

God Asks Abraham to Offer Up His Son Isaac

Genesis 22:1-8

Genesis 22:1-8 - *"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."*

² *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."*

³ *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. ⁴ Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. ⁵ 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."*

⁶ *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. ⁷ 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?"

⁸ *And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together."*

Background Notes

Isaac's age at this point is not known, but in view of the context and the fact that Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice, Isaac was probably at least a teenager – and maybe older.

Why would God test Abraham in this way? Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son, the promised son, the son for whom Abraham and Sarah had waited twenty-five years? Some ancient Jewish commentaries speculate that this was like Job's test of faith. In the first two chapters of the book of Job, we see what was taking place behind the scenes as Job was undergoing his great test of faith - that included the loss of his children. We discover that through Job's losses, God was proving to Satan that Job would remain faithful to Him, regardless of his loss of wealth, and health, and children. And Satan was not able to get Job to renounce his faith in God.

Was a similar scenario was going on behind the scenes in the case of Abraham? We don't know, but it's possible that God was demonstrating to Satan that Abraham's faith was a strong and true faith. It's possible that God said to Satan (as in the case of Job), "Have you considered my servant Abraham, that he is faithful in all that he does?" And Satan may have responded (as in the case of Job), "Of course Abraham is faithful to You! You have blessed him with possessions, and power, and prestige. No wonder he serves you!"

Child sacrifice was practiced at that time by the pagan peoples, so Satan *may* have gone on to say, "My followers will even sacrifice their children to me. Abraham's faith is nothing compared to that!" And God *may* have said to Satan, "I'll show you how faithful Abraham is. I'll prove his faith in Me through sacrificing his beloved son, Isaac." Now as I said, this is only speculation, but in view of the book of Job it is a possible scenario.

In any case, one reason why God chose this particular test of Abraham's faith was to provide an outstanding spiritual picture of the great sacrifice of God's beloved Son, the Lamb of God, at Calvary. In fact, Calvary and Mount Moriah are in the same vicinity in Jerusalem.

Doctrinal Point

The Bible teaches by the “Law of First Mention.”

The “**Law of First Mention**” states that when key biblical words are mentioned for the first time in the Bible, there you will find the essential meaning. You will also see the depth of that word, and how God wants us to understand it when it is used throughout the rest of Scripture. In other words, **the first mention** sets the pattern for the use of that word throughout Holy Scripture.

There are **four first mentions** here in Genesis 22! Here we see the first mention in the Bible of the word “**test**” (v1), the word “**love**” (v2), the word “**worship**” (v5), and the word “**obey**” (v18).

a. The first mention of the word “test” in the Bible.

The first mention of the word “test” is in verse 1. The King James Version uses the word “tempt” - but the idea is “test of faith,” not “temptation to do evil,” so most translations properly translate this Hebrew word as “test.” Notice how the first mention of the word “test” vividly shows us what a test of faith is all about. Abraham was asked to give up his most precious possession, his beloved son. What a test! God may test our faith in the area of trusting Him, even when He asks us to offer up our most prized or precious possession to Him.

Notice, too, that the test of Abraham’s faith was very hard to understand. Isaac was the promised son, and God’s covenant with Abraham depended on Isaac living, marrying and producing heirs! God may test our faith in ways that are very difficult to understand - in fact, we may not understand until we get to Heaven. But God expects us, like Abraham, to trust Him even when we can’t understand why He is testing our faith in the way He does. (Read 1 Peter 1 and James 1 for more about how and why God tests our faith.)

I think at some time during the three-day journey to Mount Moriah, Abraham came to believe that since God’s promises to him depended on Isaac being alive, that God would raise Isaac back to life again. “*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” (v4-5).* Notice he told the men that “**we**” will come back to you (verse 5).

Hebrews 11:17-19, in that great chapter on faith: “*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.*”

Abraham passed this supreme test of his faith in God. Would we have passed this test of faith – being willing to offer up to God our most precious possession? The **Law of First Mention** indicates that Abraham’s test of faith is a prime example of what a test of faith is all about.

b. The first mention of the word “love” in the Bible.

The first mention of the word “love” is in verse 2: *“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.”*

Think of how Abraham loved his son Isaac! He was the promised son, the child for whom he and Sarah had waited so long! The love that Abraham had for his son Isaac is part of the spiritual picture that God painted for us here, to convey the depth of the love God had for His own beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as They *walked together* toward Calvary.

Do you remember what God the Father said of the Lord Jesus, both at His baptism and at the Mount of Transfiguration? *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”* What a picture we have here, demonstrating that love and communion between the Father and Son! *“...and the two of them went together”(v6).* And *“So the two of them went together” (v8).*

In verse 7 Isaac said, *“Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* And Abraham answered, *“My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” So the two of them went together.”* It seems from that point on that Isaac never asked any more questions, and the two of them walked on together to the place of sacrifice. A beautiful picture of that willing obedience is given in Isaiah 53, where the Lord *“...was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”*

Can you imagine how Abraham’s heart must have been filled with anguished love for his son as they walked on together toward Mount Moriah, the place of sacrifice? How much more, then, we should appreciate the sacrificial love that God has shown toward us! John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

The **essential meaning** and **depth** of the word “love” is highlighted for us here in Genesis 22, where love is mentioned for the first time in the Bible.

c. The first mention of the word “worship” in the Bible.

The first mention of the word “worship” is in verse 5: *“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.”*

Notice what is involved in the worship of God - not just thanksgiving and praise, but **obedience** and **sacrifice!** So you see, the **Law of First Mention** shows us what is involved in the worship of God, to the highest degree.

d. The first mention of the word “obey” in the Bible.

The first mention of the word “obey” in the Bible is in verse 18: *“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”*

Obedience to God means obeying the difficult commands as well as the easy commands! And notice that Abraham didn't waste any time in obeying God: *“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” (v3).*

Instant obedience - in the most difficult test of Abraham's life! These aspects of obedience are brought out in the first mention of the word “obey” in the Bible.

The Bible teaches by the **Law of First Mention**.

Practical Application

Are you willing to give up your children to the Lord?

Abraham was tested through his son - and he passed the test! Would you have passed? Would I have passed? The Lord may not test us to the same degree as he tested Abraham, but he may test us in relation to our children.

What do you **really** want for your children? Are you hoping they'll be successful in this world? Suppose, instead, God called your child to serve Him as a missionary in another culture or country – would you be willing? Suppose this call to service meant that your child would not be successful in this world – would you be willing? Suppose it meant that your child would possibly be in danger, and it meant that you would not see your child (or perhaps your grandchildren) as often as you would like – would you be willing? Would you be willing to “give up” your child to God?

I know a young woman whose Christian parents wanted her to be a solid Christian, to love the Lord, to study the Bible, and marry a Christian guy. But when the daughter told them she felt God was calling her to become a missionary to another country, her parents wouldn't approve. They weren't willing to give up their child to the Lord!

Parents, are you willing to give up your children to the Lord?