

# GENESIS 22:1-14

## WORSHIP IN A TIME OF UNREASONABLE FAITH

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Have you ever had to give up something that you loved? I'm sure at some time we all have had to give something up that had become dear to us. Children give up blankets, toys, even pets due to their growing up or having to move. Things like this are normal, though they may be painful at the time, but they are not out of the ordinary.

But what would you think if someone gave you something they had been promising for a long time, and then came back some time later, after you had really gotten attached to gift and demanded that you give it up? When I was a kid we had a name for a person like that. He was an Indian giver. Nobody liked an Indian giver.

Most of us would throw a fit and attempt to hang on to what had been given to us. That would be normal in most cases.

But what if God gave you the desire of your heart, allowed you to have that desire for years, and then told you to kill it?

Our first thoughts are, "Wow, what a cruel God!"

But then we would have to ask ourselves is there something we were missing. At any rate it is a strange story. However, there is gold to be mined from it. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 22 verse 1 and we will read about Abraham and how he handled this situation.

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

**Gen 22:2** *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."*

**Gen 22:3** *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.*

**Gen 22:4** *Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.*

The phrase, "after these things" refers to the things that were written about in Genesis 21, the main portion of that chapter being the sending away of Ishmael. It is now plain that Isaac is the ONLY heir in the house of Abraham.

In verse 2 God told Abraham to take his, his only son and go to the mountains of Moriah to sacrifice him as a burnt offering.

This is Paganism, plain and simple! At least that is what the skeptic would say. However, we have to go deeper into the story in order to get all the clues. First of all, if we look back at verse 1 we can see that God was testing Abraham.

We have to be careful to make the distinction between tempting and testing.

Temptations come from the desires within us.

### **JAMES 1:12-16**

*12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil,*

*nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.*

**1 Cor. 10:13**

*13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

Testing comes from the LORD who has a special purpose to fulfill.

Testing:

**1Pe 1:6** *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,*

**1Pe 1:7** *that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,*

To tempt means to make one stumble. To test means to see if one will do what is required of them. Temptations are used by the enemy to bring out the worst in us while Tests are used by God to bring out the best in us. Temptations seem logical while tests seem to be unreasonable.

And while all believers face similar temptations, we don't all face the same tests of our faith. Lot was not tested the same way Abraham was. Why is that? Because Lot was being *tempted* by the world and had not matured in his walk enough to be *tested* by God. It should actually be seen as a "compliment" when we are tested. God won't send a test until He knows we can handle it. A passing test grade means that a "promotion" of sorts is at hand. It shows that you have moved forward in the "School of Faith." It could also be expressed as one having grown in his or her Christian walk. It is the process of sanctification.

But all of this begs the question, "If God knows everything, then why does He have to make Abraham go through this?" (Meaning, God knew Abraham would pass the test.)

The answer is that the test is not for God to see what Abraham would do, but for Abraham to see what he would do, as well as for the rest of us that read it, that we would be able to see what Abraham did in the hopes that we also would have faith of this caliber.

Realize what is going on here. Abraham waited for decades for this son of the promise. He has already had to send away another son. This was gut wrenching! This is the kind of thing that makes people curse God and walk away from Him! Abraham waited for decades for this son and now he is told that he will have to sacrifice him as a burnt offering! He got what he wanted. What had been promised to him, and now he has to give it back or at least give it away.

What do we do in such situations? What are our options?

1. We can get mad at God and keep our "Isaac."
2. We can attempt to bargain with God.
3. We can do what we have been told to do.

What would you have done?

The key here is in knowing the character of God. WE have to know that God has our best interest in mind. Abraham knew because God had promised him that this was no ordinary son. Isaac was a major cog in the wheel that made up god's overall plan for the world. WE have to know that God would not wreck a plan like this. Therefore, if God gave him Isaac, and then God wanted to take away Isaac, then that was what was best for all parties concerned.

Let's look at what Abraham did.

**Gen 22:3** *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.*

**Gen 22:4** *Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.*

**Gen 22:5** *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."*

**Gen 22:6** *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.*

Abraham rose up early. He didn't procrastinate. It is close to 45 miles from Beer Sheba to Moriah, the mountainous area now called Jerusalem. It was a good little hike.

Abraham got up, split the wood for the fire, got the servants together and packed all that they needed, and headed for the mountains.

On the third day, this phrase is not here just to be here. The third day is the day Jesus rose from the dead. The Hebrews aren't ones to put useless pieces of information in their writings.

Abraham was told to go to a specific mountain. Solomon would later build the first Temple on Mount Moriah. Jesus would eventually be crucified on part of that very same mountain. Keep that in mind as we see all the symbolism in the account.

In verse 5 Abraham left the servants behind and took Isaac with him to the top of the mountain. He placed the bundle of firewood on Isaac's back and he carried a torch to light the fire with when they got there.

Most of you are probably imagining a young boy struggling under the weight of the wood. However, at this time Isaac was close to 20 years

old. He wasn't a child. The word translated "lad" here can mean a child or a young adult. Josephus the Jewish historian says that Isaac was 25 when he went up the mountain with his father. Some of the Jewish Targumim claim that Isaac was as old as 36.

*yonder - southern man, as if pointing to a place.*

We see here that Abraham tells the servants that both he and the boy will return. Once again this must have been gut wrenching. He knows he is going to have to sacrifice the boy. If he is like most of us, even though he is going along with the plan, he is constantly praying that God will intervene at any moment. He isn't procrastinating, but he has had 2 days now to mull all this over and ask God for a way out of this situation.

When we are in difficult situations, and none of us have ever been in one as tough as Abraham is here, our focus needs to be on the Lord and what His will is for the situation. There is something to be said for the person that quietly goes through the test while praying for God's deliverance. Abraham hasn't freaked out and had a meltdown. He didn't go by the pharmacy to get pills so that he can cope. He is moving forward while seeking God's help. Once again, he knows the character of the one he worships. Can that be said of us?

Now as the two started their journey up the mountain, Isaac notices that something is missing.

**Gen 22:7** *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?"*

**Gen 22:8** *And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.*

**Gen 22:9** *Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.*

**Gen 22:10** *And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.*

Isaac noticed that there was no animal to sacrifice. Abraham told him that the Lord would provide His own sacrifice.

Some scholars say that this was a way to avoid telling Isaac that he was the sacrifice. Others say that it is an allusion to Jesus. Others say that Abraham knew that there was going to be a way out of this.

I personally think all of these things were rolling around in Abraham's head. I don't think he wanted to come out and say, "Son, you are going to be sacrificed when we get to the top."

I don't know how much Abraham understood about the promise of a coming seed, but I do believe he had faith that God would make good on His promise.

**Joh 8:56** *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."*

And I believe that the whole time he was praying that somehow he wouldn't have to sacrifice his son, but if he did have to go through with it we are told that he believed that God would 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 offered up his only begotten son,*

**Heb 11:18** *of whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED,"*

**Heb 11:19** *concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.*

At any rate, he didn't have all the details, but he continued to move forward.

*“Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible.”*  
*Warren Wiersbe*

The Bible is full of instances that require a miracle as a solution. Moses and Israel were trapped between Pharaoh and the Red Sea. David faced down Goliath. Joseph was in prison. They had to be asking, “Why am I here? Where is God?”

We have all asked those questions at one time or another. We are constantly looking for the solution, but as logical as that may seem, maybe that shouldn't be our aim.

*As Christians, we live by promises, not explanations!*

Look at the situation in which Abraham found himself then place yourself in that same situation. Most of us would immediately ask God, “Why, Lord?” and we would then quickly follow that up with, “Why me?” We immediately aim for the explanation as we quickly forget the promise.

This suggests that we may not know God or ourselves as well as we might think.

Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead if that were necessary. Once again, *faith does not demand explanations; faith rests on promises.*

Abraham believed God when he didn't know when, where, how or why.

He raised the knife to kill Isaac, when he was stopped by the Angel of the LORD.



Jesus called out to Abraham to stop, and so he did.

**Gen 22:11** But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am."

**Gen 22:12** And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me."

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

**Gen 22:14** And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said *to* this day, "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Abraham was stopped because the test was over. Verse 12 states that now ***I know you fear God***. God knows the end from the beginning. The test, as I said earlier was for Abraham as well as for us. Abraham is a testimony to what faith can do.

When Abraham looked around he saw a ram caught in a thicket and sacrificed it. This shows us the concept of substitutionary atonement. That is, to appease by a substitute.

Just as a ram was a substitute in this case, Jesus was our substitute. He died for our sins. The Targum of Jonathan states that the ram had been provided from the beginning of the world.

God stopped Abraham, who was being obedient, but we also have to see that there was another person being obedient on that mountain, Isaac. Isaac was a young man in his prime. He could have easily gotten away from his elderly father had he wanted to do so. He was complicit in carrying the firewood and being bound on that pile of firewood.

The obedient son is part of the symbolism we need to see, because while in this instance Abraham was praying for a way out and got it, almost 2,000 years later Jesus prayed the same prayer and didn't get a way out.

**Mat 26:39** He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "**O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.**"

**26:42** Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "**O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.**"

He carried a cross, not firewood, though they would have served the same purpose.

**Heb 11:1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith allows us to carry on with the plan God has for our lives even though we don't understand the plan.

If you aren't in the middle of a test now, you will be. Some are bigger than others. None will be like what Abraham faced, though we may have a tendency to blow them up to that size. However, when we know the character of the God we serve, we can move forward knowing that He has our best interest in mind even though we don't understand all the details or why we are going through it.

There are some people that have to have all the details. I am not one of those people. Most of the time, too many details just overwhelm me. I relish the fact that I don't have to know everything about everything that is going on around me. I just plod along, most of the time at a very slow pace knowing that God will work out the details before I get to that bridge.

Many of us, as we read through this passage seem to think that Abraham was going through with the test and only began to worship after the ram was found in the thicket. However, *worship carries the meaning of bowing to the will of God.* Therefore, Abraham was worshipping throughout this chapter.

We can sing as loud as we possibly can, we can raise our hands until they go numb and not be worshipping God. It is only when we are acting in obedience from a foundation of faith that we are truly worshipping God. This makes worship a lifestyle and not just an event. (mind blow) And that makes all the difference in the world.

I am not a giant of faith. I am no different than anyone else. But I do know the character of the God I serve. And I know that He has my best interests in mind. And I know that if I obey Him, though I can't see it now, everything will be all right. When I cease to look for explanations and learn to focus on the promise, ironically life gets easier.

I pray you will know that peace also.