

A Substitute  
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Genesis 22:1-14

Think back about the stress of preparing to take an important test. What kind of emotions and physical reactions did a major test bring? Why are tests necessary? Why do tests need to be rigorous (think surgeons, accountants, lawyers, and soldiers)?

In God's "school of faith" there are lessons to learn and tests to see how much our faith in Him has grown. At age 75 Abraham started as a promising pupil in the school of faith. Like most students, there were missteps and incompletes as Abraham (and Sarah) attempted to short-cut God's lesson plan for trusting Him. When Abraham stumbled, God would refocus him on the advanced degree he was pursuing: God's promise to make Abraham and Sarah (in their old age) the parents of His chosen nation, Israel.

After a quarter century Abraham was still trusting God's promise when Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90. Anyone would look at Abraham's great faith and pronounce Him a summa cum laude doctoral graduate at God's "University of Trust and Obey." *"Congratulations, Abe! At 100 years old you can sit back and watch God work."* Not so fast. If Abraham's faith in God to fulfill the covenant was graduate school, then the faith test we see in Genesis 22 was an extreme "boot camp" testing of obedience to God that is almost inconceivable.

The point: If we've trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, we are automatically enrolled in God's "University of Trust and Obey." Our education in trusting God will involve TESTS to measure the depth of our faith in Him, and TEMPTATIONS from Satan to distract us from our progress. Sometimes we will have to go through "faith boot camp" to really see what our walk with God is made of. This will be painful, but it is necessary because (to quote Adrian Rogers): *"A faith that hasn't been tested can't be trusted."*

In addition to a lesson on the testing of our faith in God, we will also see another example of how the Old Testament continually points to Jesus as God's perfect substitute so sinful people like us can live forever.

Let's begin in verse one where God's "faith bootcamp" for Abraham is just beginning:

**(ESV)** — **1** After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." **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." **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.

- Verse one spells out the fact that God "tested Abraham."

- Abraham's response ("Here I am") shows an active, open relationship with God.
- God's command was shocking. Why was it even more stunning in this situation?
- How do you feel (especially as a parent) putting yourself in Abraham's place?
- Our first reaction to a test of our faith in God is often: *"I just can't do this!"*
- Shortly we'll see how this text applies to us. Let's press on with verse three.
- Why do you think we are told Abraham "rose early" the next morning?
- These verses paint a picture of a man who was open to God's will though it made no sense. He was immediately obedient with no argument or debate.

**4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. **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." **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. **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?" **8** Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

- Verse five: Abraham accurately called this terrible task "worship."
- When we think of worship what comes to mind?
- Romans 12:1 gives us a deeper definition of worship: *"...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*<sup>ii</sup>
- Abraham was about to offer what was most important to him back to God on the altar because God is worthy to receive anything He has given to His people.
- Verse four: Abraham told his hired hands that BOTH he and Isaac would return.
- Verse eight: Abraham told Isaac God would "provide" the sacrificial lamb.
- What do these verses say about Abraham's belief in God to keep His promise that Isaac would start the ancestral line of the nation of Israel?
- We don't know Abraham's thoughts, but the writer of Hebrews said this about him in Hebrews 11:19: *"He considered that God was able even to raise him (Isaac) from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."*
- God had promised His chosen people would be born from Isaac yet Abraham trusted God enough to obey this terrible command to sacrifice Isaac.
- Abraham wasn't the only one demonstrating great faith that day.

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

- How old do you imagine Isaac was in this situation? How does verse six provide some clue about Isaac's age? What about Isaac's question in verse seven?<sup>iii</sup>
- Isaac was old enough and strong enough to resist Abraham tying him to the altar and to know what was about to happen. It seems clear that Isaac voluntarily submitted to God's command because he trusted his father, Abraham.

- When a test is over we are told to put down our pencils. In this case, Abraham was told to put down the knife.

**11** But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." **12** 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." **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.

- Abraham (and Isaac) passed God's incredible test of faith and obedience, and God's promise for them both was still intact because He is a promise keeper.
- We'll see how this text applies to us in a moment. First, let's look at how it points to Jesus as our substitute on the cross:
  - Jesus and Isaac were both children of promise from God.
  - Both were "only sons" offered by their fathers as a sacrifice.
  - Both (in different ways) were raised from the dead on the third day.
  - Isaac bore the wood and Jesus bore His cross.
  - Both were offered as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah (later Jerusalem).
  - Both were obedient to their fathers to the point of death.<sup>iv</sup>
- Though there were many similarities, there is a difference. In the end, Isaac shifts from a picture of the promised Messiah to a picture of you and me.
- The wood Isaac bore on his back represents the sin every human bears.
- The wood for a sacrifice would be burned up along with that sacrifice.
- Without a substitute sacrifice, we would be destroyed along with our sin.
- As Isaac was spared and the ram was sacrificed instead; Jesus, the perfect lamb of God was sacrificed on the cross as the substitute to pay the price for our sin.
- Now let's look at how God's test of Abraham's faith applies to our lives.
- When I read this story, I shake my head saying, "*Lord, I couldn't do what Abraham did! Please don't call me to do something that extreme!*"
- We don't have to even imagine God asking us what He asked of Abraham.
- Later in scripture God prohibited human sacrifice among His people (Deut.18:10). He never again commanded this from anyone and He didn't make Abraham kill Isaac; He only tested Abraham's willingness to trust and obey.
- This was a specific test for a specific person for a specific purpose.
- Abraham's test was just for Him. There would be other incredibly hard tests for God's people recorded in scripture but this one was only for Abraham.
- Back to us. What if God calls me to do something I just can't do?
- If God calls us to something and if that call it is truly from Him, He will equip us and give us the grace and peace to deal with any fears or anxiety.
- If the idea is not from God, we shouldn't do it anyway.
- How can I know if a calling is from God?
- That's a big topic requiring deep study. The short answer is seeking His confirmation through prayer, His word, and the counsel of wise, godly people.
- There is another lesson in this story that applies to us.

- God was also testing Abraham's willingness to place the most important thing in his life (the son God had promised and gave him) on the altar to God.
- Scripture doesn't say it, but we wonder if Isaac had become an idol to Abraham. Had Abraham placed his supernaturally given son on the throne instead of God.
- *"In his book The Pursuit of God, A. W. Tozer commented, "To the wondering patriarch [God] now says in effect, 'It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there.'"*<sup>v</sup>
- Chuck Swindoll writes, *"What you retain for yourself is usually what God asks you to release to Him. It may be some possession. It may be a position of prominence. It may be a valuable relationship. It may be a cherished dream. Whatever has taken that special place that you've retained for yourself, that's probably the area where He's going to say, "I want to have that." Make sure God remains in first place. What you release to God, He replaces with something even more valuable. God plays fair. Whatever you release to Him, He will replace with something better. Abraham had placed Isaac on an altar. Isaac was as good as dead. But afterward, he was even more valuable, because Abraham had God in first place without question. Are you willing to let go?"*<sup>vi</sup>
- Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- If we've trusted Jesus, we are enrolled in God's "University of Trust and Obey."
- Our education in trusting God will involve TESTS to measure the depth of our faith in Him, and TEMPTATIONS that might distract us from our progress.
- God's command made no sense, but Abraham moved forward in faith. He knew God would keep His promise even if he didn't know how God would do it.
- In verse fourteen we see a new name for God.
- **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."*
- One of the many names for God in scripture is Jehovah-Jireh 'The Lord will provide [or see to it]'). God provided everything Abraham needed to pass this test: The strength to obey this awful command, the grace to see it through, and one more thing, His blessings because of that obedience. Look at verses 15-18:
- **15** *And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven* **16** *and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,* **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,* **18** *and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."*
- God tested Abraham and God provided everything needed to pass the test. He will provide the same for every follower of Christ who trusts and obeys Him.
- Sometimes we must go through "faith boot camp" to see what our walk with God is made of. It is painful, but necessary because *"A faith that hasn't been tested can't be trusted."*<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://quotefancy.com/quote/1528136/Adrian-Rogers-A-faith-that-hasn-t-been-tested-can-t-be-trusted>

<sup>ii</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Ro 12:1). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>iii</sup> Several commentators have weighed in on the question of how old Isaac was when he was to be sacrificed: 18 to 20 years old (Leupold, 1:625); 25 years old (Josephus, 1.13.2); about 33 years old (Adam Clarke, 1:140); and over 20 years old (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 29).

Taking all the evidence, we can safely say that Isaac was a young man—not a young boy—when

Abraham attempted to sacrifice him on Mt. Moriah. <https://www.gotquestions.org/how-old-was-Isaac.html>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://makinghimknown.tv/10-ways-isaac-is-a-picture-of-jesus/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://harvest.org/resources/devotion/everything-sacred/>

<sup>vi</sup> Swindoll Study Bible – Pg. 41 – “Let it go”

<sup>vii</sup> <https://quotefancy.com/quote/1528136/Adrian-Rogers-A-faith-that-hasn-t-been-tested-can-t-be-trusted>