

Unit I: The Genesis of Altars and Sacrifices

The Value of a Life

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 4:1-15

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 22:1-19

PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 22:1-14

KEY VERSE

Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. (Genesis 22:14, KJV)

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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.” (Genesis 22:14, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Examine the level of trust that Abraham demonstrated in obeying God's call.
- Value God's testing and trust Him in your own lives.
- Promise obedience to God amid testing.

*Key Terms

Altar (verse 9)—Hebrew: *mizbeach* (miz-bay'-akh): a place of slaughter; a place upon which sacrifices to a deity are made or where worship takes place.

Called (verse 11)—Hebrew: *qara* (kaw-raw'): proclaimed; read; invited; summoned.

Place (verse 3)—Hebrew: *maqom* (maw-kome'): a standing place; ground; site.

Ram (verse 13)—Hebrew: *ayil* (ah'-yil): an animal; in this context, the substitute sacrifice in place of Isaac.

Tested (verse 1)—Hebrew: *nasah* (naw-saw'): tried; proved; “did tempt” (KJV).

Worship (verse 5)—Hebrew: *shachah* (shaw-khaw'): to bow down; to give adoration; to revere.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**



The Biblical Context

The first part of the book of Genesis is identified as Primeval History or an account of the first years of the world's existence (chapters 1–11). The second part (chapters 12–50), Patriarchal History, is a record of God's calling of Abraham to become the father of His chosen people, Israel, his son Isaac, grandson Jacob, great-grandson Joseph, and Abraham's descendants' arrival in Egypt. Abraham's calling is foundational for the rest of all that follows in the Bible. Chapters 12–15 are devoted to Abraham's walk of faith with God, beginning with the unconditional covenant God made with him, the Abrahamic covenant, identifying him as the line through whom God would build many nations and make his name great. Abraham was promised that his descendants would inherit a land that he had not yet seen. Abraham had to walk by great faith. His faith walk was marked by periods of tests of his faith in God. Commentators vary on the number of tests Abraham encountered. Still, we can identify three significant ones: the call to leave his home in Ur of Chaldees, the test to trust God's promise concerning possessing Canaan and becoming the father of multiple descendants, and his most comprehensive test recorded in Genesis 22—sacrificing his son Isaac as a burnt offering on a mountain he would identify in the land of Moriah.

Introduction

Classroom testing is a crucial component in informing students and instructors about students' progress and what they need to do to improve or maintain to be successful. Testing in the spiritual arena is necessary to assess and evaluate the believer's spiritual progress. When we accepted Christ, we were automatically enrolled in what Warren Wiersbe identifies as the "School of Faith," in which God administers periodic faith tests that allow us to see where we are spiritually. Abraham enrolled in the "School of Faith" at age 5 and was still being "tested" by soul-searching experiences to determine the authenticity of his faith in God. Abraham's most comprehensive exam was given when God tested his faith by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac, through whom the Abrahamic covenant's promises were to be fulfilled. It was a test to determine his love for, faith in, and trust in God.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Tested Faith (*Genesis 22:1-8*)

KJV

AND IT came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.
5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

NIV

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.”

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.

The words “after these things” in **verse 1** set the context for Abraham’s ultimate faith test. Some time had passed since Isaac’s birth and weaning (see Genesis 21:8). Commentators suggested that he had matured and was most likely a teenager or a young adult. By this time, Abraham and Isaac had a bond of love. However, when God calls Abraham, he immediately responds appropriately, indicating that he is ready to hear what God has to say. “Tested” here is the Hebrew word *nissah*, which aims to prove the quality of something by putting it through a trial. Consequently, God allowed Abraham the ultimate opportunity to prove that his heart belonged to Him alone. Abraham experienced several tests of his faith, but this was the most significant and challenging of all—sacrificing his long-awaited heir (**verse 2**). God’s command tested whether Abraham trusted Him even when what He asked was illogical. Abraham’s response was unexpected—he obeyed instantly without questioning, arose early the next day, and prepared to comply with God’s unusual demand (**verse 3**).

Upon arriving at the designated site, Abraham took Isaac and commanded the two servants accompanying them to stay behind and wait until he and Isaac returned (**verses 4-5**). His statement reveals faith in God’s promise that He would establish His covenant with Isaac as

an everlasting one for his offspring. At this point, Abraham didn't know how God would do it but believed that the promise would be fulfilled, even if it meant resurrecting Isaac from the dead. Whatever Abraham expected, he did not hesitate to obey God's command to sacrifice Isaac (**verse 6**). Abraham had seen God turn around impossible circumstances as proof of His power and righteousness. Therefore, his resolve to follow the path of obedience was based on a tried and proven confidence in God to fulfill His promises. This confidence is further affirmed by his response to Isaac's question regarding the lamb for the sacrifice (**verses 7-8**). Abraham unhesitatingly responded that God would supply a lamb for Himself. It must be noted that Isaac did not require further explanations and willingly accompanied his father, suggesting that he possessed faith in his father's God.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why is knowing God's purpose for testing believers' faith necessary to receive the benefits that result?

A Rewarded Faith (Genesis 22:9-14)

KJV

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

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

NIV

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.”

Abraham arrived with Isaac, built the altar, arranged the wood, bound Isaac and laid him on the altar atop the wood, and obediently prepared to do what God commanded (**verses 9-10**). We are not given any details concerning Isaac’s reaction to what was happening. Still, it is conjectured that he was a willing participant because of his father’s advanced age; Isaac could easily overpower Abraham and run away. Therefore, in this context, Isaac foreshadows Jesus’ actions centuries later when He allowed Himself to be the propitiating sacrifice of humanity’s sins to please His Father. Yet, as unthinkable as God’s request was from humankind’s perspective, Abraham continued to demonstrate an unshakable faith by preparing to slaughter his son as a burnt offering to God. However, God dramatically intervened and prevented Abraham from making this sacrifice (**verses 11-12**). The angel of the Lord urgently called his name from heaven and stopped him just as he took the knife in his hand to slay Isaac. It was then confirmed that this was a test of Abraham’s faith because of his moral reverence for God, demonstrated by absolute trust and unquestioning obedience. Abraham’s demonstration of unwavering faith is an example of authentic worship. He willingly held nothing back as an expression of his love for God—and neither should we.

Consequently, God provided what Abraham needed as his reward for this extraordinary demonstration of faith, as Abraham prophetically predicted to Isaac. Abraham looked around and saw a ram caught in a thicket of thorns, took the ram, and offered it to God as a sacrifice in place of his son (**verse 13**). Abraham commemorated this experience by naming the place “The LORD Will Provide” (**verse 14**). For this test of faith, God was after Abraham’s heart, not the sacrifice, because it is the surrendering of the heart that makes a sacrifice of worship acceptable to Him (see 1 Samuel 1:15-22; Psalm 51:16-17; Jeremiah 7:22-23). The outcome of Abraham’s faith test mirrors God’s offering of His Son as the sacrifice for humanity. God gave up His most cherished possession as a substitute to reconcile and restore the broken relationship between Him and humanity.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What spiritual disciplines must be acquired and practiced to mature to totally surrender the heart to God?

A Closing Thought

The supreme test of Abraham’s faith was designed to determine whether his love for God superseded his love for anyone or anything else. Abraham passed his test with “flying colors” by

demonstrating an unquestioning willingness to sacrifice his only son because God asked him to do so. Although God may never ask us to sacrifice our ties with a family member to test our faith, He will test it in some way to determine if we are entirely surrendered to Him. Consequently, our responsibility is to practice those spiritual disciplines that will help us deepen and strengthen our relationship with Him so that He can progressively transform our lives into Christ's image. We can begin by intentionally presenting ourselves to Him as living sacrifices daily.

Your Life

God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his most cherished possession—his long-awaited son, Isaac. Since believers are to expect tests of their faith, consider what you are willing to sacrifice to prove to God that you are surrendering your heart to Him entirely. What might prevent you from doing so, and how can you mature spiritually to demonstrate Abraham's level of faith?

Your World!

Abraham did not arrive at this level of absolute trust in God overnight. For him, it was a lifelong journey of encountering "mini-faith tests" preparing him for this one—which required him to act on what he knew about God. Therefore, consider reviewing and reflecting on the tests of faith you have experienced and how God delivered you. Then, commit to using this review to prepare to face and pass the inevitable faith tests.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, help us use what we know about You and what You have done on our behalf to strengthen our resolve to commit ourselves to You entirely, trusting You to supply what we need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Consider your response to this question for next week's lesson: "How do we show our gratitude for the legacies of those who have invested in our lives within the faith community?"

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, June 16	"Love the Alien as Yourself"	(Leviticus 19:30-37)
TUESDAY, June 17	"Isaac's Prayer for Rebekah"	(Genesis 25:19-28)
WEDNESDAY, June 18	"Living as an Alien"	(Genesis 26:1-11)
THURSDAY, June 19	"God Will Supply Every Need"	(Philippians 4:10-19)
FRIDAY, June 20	"God Blesses and Provides"	(Genesis 26:12-23)
SATURDAY, June 21	"Live in Harmony; Welcome One Another"	(Romans 15:1-13)
SUNDAY, June 22	"Making Peace with Others"	(Genesis 26:24-33)