

Abraham Makes an Offering

Devotional Reading: Romans 4:1-15
Background Scripture: Genesis 22:1-19

Genesis 22:1-14

¹ Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

² Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

⁸ Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

¹² “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

Key Text

Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” —Genesis 22:14

Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings

Unit 1: The Genesis of Altars and Sacrifices

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Outline the main points of the lesson text.
2. Identify acts of trust and what was required of the trusting person.
3. Identify how to exhibit greater trust in the Lord in a current difficulty.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Testing Commitment
- B. Lesson Context

I. God Tests (Genesis 22:1-2)

- A. Call (v. 1)
- B. Requirement (v. 2)

The Value of Testing

II. Abraham Acts (Genesis 22:3-10)

- A. Journey and Preparation (vv. 3-6)
- B. Question and Answer (vv. 7-8)
- C. Arrival and Intention (vv. 9-10)

III. God Intervenes (Genesis 22:11-14)

- A. Sacrifice Halted (vv. 11-12)
Where Are You?
- B. Sacrifice Provided (vv. 13-14)

Conclusion

- A. Testing and Faith
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Testing Commitment

As a competitive swimmer in high school, I had to practice every weekday. One wintry Friday evening, our coach assigned us to swim an extraordinarily long set. He didn't explain why he selected the grueling workout, only that it would test both our physical endurance and mental strength. Some teammates complained that the workout would upset their Friday night plans, so they refused to complete it. Others started the set but couldn't finish. Only four of us completed the workout—a completion rate of 10 percent of the team!

When we arrived at practice the following Monday, our coach revealed that he had selected the team captains based on the workout from Friday night. He said that the four who finished—me and three others—had proven themselves committed and “mentally tough” enough to accept the responsibility of being team captains.

Numerous examples from Scripture describe times when God tested his people's commitment (Exodus 20:20; Deuteronomy 8:2; Job 23:10; Psalm 66:10; etc.). God challenges his people to remain faithful to and obey him even in the most difficult circumstances. This week's lesson will address one of the most famous examples of divine testing.

B. Lesson Context

While the Scriptures recognize Abraham as a man of faith (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:16-22; Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19), his was by no means a perfect faith. He demonstrated great faith in leaving his home in Ur (Genesis 12:1-4). But by the end of the same chapter, he was telling his wife, Sarah, to lie and say she was his sister (12:10-20).

Later, when Sarah failed to conceive, Abraham impregnated her maidservant Hagar rather than seek the Lord's will. This created serious tension in Abraham's household (Genesis 16:1-6). After God made clear to Abraham that Sarah would give him a son, Abraham handed her over to a pagan king (20:1-18), failing once again to trust God.

Despite all this, God remained faithful to

Abraham and Sarah. He delivered them from several powerful kings. He watched over the circumstances involving Lot, Hagar, and Ishmael (Hagar's son). And God provided the son of promise for whom Abraham and Sarah had been waiting: Isaac.

Still, by the time we get to Genesis 22, we are left wondering whether God would grow impatient. Abraham was a man of spiritual highs and lows. His faith was strong but inconsistent. The reader is left wondering who the “real” Abraham is. Perhaps Abraham was wondering the same thing. Was he still the man of great faith who left Ur behind to go to an unknown land, or had years of wandering taken their toll on his faith?

I. God Tests

(Genesis 22:1-2)

A. Call (v. 1)

1. Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.

The phrase *some time later* indicates a certain passage of time, but we do not know how much time. *Abraham* was 100 years old when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5). Since Isaac is capable of carrying wood (22:6-8, below), we can assume a passage of several years has occurred since Isaac's birth.

God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13). Instead, the idea in this verse is that of proving one's faith through testing. Hebrews 11:17 supports this by saying that Abraham was “tested.”

What Do You Think?

What distractions do you need to remove to hear God more clearly?

Digging Deeper

How will you deal with distractions that might prevent you from saying, “Here I am” to God?

B. Requirement (v. 2)

2. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to

the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

This verse refers to *Isaac* as Abraham's *only son*. However, Abraham had previously fathered Ishmael through Hagar (Genesis 16). In Genesis 21:9-12 we learn that Ishmael was not the son of promise. He was the son that resulted from Abraham's seeking to fulfill God's promise of an heir through ancient custom rather than divine provision. God did not, however, reject Ishmael altogether. On account of Abraham, God blessed Ishmael and made a great nation of his offspring (21:13). Though God continued to look after Ishmael (21:20), he was no longer Abraham's responsibility. There is only one son of promise to Abraham, and that son is Isaac.

Therefore, it is most startling to read that God asks Abraham to sacrifice the child of the promise. This request is undoubtedly what Abraham finds most disturbing. God had spoken to Abraham many times, often to reiterate covenant promises to make him into a great nation with countless descendants (Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15; 17:1-22; 18:13-15; 21:12-13). The command *take your son* and *sacrifice him there as a burnt offering* seems to threaten those promises. Abraham is not only giving up someone he loves but also cutting off the only way he sees possible to beget offspring.

The Law of Moses prohibited human sacrifices (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10). The Old Testament prophets chastised God's people for breaking these commands (Jeremiah 7:30-34; 19:5-6; Ezekiel 20:31; etc.). But Abraham lived five centuries or so before the giving of the Law of Moses, and human sacrifice to pagan gods was not unheard of in the ancient Near East world.

The only other mention in the Bible of *Moriah* can be found in 2 Chronicles 3:1. That passage informs us that centuries after Abraham, King Solomon would build the temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The location where God asks Abraham to offer his son is the same place where the people will later sacrifice their offerings and very close to where God will offer up his own Son, Jesus.

The Value of Testing

The last 100 years of automobile usage have led to significant safety improvements. By one estimate, traffic fatalities in 1923 in the United States occurred at a rate of 18.65 deaths per 100 million miles traveled. In 2021, that rate had dropped to 1.5 deaths per 100 million miles traveled. What made the difference? Stated simply: better cars.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration began doing crash tests in the late 1970s. We've all seen videos of those tests—cars crumpling under various impacts and the crash-test dummies flailing about. Car makers began responding to government regulations based on these tests. As a result, seat belts, airbags, and improved construction have drastically reduced fatalities and injuries.

The purpose of testing is to discover strengths and weaknesses. Trust in God helps us build on the former and minimize the effects of the latter, even if we don't understand why we are being tested. This was the case for Abraham. Should we look forward to testing or dread it? —C. R. B.

II. Abraham Acts

(Genesis 22:3-10)

A. Journey and Preparation (vv. 3-6)

3. Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

We are not told that Abraham said anything in response to God's command. There is no haggling with God, as we see in Genesis 18:22-33. *Abraham* wasted no time carrying out his assignment. His actions speak for themselves as he rose

early the next morning to begin the trip. The journey required that *two of his servants* be brought along. Abraham probably needed their help handling the logistics of food, clothing, bedding, and pack animals required for the trip.

This verse reveals Abraham's faithfulness and obedience to God. When God initially called him from Haran, Abraham followed in hopes of receiving the promises (Genesis 12:1-4). Now Abraham followed God's lead in full awareness that he might lose his son and, thereby, the promises of God.

What Do You Think?

How can believers prepare themselves to do the work God calls them to do?

Digging Deeper

Who can be an accountability partner or spiritual mentor to help support your preparation in this regard?

4. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

If we assume that Abraham's point of departure is Beersheba according to Genesis 21:22-34, then the trip to Moriah is one of about 50 miles. This three-day journey gave him plenty of time to get cold feet, devise an excuse, or otherwise maneuver his way out of this terrible assignment. In building such time into this test, God made sure that Abraham's compliance would not be an impulsive act. Abraham's faith was tested in the crucible of time.

5. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Abraham needed the aid of *his servants* to reach this point, but now he must leave them behind. Abraham's statement *I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you* injects irony and ambiguity into the narrative. Whether or not Abraham intended to lie, his words will ultimately prove accurate. Hebrews 11:19 offers helpful commentary in stating that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son because he believed that God could bring him back from the dead. In that case, we can read Abraham's

How to Say It

Beersheba	Beer-she-buh.
Hagar	Hay-gar.
Haran	Hair-un.
Ishmael	Ish-may-el.
Moriah	Mo-rye-uh.
Ur	Er.

words in the verse before us as proof of his trust in God’s promises.

6. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together,

The narrative as we have it provides minimum details. It says nothing about the emotional state of *Abraham* or *Isaac*. We know nothing of how Abraham may have felt as he laid *the wood for the burnt offering* on the back of *his son* whose body may soon be consumed. It is noteworthy that Jesus also carried on his back the wood that was his own cross to Golgotha (John 19:17).

B. Question and Answer (vv. 7-8)

7. Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

At last we hear from Isaac. This verse indicates that Abraham has not yet told Isaac what is about to happen. Isaac’s question is to be expected. He and his father have all the elements for a sacrificial offering except for the sacrificial animal itself.

The description of Isaac speaking *to his father Abraham* by saying “Father” may seem unnecessarily at first glance. But the intent may be to highlight the drama. Using our “sanctified imaginations,” we might presume an attitude of excitement behind Isaac’s question *where is the lamb for the burnt offering?* as he presumes this to be a special outing, maybe even a feast for just the two of them. On the flip side, we easily imagine a somber tone in Abraham’s address of Isaac as *my son*.

What Do You Think?

How have the words of a child increased your knowledge of God or strengthened your faith?

Digging Deeper

How can you communicate spiritual truths to children in an honest and age-appropriate way?

8. Abraham answered, “God himself will

provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

Some students of the text think that *Abraham* intended to mislead Isaac to avoid scaring him. A better idea is that Abraham was so convinced by God’s provision that he was confident in God’s miraculous provision to provide *the lamb for the burnt offering*. Abraham likely knew that God’s promise does not depend on human planning, so he waited expectantly for God to provide.

C. Arrival and Intention (vv. 9-10)

9. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

The text does not disclose the age of *Isaac*. While he may have been a child, some later Jewish interpretations of this text believed that Isaac was grown and past the age of 13. The basis for this interpretation is that Isaac willingly submitted to being sacrificed. God’s request of Abraham might seem to be less problematic if Isaac himself volunteered to die.

The *altar* Abraham built may be no more than a simple pile of rocks. *The wood* was laid on top of the rocks, and the offering was on top of the wood. For Abraham to bind *his son Isaac* may not be a simple matter, however, if the lad resisted. But the text gives no indication that he does. The succinct narration emphasizes Abraham’s obedience: he showed commitment to God by completing the procedures to sacrifice his son.

10. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

No spoken words are recorded, but it’s easy to conjecture what is going through the minds of both father and son. The level of Abraham’s anguish probably matches the level of Isaac’s terror. Only God’s intervention can stop things now.

III. God Intervenes
(Genesis 22:11-14)

A. Sacrifice Halted (vv. 11-12)

11. But the angel of the LORD called out



Visual for Lesson 3. *Display this visual as you discuss the lesson commentary and discussion questions associated with Genesis 22:13-14.*

to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"
"Here I am," he replied.

This verse provides the story's climax: God's intervention through *the angel of the Lord*. This title is a designation given to God's angelical beings who often relay the words of God (examples: Genesis 16:7-8; Judges 13:3; 2 Kings 1:3).

In the verse before us, the angel does not appear to Abraham. Instead, the angel speaks to Abraham *from heaven*. For the final time in this story, Abraham responds, *Here I am* when addressed. Abraham is interrupted just as he is about to carry out the sacrifice commanded of him. The two-fold calling of *Abraham! Abraham!* carries a sense of urgency.

The scene is similar to what later occurs at the burning bush with Moses. There, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses “in flames of fire from within a bush” (Exodus 3:2), but then God is said to be the one who calls to Moses from the bush (3:4). It is clear that the angel represents divine authority.

Where Are You?

Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 disappeared on March 8, 2014. The last voice contact with the crew came less than an hour after takeoff. Radar showed the plane deviating from its flight plan soon afterward. Satellite tracking eventually revealed that the flight headed southwest over the Indian Ocean. Nearly a year and a half later,

debris from the plane began to appear. As of January 2024, the entire aircraft has yet to be found.

Flight 370's disappearance has led to various theories about the cause. Was it an act of terrorism? Did the pilot intentionally change the flight path and crash the plane into the ocean? All we can ask regarding this flight is, "Where are you?"

When God and Isaac each called to Abraham, that man declared his presence by saying, “Here I am.” He had not deviated from where he was expected to be. Whether the situation involves family, friends, work, or our relationship with God, when we are called upon to be wholly present, the only satisfactory answer is “Here I am,” when “here” is the appropriate place to be. It’s a matter of integrity and responsibility. But ultimately, it’s a matter of being accountable to those we love and who love us, especially God.

—C. R. B.

12. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

The angel ordered Abraham to halt, thus preventing any physical harm to Isaac. The angel reveals the rationale for God's request: to test whether Abraham was willing to give up his *only son* out of obedience to God.

These words tell us that Abraham has indeed passed the test. In essence, God asked him, “Do you trust me and me alone to fulfill my promises to you? Are you willing to give up all control and place your entire future into my hands?” The answer to both questions is a resounding *yes!*

No other feat could demonstrate with such certainty Abraham's faith in God alone to fulfill his promise. Isaac is not merely his *only son* (see commentary on Genesis 22:2, above); Isaac was Abraham's only chance to secure future promises. In raising the knife, Abraham boldly declared his conviction that God is his only hope. With that unspoken confession of faith, he received his son back, as though from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).

We should not misinterpret the phrase *you fear God*. God is not glad that Abraham was afraid of him. Instead, *fear* is another way to express wor-

ship. It signifies that Abraham understood that his son and, thus, his future belonged to God. Abraham's obedience echoes David's later testimony of the Lord: "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;" (Psalm 103:11).

The will of God was the driving force in Abraham's life. God was his ultimate motivation. Abraham's actions reveal the heart of true worship. God values obedience over sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22).

What Do You Think?

What are the lifestyles and behaviors of someone who fears God?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to worship God in the upcoming week?

B. Sacrifice Provided (vv. 13-14)

13. Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Centuries after Abraham, the Law of Moses would prescribe the use of a ram for sacrificial offerings (Leviticus 5:15; 9:4; etc.) and in ordination proceedings (8:22; etc.).

God did indeed provide for the sacrifice. The *ram* was not provided when Abraham began his three-day journey, along the journey, or at the foot of Mount Moriah. It was provided only after Abraham demonstrated his willingness to go all the way in carrying out God's instructions.

14. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

God faithfully provided for Abraham. As a result, the man names the location "*The Lord Will Provide*." Abraham fully understood that the one true God always sees that his people are provided for.

It is worth noting that Abraham does not name the place "Isaac Is Spared" or "A Father Is Relieved." This account has been about God's faithfulness and whether Abraham truly believes

that God will keep his promises. Indeed, God is faithful, and Abraham truly believed.

What Do You Think?

How will you have spiritual "eyes" to notice God's provision?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to worship and praise God for His provision?

Conclusion

A. Testing and Faith

Tests reveal the preparation of the one tested. Some tests also expose the character of the person being tested. God's testing of Abraham in today's Scripture text exposed that man's trust, loyalty, and devotion. It proved the authenticity of his faith, the faith for which God pronounced Abraham righteous (Genesis 15:6; see James 2:21-23).

The testing of Abraham also revealed God's faithfulness and promises to his people. God preserved the life of Isaac and, therefore, reiterated his promises to multiply Abraham's descendants and bless all nations.

God's people will continue to face tests and trials. Not all of these trials will be from God in the same manner as Abraham's test. Trials prove the strength and sincerity of our faith (1 Peter 1:6-7). While we may never hear a voice from God at the test's conclusion, we can be confident that God will be with us in our trials as we grow in faith, perseverance, and maturity (James 1:2-4).

B. Prayer

Lord God, we call on you to be in our lives what you have been for our forefathers and foremothers of the faith. Give us faith to trust in your provision and empower us through your Spirit to remain faithful to you. We want to grow our faith in strength and witness. We trust you and love you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God always provides,
but not always in the ways we expect.