

## Abraham's Trial of Faith

Without doubt, Abraham was one of the great heroes of the Bible. He is mentioned in 25 of the 66 books of the Bible. Three times in the Bible he is called "*the friend of God*" (Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7; Jas. 2:23). He is mentioned in Hebrews 11, in that great chapter which has been called "faith's hall of fame," a chapter wherein many Old Testament worthies are listed, along with their works of faith. There are several reasons why Abraham was such an important Bible character. A few such reasons are as follows: (a) It was to him that God gave the great promises recorded in Gen. 12:1-3; (b) The Jewish nation descended from Abraham, Gen. 12:2; John 8:32,33; © Jesus Christ descended from Abraham, Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16; (d) Christians today, in a spiritual sense, are "*Abraham's seed*," Gal. 3:29, etc., etc.

This article, however, is not intended to take an overall look at the life of Abraham. To the contrary, our intent is to focus upon one incident in his eventful life which, properly understood, truly reflects what must have been his greatest "trial of faith." It is recorded in the 22nd chapter of Genesis. The first three verses read as follows: (1) "*Now it came to pass 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.*"

### These Scriptures Examined More Closely

**The Time Period** "*after these things*," Gen. 22:1. After the events of chapter 21, which informs us of: a. The birth of Isaac, when Abraham was 100 years old, v. 5. b. the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael, vs. 10-14, c. After Isaac had grown up (evidenced by his being able to carry "*the wood*" which provided the fuel for the sacrifice, Gen. 22:9.

**God tested Abraham**, Gen. 22:1. The KJV says God "*did tempt*" Abraham; however, God does not tempt man with evil (Jas. 1:13-15), but He does test us, which enables our faith to grow stronger (Jas. 2-3).

**The Command:** "*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...*" Gen. 22:2. Regarding this command, we note that: (1) It was emotionally difficult — taking his "*only son*" whom he loved, and offering him as a "*burnt offering!*" (2) From a logical perspective, it did not make sense — especially in view of the promise recorded in Gen. 21:12, in which, after the birth of Isaac God said to Sarah his mother, "*in Isaac your seed shall be called*."

**Abraham's response:** He "*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. 22:3. Please note that going to offer his son as a sacrifice unto God was regarded as an **act of worship** — one involving offering his son as "*a burnt offering*" unto God! Yet there was no hesitancy, notwithstanding how emotionally difficult this had to be! Nonetheless he "*rose early in the morning*" in order to carry out this most difficult command. Wouldn't it be great if all Christians would rise "*early in the morning*" every Lord's day to make sure they could arrive on schedule (and even ahead of schedule) to be present to worship God — worship which does not involve offering up one's own son unto God, but rather the offering of "*spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus*"

Christ,” I Peter 2:5?

**Abraham’s words of faith.** When he arrived at the proper place, he 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. 22:5. Amazing! Abraham knew that to offer his son as a *“burnt offering”* would necessitate the death of his son; nevertheless he said *“we* (which includes Isaac, the presumed sacrificial victim) *will come back to you.”* Abraham had not forgotten the original promise that *“in Isaac”* his *“seed shall be called,”* Gen. 21:12. This reminds us of Hebrews 11:17-19 which says: (v. 17) *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, (v. 18) of whom it was said, ‘in Isaac your seed shall be called, (v. 19) concluding that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”* Abraham’s faith was such that he did not question the command of God; to him, if God said *“do it,”* he intended to obey, even though the thing commanded might seem to contradict previous promises God had made to him.

**The Calm obedience of Abraham.** He *“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,”* Gen. 22:6. Isaac was to be the *“burnt offering,”* the *“knife”* was to slay Isaac, and the *“fire”* was to be used for the *“burnt”* offering. Yet there was no delay — Abraham was committed to obeying the commands of God, regardless of how difficult, or seemingly contradictory!

**Isaac’s question.** He said to his father: *“Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering,”* Gen. 22:7. At this point Abraham’s true faith appeared most evident. To Isaac’s sincere question, he said *“God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering,”* Gen. 22:8. So the two of them went to the specified *“place,”* where Abraham *“built an altar, and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar upon the wood,”* and then *“stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son,”* Gen. 22:9-12.

**The divine intervention.** Just before Abraham’s knife was thrust into his son, *“the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ So he said, ‘Here I am.’ 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. Then Abraham lifted up 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. 22:11-13.

**God renewed His promise** to Abraham: *“...because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son — blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice,”* Gen. 22:16-18.

### **The Amazing Symbolism - Isaac a Type of Christ!**

**Note:** For these “symbolism” points I am indebted to Burton Coffey and his commentary on the book of Hebrews.

1. Isaac was supernaturally the son of Abraham (Gen. 11:30; 18:11), and Jesus’ birth involved the supernatural agency of God, Matt. 1:18-20.

2. Isaac was the “*only begotten*” of his father, Heb. 11:17, and Jesus was the “*only begotten*” Son of God, John 3:16.

3. Isaac consented to be the sacrificial victim, Gen. 22:9; Jesus consented to be our sacrificial offering, John 1:29; 10:11.

4. Isaac carried the wood for the fire, Gen. 22:6; Jesus bore the cross upon which He was crucified, John 19:16-17.

5. Isaac, in a figure, was sacrificed by his father, Heb. 11:17; God sacrificed Jesus, John 3:16; Matt. 26:39.

### **Application:**

**1. True faith does not question God!** Cf. Isa. 55:8-9. God has His reasons for what He commands.

**2. It helps us when our faith is tried,** James 1:2-3. God tries our faith ;not to make it grievous, but to increase the measure of it. Cf. James 2:22.

**3. God always gives back more than He asks of us.** God spared Isaac; He gave him back to his father. God promised great blessing to Abraham, Gen. 22:17-18. And a study of the scriptures reveal that God honored every promise He made to Abraham. He tries us, but He has assured us that “*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,*” Rom. 8:18.

**4. God spared Isaac** by providing a lamb to be offered in place of Isaac. But God did not spare His “*only begotten Son,*” John 3:16, Who became our sacrificial “*lamb*” who came to take “*away the sin of the world,*” John 1:29.

5. Though we live in a different biblical dispensation than Abraham, it should be remembered that **the kind of faith** by which he was justified is the kind of faith by which we are justified, John 8:39; Rom. 4:12, and his faith was **not** the “faith only” variety, Jas. 2:21-24! For good reason Abraham was called “*the friend of God*” (Jas. 2:23), but all who obey the gospel of Christ are “*children of God,*” I John 3:1, “*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,*” Rom. 8:17!

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—B. Witherington