

The Testing Of Abraham

Introduction. In James 1:13, the Bible assures us that God does not tempt people with a view to causing them to sin. But like any good teacher, he tests His disciples so they can improve (James 1:3-4, 12). In Genesis 22, Abraham is put to the test and the narrative of it is recounted so Israel and all of us can learn from it.

Abraham was at a junction in his life. Sarah, who had conceived Isaac in her old age, would die in the next chapter, Abraham's life would fade in the background after this and the stage would be occupied by his son Isaac. Abraham faced the most critical test of his life. Passing the test would cement his legacy in Jewish history, and Abraham would receive the highest and most affectionate accolade God had given man.

I. The Power Of An Example

- A. God had told Abraham more than 30 years earlier to say goodbye to his past (Genesis 12:1, 4) and then again, only recently, he insisted that Abraham say goodbye to his present, his son Ishmael whom he dearly loved (Genesis 21:11-14; 17:18). Now on this occasion God asks Abraham to say goodbye to his future by sacrificing Isaac, the child of hope and promise.
- B. The Bible looks back to this old man's trust in God as one of the essential definitions of real religion (cp. Romans 4:1-3). We can only imagine the struggle in his heart. He was to destroy all that made life worthwhile and joyous to him. All that God had told him about a blessed future now seems gone.
- C. And it simply was not a matter of him resigning himself to Isaac's death — he himself had to build the fire, bind the boy, raise the knife, look in his eyes, and plunge it into his defenseless body. It was not enough that he had to suffer the loss — he was being compelled to carry out the process (Genesis 22:6-10).
- D. And Abraham did it! No wonder he was called the friend of God (James 2:18-23). This trusting old wanderer was completely devoted to God. He becomes a role model for us. We not only need a standard by which to live (2 Peter 1:3-4), we need examples and role models. People who can do more than tell us what we need, people who can show us and in showing us can inspire us to their heights of knowledge (Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18:24-26), good works (Phoebe, Romans 16:1-2), and kindness (Dorcas, Acts 9:36-39).

II. The Three Day Ride

- A. God did not awaken Abraham in the middle of the night and urge him to immediately take the boy's life. He told him to take him to the region of Moriah and that was a three day ride from where they were (Genesis 22:1-4). He had time to think about it. You do not have to be a psychologist to understand what went through Abraham's mind. It would be easy to assume Abraham's faith kept him from pain, but that is not how he acted when Ishmael was to be removed (Genesis 21:11) and there is no reason to believe he reacted any differently here.
- B. One's willingness to obey is tested by persistence or endurance (Job 7:3; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). In the heat of combat very ordinary people perform extraordinary feats. Abraham's test was not over in a flash — he had three long days to talk himself out of obeying. To his everlasting credit, the delay between

the order and the execution made no dent in his willingness to obey. Abraham did not ask for further clarification, bargain for a later date, or fake moral disgust at the request (Hebrews 11:17-19).

- C. When Bible believers rehearse the accounts of marvelous deeds in the ages to come, they will tell of David's gallant rush against Goliath (1 Samuel 17:43-45), of Mary's impetuous anointing of her Lord (Matthew 26:6-13), and Stephen's swift and loving prayer to Christ as he dies (Acts 7:59-60). But they will also tell of unsung heroes, men and women, boys and girls, whose obedience was lifelong and whose crucifixion was a daily affair (Luke 9:23). They will tell of people who, without the cheering audience, kept a fire burning on the altar of God, just like Abraham (Genesis 12:7-8; 13:4, 18).

III. Moriah's Message For Israel

- A. Isaac was a child of promise, a gift from God to a man and woman who could not produce a child (Genesis 18:11-14). Isaac's existence is the result of God's grace and his place in history is defined by the purposes of God. Israel must see herself in Isaac. She was a nation whose very existence was God's work and her place and vocation in history was defined by the purposes of God. Isaac meant what God purposed him to mean and Israel meant what God purposed her to mean. Likewise, the church cannot define herself.
- B. Israel was to see herself in Isaac and so must the church (Galatians 4:28). The origin and continuance of all three was and still is a matter of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 15:10). Therefore, there can never be a legitimate protest by us as far as doing the Lord's will is concerned.
- C. But at the point of crisis, God provided for Isaac when Abraham did His will (Genesis 22:13-14). Israel was to understand that He would provide for her too at her point of crisis (Isaiah 43:2). The church has this assurance too (Matthew 6:33-34; Revelation 12:6). Abraham believed nothing was impossible to Him, and nothing is impossible or too hard for Him to do (Matthew 19:26). God is the God of provision, and has not nor will not fail you (Psalm 27:14; 34:8-11; Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 13:5).

Conclusion. In a world full of sunshine there would only be deserts. It is easy to obey God when it takes little sacrifice on our part (2 Samuel 24:24), in matters that do not really test us (Matthew 5:46-47). What God wants to know is how we will fare when the going gets tough (Job 23:10; 1 Peter 1:6-7). How will we perform when God truly asks something difficult, perhaps impossible of us? Do not forget that Isaac was Abraham's life. Abraham loved his son dearly. So when hardships come that torment us, look up to the heart of a loving Father, trust His good purpose, and be strong. God will never ask you and I to do something He would not or has not done.

The ultimate and perfect fulfillment of God's promise to provide for the need of man is in the gift of His Son (Romans 5:8). Jesus is the unblemished and spotless lamb (1 Peter 1:19) who was led as a sheep to slaughter (Acts 8:32), the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). He brings hope, glory, dignity, and comfort to those who are obedient (Hebrews 5:8-9). He gave us His very best, we must not give Him anything less than our very best.