

A MOMENT OF TRUTH (vv. 9-18)

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."

¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, ¹⁹ because you have obeyed me."

1. The Rabbis are quick to remind us that Isaac must have been in his early teens, and Abraham would have been well over a hundred. Isaac could have easily outrun his father or taken him in a fair fight. The fact that Isaac allowed himself to be bound suggests he was willing to submit to his father at the cost of his life. What does this seem to indicate about the relationship between Abraham and Isaac? What does it seem to suggest on a far grander scale about the mutual love, trust, and submission between Father, Son, and Spirit?
2. What does God learn about Abraham that he did not already know?
3. What does Abraham learn about God that he did not already know?
4. While Abraham's hand was stayed from offering Isaac, our Heavenly Father would not stay the hands of those who crucified our Lord. How does considering the sacrifice of a beloved son through the eyes of an earthly father further our appreciation of the cross?
5. Abraham would call the mountain, "The Lord will provide." How did God provide for Abraham? How does God provide for us?
6. While God's promises to Abraham ultimately rely on God's faithfulness rather than Abraham's obedience, the final line of the story suggests the two are inevitably linked together. How would you describe the relationship between faith and obedience? What in this story inspires us to even more confident obedience?



If you are looking for a happy ending to the Abraham story, the birth of Isaac would have been the perfect place to roll the credits. Sarah's jubilant announcement captures the joy of the moment,

God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age (Genesis 21:6-7)."

The aged couple has finally experienced the blessing that had eluded them all their lives—the blessing that was at the very heart of every good promise God had made to them and us.

The joyous laughter, however, quickly gives way to deep family dysfunction. It will be necessary for Hagar and Ishmael to be banished from Abraham's household. They will be sent into the desert with a skin of water and a morsel of bread. They share the last drop of water and lay down to die. Even though God meets them in the moment and provides for their needs, it is an unsettling episode in the life of Abraham.

As the years pass, and the wounds begin to heal, God asks the unthinkable of Abraham. The request leaves us breathless in its magnitude. God asks something of Abraham we are confident we could never give, And while none of us will be tested in exactly the way Abraham was, there will be times when we are called to surrender the things most precious to us.

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM (vv. 1-3)

22:1 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."

1. In both the Old and the New Testament, the word for "test" can also be translated "temptation." In each case, they refer to something that the enemy can use to destroy our faith or something the Lord can use to reveal the nature of our faith and strengthen our resolve to know and follow him. What is at stake in this particular test? What are some of the trials we commonly face? What is at stake when we are tested? What does God promise to accomplish when our faith is tested (see Romans 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:2-5)?
2. How does this passage describe Isaac?
3. The burnt offering is significant on several levels. It involved giving the very best one had to offer. It was considered a substitutionary sacrifice (one would lay hands on the sacrificial animal in recognition that it stood in their place). It was wholly devoted to God (unlike other sacrifices none of it was shared with the priests or given back to the worshipper). How are these elements at play in this passage? How do they describe what God asks of us? How do they describe what God has given us?
4. What are some of the emotions Abraham must have experienced when God asked him to "sacrifice [Isaac]... as a burnt offering?"
5. While none of us will ever be asked to offer our children as burnt offerings, what are some of the ways we will be asked to offer our children to God? What are some other things we might be asked to offer God?

THE ROAD TO MORIAH (vv.3-8)

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.

1. Not only is Abraham asked to do the unthinkable, but he is also given a long time to think about it. What do you suppose Abraham was thinking about as he made his way to "the mountain God would show him?"
2. What do you make of the fact that Abraham told his servants, "We will worship, and we will come back to you?"
3. Father/son walks usually involve meaningful conversations. This one seems to be marked by sober reflection. Finally, Isaac breaks the silence. "The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" What do you think Isaac was thinking when he asked the question? What do you think Abraham was thinking when he answered?
4. Micah asks, "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul (Micah 6:6-7)? Why is each of these sacrifices finally inadequate? Why is it important that "God himself provide the lamb for the burnt offering?"