

Faith and Trials

Abraham—part 15

Genesis 22:1-19

September 20, 2026

DAY 1: The climax of Abraham's story

1. God's covenant promise was that through Abraham's descendants all nations would be blessed. They would eventually number as many as the stars of heaven.

2. But several decades had passed and there was no blood descendant from Abraham and Sarah. They were well past the biological years of being able to have a child. Finally, God miraculously enables them to conceive and Isaac is born, the child of the promise.

Genesis 17:19 ... your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

3. We pick up today's episode.

*Genesis 22:1 Sometime 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."

4. Throughout human history child sacrifice had been practiced. When life was catastrophic, and there was nothing to stem the tide of suffering, people in tribes all around the world turned to superstition as a last resort—child sacrifice. Perhaps that would quell the wrath of the gods. The effort was to try to make right whatever humans had made wrong. We have no record anywhere of a law against that until Deuteronomy 18:10.

5. If there was ever a more dumbfounding message, this one tops the list. For decades, Abraham and Sarah had walked by faith for the birth of their promised heir. And now God gives **this** directive???

Genesis 22:3 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 obeys God's command the next morning.

7. What strikes you so far in this story?

DAY 2: The story unfolds

Genesis 22:6 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?”

1. We are not told the emotional state and emotional reactions of Abraham or Isaac. We are not told about the heartbreaking internal wrestling, wrestling with God. And how would he answer Isaac’s question? How would Abraham explain all of this to his son?

2. The writer emphasizes the intensity of the pain. Abraham’s trial is different than even the trial we endure when losing a loved one. Abraham is also the instrument at work. The language is as emotional as emotion can be, touching the deepest parts of his soul.

3. In addition to the heartache he is facing, this strikes at the very essence of his very life! From all the way back to when he left Haran until now, the promise of descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens has been the main plot line.

4. There is a theme isolation in this passage. He had to separate himself from his servants. How could they have possibly understood what was going on?

Genesis 22:6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife.

Genesis 22:6b 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?”

Genesis 22:8a Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

Genesis 22:9 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.

Genesis 22:11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

5. This all seems so inconceivable, but as we will see Abraham had landed on an answer to the awful conundrum he faced. God had told Abraham that Isaac was the child of promise through whom descendants would bless the world, and yet, before Isaac could have *any* descendants, God had commanded Abraham to kill his son!

6. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

(We will delve into the conundrum tomorrow).

DAY 3: The conundrum

1. The conundrum: Abraham wrestled with one central question. At their advanced age, if Isaac was killed, and not the heir upon which all of his descendants would become like the stars of the heavens, how could God's promise be fulfilled?
2. He was utterly heartbroken and stricken with grief. How did Abraham find the strength to do this? We find the first hint of the answer back in v. 5 in his instructions to the two servants he took with them for the trip. "*We will worship and then we will come back to you.*"
3. The resolution to the apparent conundrum was formulating during the three-day journey. Let's get inside Abraham's head and reasoning.
4. What had gone so tragically wrong with human life? Abraham had been involved in a war to rescue his nephew and nephew's family. He had seen how women were treated in Egypt, as in a harem. He had seen how Sodom and Gomorrah plunged so far into depravity and unfettered sexual assaults of all kinds that only judgment would finally end the awful evils inflicted on their victims. And he had seen the utter folly of sin in his own family with the disaster involving Hagar, the unmitigated and unending drama between Sarah and Hagar, and the awful painful separation that ended it.
5. What could be a cure for all of these types of human sins? Was there some kind of sacrifice that could be made as a remedy? Might not the seed, the son, play a role in a solution for humankind? Could this sacrifice be part of that story? Were they central figures in a giant story being played out, a story of mass redemption?
6. How could this dilemma be solved? First, he might have thought that God was not righteous as He had witnessed God to be. But that's not what a lifetime of walking with God had demonstrated. Second, he likely fell back on truths about himself. He was finite, with finite knowledge, and finite understanding. He was a mere mortal in comparison with God. Though Abraham could not think of a resolution to the dilemma, perhaps an infinite, all-wise, sovereign God could bring about a solution to the dilemma. Abraham's experience with God had led him in this direction. Abraham's faith was based on the evidence of decades in walking with God. God was faithful to His word and His promises. His mind must have been ruminating in this way. "How can God be true to His promise if I sacrifice Isaac? What is God going to do to remain a God of honor?"
7. Sometime in the night before they left, as Abraham wrestled with God Abraham realized the only way he could sacrifice his only son AND the son to still be the fulfillment of the promise was God's ability to raise Isaac from the dead.
7. The passage indicates that Abraham found satisfactory answers to this apparent dilemma on his way to the sacrifice.

*Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." r ¹⁹ Abraham **reasoned** that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.*

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: The climax

Genesis 22:9 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.

1. The intent and tension of the moment is about to reach its climax with the death of his son. Suddenly, divine intervention explodes on the scene. Abraham's intent is so fixed that the angel of the Lord calls out to him quickly and twice.

Genesis 22:11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

Genesis 22:12 "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."

2. Abraham has faced all kinds of trials since the beginning of our study. Through each and every trial God "showed up," speaking, comforting, directing, commanding, leading Abraham and acting. Divine intervention has been a regular part of our study.

3. When we go through trials, the question is always the same: "Why?" And in my pastoral experience is universally followed with, "There must be some reason for this. I don't know what it is or why but there must be a reason." Those statements can be said with utter cynicism toward God on one end, or with bewildering honest sentiments.

4. What we minimize is God's character, God's nature, God's purposes, and God's heart. We only faintly see God's larger story of redemption, our desperate need for continued transformation, the opportunity to reflect God well to others when we are under trials, and to trust God with His ability to redeem any and every trial we endure.

Perhaps we should consider into Whose hands we commit ourself!

5. God's larger story continues: in Abraham, through Isaac, and down through history!

Genesis 22:15 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, because you have obeyed me." ¹⁹ Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

6. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: Foreshadowing and meaning

FORESHADOWING:

1. As we've seen in this series on Abraham, one of the things that so many of the episodes of the Old Testament portray is a picture or a form or a type of what is to come. This is repeatedly done of the Messiah. This episode in Genesis 22 is one of the greatest of these. It gives us a clear picture, not only of the Messiah, Jesus, but the gospel! We see the gospel from God's point of view, the gospel from man's point of view, and the gospel from Jesus' point of view.

2. This episode foreshadows places and events called Gethsemane, Calvary, and the resurrection. Abraham is sent on a three-day journey to Mount Moriah.

a. **MORIAH:** is the exact same location that King David will buy a threshing floor to aid in worship that will one day be the site of the Solomon's temple (1 Chron. 21:18; 2 Chron. 3:1).

b. 2 Chron. 3:1 indicates that this hill is the hill upon which Jerusalem would one day be built. In Abraham's day there was no city there, no town there, no hamlet or outpost. It was just a barren hill. The symbolism is stunning. On the very hill where Isaac would be offered up as a sacrifice, on that very hill would Jesus die as a sacrifice for sin. "God will see to it," meaning God will see to our salvation. "The Lord will provide," meaning God Himself will provide the sacrifice for sin.

3. It would take centuries to fully comprehend the foreshadowing of this redemptive story.

Genesis 22:8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

John 1:29 "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

4. Here is more foreshadowing:

- Isaac carrying the wood like the Christ sentenced to death carried his own crossbeam

(John 19:17)

- Isaac allows himself to be bound and laid on the wood like Jesus also laid on the crossbeam and bound to it.
- Isaac's passive acceptance of self-offering is as stunning as Abraham's.

Isaiah 53:7 "Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

- In this Isaac proves himself a child of the promise. Jesus is the key descendant!

Hebrews 9:14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, ^h so that we may serve the living God!

MEANING:

The meaning of this episode:

- The Lord will provide the sacrifice for sin.

5. Abraham now understands the answer he gave Isaac. "The Lord will provide." And Abraham names that hill, "the Lord will provide."

Hebrew translators have also translated the name of this place, “on the mount of the Lord, He shall be seen.”

- On this mount, the Lord will be seen.

6. We see the heart of God most clearly. Sin will be atoned for, not by man, but by God’s action.

- We can have confidence in God that even in the most dire of heartaches, our redeemer God is at work telling a larger story in our lives and through our lives.
- A day is coming when we will finally see the larger story of every heartache.
- The testimony of untold numbers of people is similar to Abraham’s. By God’s grace they were able to face even the worst they could imagine and began to understand the heart of God like never before. “Even in THIS, God was at work for ultimate good.”

7. What had Abraham come to believe?

Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” ^{r 19} Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

8. The three-day journey, ruminating over this apparent dilemma drew him to this conclusion. God would, once again, provide a miracle regarding the boy. His thinking likely went along this way. First, God was not a liar. He has always been faithful and true to His word and promises. Second, God told me I would have a son. Here he is. Third, this son is the promised son and the son of the promise. God’s promises hinged on Isaac. Fourth, Isaac must live, at least until he has descendants. Death now was too soon. Fifth, though the contradiction appears to rest with God, God is not a God of contradiction. This is the foundational fact. Sixth, what did Abraham know about the character of God? God was sovereign, personal, purposeful, faithful, a miracle-working God. Seventh, the miracle-working God would solve the dilemma. Somehow, some way.

CONCLUSION

9. The stunning conclusion of the story doesn’t end with the ram caught in the thicket. It is as if God said to Abraham and to us, “Not your best Abraham, but mine! Not your lamb, Abraham, but mine! Not your son, but mine!”

(John 1:29, 36; Romans 8:32)

SACRIFICE, SUBSTITUTION, RESURRECTION.

10. Thus, the very transaction which so severely tried the faith of Abraham showed him all that his faith longed so much to see. He saw the day of Christ. He saw the humiliation of Christ and the victory of Christ.

11. When God's hand was raised at Calvary, and Jesus was already nailed to the cross, there was no one to call God's name, "God, God, don't touch the boy."

12. Calvary, the very place where an even deeper dilemma than Abraham was resolved. How could God be both just in the punishment of sinners, punishment they deserved, and at the same time merciful to sinners? This was a seemingly impossible dilemma. But the dilemma was resolved at the cross.