

A MOST UNUSUAL TEST | GENESIS 22:1-12

The greatest test of Abraham's life, and perhaps the most famous event of his life, is the sacrifice of Isaac found in Genesis 22. The story parallels his original call of Genesis 12:1 in which the Lord says, **Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.** Now the Lord says, **Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah** (Gen. 22:2). Both tests have a "triplet" (country/kindred/father's house and son, only son, whom thou lovest) and both have a *go* command.

At the first test we surmised that the Lord had chosen Abram because of his family values which would serve well for passing on the ways of the Lord to the next generation. But in this test *family values* seems to "go out the window." In fact, the perplexing issues of Genesis 22 have caused many to wonder *what is going on here?* How could the God of family values now be encouraging child sacrifice, and especially the sacrifice of the promised child? Some have speculated that Abraham misunderstood God, but this is difficult to sustain with the clarity of the text.

In the previous chapter Abraham had *passed the test* in letting his beloved son Ishmael go, at the instruction of both Sarah and the Lord. Now Abraham is given the test as to whether *he will do it again*.

In the first test, Abram is to go **unto a land that I will shew thee** (Gen. 12:1). Similarly, Abraham is now instructed to go into **the land of Moriah** (Gen. 22:2). This is the first time to hear of **Moriah**. If translated, the word would be *the place chosen by God*. It is only seen again in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the location of the Temple. In the first test Abram (as we have seen) struggled to know exactly where it was. In the second test, Abraham quickly **went unto the place of which God had told him** (Gen. 22:3). It was a three-day journey.

In verse 3, the word **and** is repeated six times, seemingly to emphasize the deliberate nature of what Abraham was doing, and his apparent calm nature in doing so. There seems to be an apparent faith in verse 5 also, since Abraham declares **I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you**. The verb **come** is in the first-person plural, thus showing Abraham's belief that *both* would return.

Abraham **took the fire in his hand** (v. 6) and made the journey. This **fire** was likely from his own altar and had likely been originally ignited by the Lord Himself. There is every indication that God only accepted a sacrifice from fire which He Himself sent (see Gen. 4:4, compared to Lev. 9:24, Judg. 6:21, 1 Kings 18:38, etc).

In verses 9-10 the repetition of **and** is again seen, causing the reader to dwell upon the activity each step along the way.

Abraham passed the test! He was willing to be obedient all the way to the end, always knowing that God would provide. He was obedient until he heard the command of God (vv. 11-12), at which point God provided for the sacrifice (v. 13).

A BLESSED PROVISION | GENESIS 22:13-18

As the Lord stops Abraham, He also provides a ram (v. 13) and Abraham uses it for the burnt offering. Having done so, he **called the name of that place Jehovahjireh** (v. 14), which means *Jehovah will see* (or "see to it," thus "provide"). Thus, the scripture declares, and thus it is said, **In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen** (v. 14). The meaning of this is ambiguous, possibly referring to the Lord providing the sacrifice but also possibly meaning that the Lord will be seen in that mountain. Indeed, later Solomon would build the Temple on that same place.

In verses 15-18 Abraham is given the blessing of obedience. Strangely, however, it is the same blessing that had previously been stated. Perhaps Abraham, having been "beat down" by the previous events, needed to hear it again.

It does appear that, in this test, Abraham was proven faithful to make God first in all his priorities. The previous accounts display a man who struggled with "ups and downs" in his spiritual life, but this closing account of Abraham proves to us (and to himself?) that he was *fully committed* to the Lord.

AN UNSATISFYING CONCLUSION | GENESIS 22:19-24

Verses 20-24 is a narrative about the long-lost brother, Nahor, and his family. But why is it there? Possibly it is there just for historic purposes. But could it be there because *after this point Abraham didn't have any family?* Let's consider that possibility.

First, in verse 19 says that Abraham went with unnamed **lads** and **Abraham dwelt at Beersheba**. But nothing is said of Isaac? And rather than dwelling in Beersheba with Abraham, the next time we see Isaac he is a single man living **in the south country** (Gen. 24:62), near the same place Ishmael was abandoned. Furthermore, in Genesis 23 we see Sarah living in Hebron, and Abraham coming to that place to mourn her death (Gen. 23:2). Could it be that Abraham's obedience to the Lord *cost him his family*, and that the only family he had left was his brother and nephews? Such a wild (and preposterous) statement seems unfounded to Christian audiences yet is often taught in rabbinical texts. In the end, we will likely never know, but the possibility certainly presents itself. If so, Abraham is the man who *leaves his family* and then is *over-devoted to his family*, especially with Lot and Ishmael, then *loses his family* and takes refuge in his *old family*.

Whether this speculation be true or wildly false, we do see a man, chosen of God, who struggled to be faithful and yet God was faithful to the end...and God provided!