures reveal to us. Evidently, Abraham knew a lot more about Christ and the Gospel than we give him credit for. John 8:56 is a quote by our Lord Jesus Christ.

**John 8:56** “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”

Abraham lived 1900 years before the Cross, yet regarding the Cross, he “saw it and was glad”.

**Gen 22:19** So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

<sup>20</sup> Now after these things it was told to Abraham, “Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: <sup>21</sup> Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, <sup>22</sup> Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.” <sup>23</sup> (Bethuel fathered Rebekah.) These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. <sup>24</sup> Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

The remainder of the chapter gives a little sidelight on the family of Abraham. His brother Nahor had been left with his family back in Haran. This line is not followed in the Scriptures, but we will cross it a little later in our story. With Isaac’s future guaranteed, the narrative looked briefly to show us the pedigree of his future bride, Rebekah.

### **Similarities Between Christ and Isaac**

This event with Isaac is a wonderful type of Christ. The similarities are striking.

- Both Isaac and Christ were promised sons
- Both were born miraculously
- Both brought joy to the hearts of their fathers
- Both were born at the appointed time
- Both were persecuted by their brethren
- Both were obedient unto death
- Both were the same age
- Both were the “only Son”
- Both were willing to give his life to please his father
- Isaac carried the wood for the offering, Christ carried His Cross
- Both were sacrificed on the same mountain and in the same spot
- Christ was crucified between two thieves, and we have two young men who went with Isaac (v. 3).
- Isaac questioned his father, and Jesus asked, “My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46, NKJV)
- Isaac traveled three days, and Christ was three days in the grave
- Both “rose” on the third day

- Of course, Christ died, while Isaac was spared. However, in God's sight, Isaac did "die." Hebrews 11:19 says that "figuratively speaking" (symbolically) Isaac was raised from the dead."
- Verse 19 indicates that Abraham returned to the waiting servants, but nothing is said about Isaac. This too is a type, for the next time we see Isaac, he is receiving his bride! (24:62ff). And Christ gave Himself on the Cross and went back to heaven, and one day will come forth to receive His Bride, the Church.

### **Lessons**

True faith is always tested. Of course, God did not want Isaac's life; He wanted Abraham's heart. Isaac was dear to Abraham, and God wanted to be sure that Isaac was not an idol standing between Him and Abraham. Abraham might have been trusting Isaac to fulfill the promises and not trusting God. The test was more for Abraham to fully realize the faithfulness of God, that He was true to His word. How did Abraham go through this test? For one thing, he rested on God's promises (Heb. 11:17–19). God had promised Abraham many descendants, and this promise could not be fulfilled unless Isaac lived or God raised him from the dead. Abraham knew that God would not lie, so he rested in His unchanging Word. Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light. Abraham obeyed without delay. If we do the one thing God tells us to do, He will reveal the next step when the right time comes. God's answers never arrive a minute too late! God supplied a ram just when one was needed. This is why Abraham called the name of the place *Jehovah-Jireh*—the Lord will see to it!