

INTRODUCTION

We are continuing our series through “Big Events of the Old Testament.” This is the third and final message in which I’ll be talking about Abraham. We talked about how “Abraham Had Many Sins” and how “God Made a Great Promise to Abraham.” Tonight we’re going to talk about “God’s Agonizing Testing of Abraham.”

I remember when I was a child and how awful I was and how much I misbehaved in church. There were a lot of times when I went home from church on Sunday afternoon and got a whipping just for the way I acted in church. I sat with my mother, because my daddy took up the offering. He was the one who greeted people and passed out the cards and he was always standing over to the side. Even though I was sitting with my mother, he was always leaning over during the service saying, “Hush! Hush! Hush!” I was 14 years old before I found out they were “ushers” and not “hushers.” Probably the times I was the quietest and the stillest was when my mother handed me her big old Bible. It is said, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” In her big old Bible she had some pictures. There were maybe a dozen color pictures in the front and back. The number one picture that captivated my attention as a young man was a painting of what we are going to talk about tonight. It was of an old man with long hair and a flowing beard. He had his hand raised with a sharp dagger in his hand. Laid out in front of him was what appeared to be a little boy with golden ringlets of hair and an innocent look upon his face. It looked as if this mean, old man with the beard was about to kill the little boy. Then in this same painting there was a picture of an angel who was reaching down from heaven and the angel had grabbed Abraham’s hand. I can’t tell you how many times I stared at that picture saying, “What is that all about? What in the world is taking place in this picture?” That is a picture of what took place in the life of Abraham when God tested him.

Genesis 22:1-2. “Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’”

I. GOD TESTS HIS CHILDREN

What do we learn from these first two verses? Number one: God tests his children. Abraham is not the only child of God who has been tested. Throughout history in the word of God, God has tested his children. He tested Paul, Job, Peter, and he tested me and God is *still* testing his children! God tests his best. He very seldom tests his children who are rebellious and backslidden and turned away from him. He tests the best. It’s interesting to me that God did not test Sarah or Lot but he chose the one individual he had called out for a special job—he tested Abraham. If you are trying to really grow as a Christian, if you are trying to give the best of your commitment to Jesus Christ, you are trying to surrender all that you have, and all that you are to God, you be ready! God is going to test you.

The problem is Abraham didn’t know it was a test. The problem was Job never knew he was being tested and the problem with us is when God is testing us we seldom know it is a test. All we know is it is some kind of predicament we find ourselves in. What about this testing? What

can we learn? What did he do for Abraham?

1. Go to a new place

The first thing he said to Abraham was “I want you to go to a new place.” Sometimes God gives us a command to go to a place we have never been before. It may be a new area of service, it may be a new church, it may be a new location, it may be a new job, it may be a new town, it may be a new challenge—but God will say, “I want you to go to a new place.”

In this passage of scripture God said, “Abraham, I want you to go to Moriah.” That’s very important. Mount Moriah is in the middle of Jerusalem. Most Bible scholars believe at this time it was an uninhabited wilderness. Later, Jerusalem was a Jebusite city, but at this time we believe it was just a wilderness. It was a mountain. I want you to know that is the exact place where Jerusalem was later built and the temple itself was built on Mount Moriah. Today if you go to Jerusalem and you go up on the Temple Mount today, the most imposing, dominating building is what’s called, “The Dome of the Rock.” If you have ever seen any pictures of the landscape of Jerusalem, you see this beautiful golden dome. To enter it, you must take off your shoes. It’s a Muslim holy spot. When you enter, all you see is a rock, The Dome of the Rock, but it is the top of Mount Moriah. That’s exactly where the temple was built. It is a holy spot to Jews. Abraham sacrificed Isaac there. It’s a holy spot to Islam, because the Islamic legend says Mohammed stepped foot there before he stepped into heaven. It is also very important to us as Christians, because we see in this incident a very beautiful picture of the sacrifice of Jesus. Moriah is the main mountain, but there are mountain ridges that go off from it. Mount Zion is in the same area. There’s another mountain that is part of the same mountain range: Mount Calvary, the Place of the Skull. You can stand on Mount Moriah and throw a rock and almost hit Mount Calvary. That’s how close they are.

God said, “I want you to go to the region of Moriah” which speaks of the general vicinity, and then he said, “I want you to go on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” We don’t know for sure and won’t know until we get to heaven, but it would make perfect sense in the impeccable sense of geography that God maintains that the very place where this sacrifice was made was Mount Calvary because it is in the same area. So he said, “Abraham. Go to a new place.” Sometimes God tells us what to do and we don’t like to go to new places. We like being settled in our old comfort zone. We know who the people are, we know what we have been doing, we don’t want to go to a new place but sometimes God says, “I’m going to test you. Go to a new place.”

2. Give up what is most precious to you

Number two, sometimes God says, “Give up what is most precious to you.” He said, “Abraham. I want you to give up your only son, the son whom you love.” We noticed earlier Abraham had another son through Hagar, whose name was Ishmael, but it’s as if God didn’t recognize Ishmael as a true son, because he was born out of wedlock. We talked about how Abraham and Sarah both got ahead of the will of God, and they tried to manipulate God’s plan and tried to create a solution for God’s problem and God already had it figured out. So he said, “I want you to take your only son, Isaac, and I want you to sacrifice him as a burnt offering.” What does that mean?

A sacrifice was a living animal that was put to death. Then it would be burned as a sacrifice to God. So that's what God is saying. "I want you to kill Isaac and then I want you to burn his body as a sacrifice to me." Can you imagine any more difficult command than that? "Oh God! Anything but that!" But Abraham was willing to do whatever God told him to do.

II. DURING OUR TESTING, WE MUST TRUST GOD

During testing, we must *trust him!* That's all you need to do during testing, "trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust" that's first "and obey."

Genesis 22:3-5. "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 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.'"

The word *boy* is a word that could be used for any age from a teen to a young soldier. We're not talking about a preschooler here, we're not even talking about a preteen. Isaac was a young man. The last thing he says is, "we will worship and then we will come back to you." Wait a minute! Wasn't he going to kill Isaac? This has to be a mistake, doesn't it? Both were going, but only one was going to come back right? Wrong! Abraham was saying, "We're going to go to worship and we are going to return!" You say, "I know why he said that, preacher. He knew back in the back of his mind God was going to provide a substitute and he was not going to have to carry through with this." Wrong. We're going to see why he could say, "We are going to come back to you." He had *faith*.

Genesis 22:6-8. "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 together, 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?' Abraham answered 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son.' And the two of them went on together."

The question of the entire Old Testament is "Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" The answer to that question is "God is going to provide a lamb for himself." Of course we know the true answer to that question is "Jesus is the Lamb of God."

Genesis 22:9-14. "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. Then he reached out his hand and he took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven. 'Abraham! Abraham!' 'Here I am', he replied. '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.' 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. 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.’

1. Abraham had faith in God’s plan

When God tests you, the only thing you need to do is trust and obey. Abraham trusted God’s plan and we need to trust the same way. I confess sometimes when God tells me to do something in his word, I have the terrible tendency to want to say, “WHY? Why do I have to do it that way? Isn’t there some other way?” That is wrong. Abraham didn’t say, “Now, God, are you sure you want me to do that? He’s the only son I have. Wait a minute, God. Are you sure you want me to kill him? Can’t I just dress him up real nice and parade him in front of you, God? Can’t we just dress him up real nice and point to him and say, “Hey, this is a gift from God. His name means ‘laughter.’ God gave us this son in our old age. God, isn’t it enough just to dedicate him to you?” No Abraham didn’t do that. He trusted God’s plan. God has a plan for your life and his plan for your life and my life is a much better plan than any of us could ever figure out for our own lives. We get in trouble when we try to exchange God’s plan for our own, because we think God’s plan doesn’t make sense. It doesn’t make any sense for one man to kill his only son, does it? After all God has promised he would have descendants more numerous than the stars and the sands of the sea. Wait a minute, God! It just doesn’t make sense! I have learned I am learning a lot of the commands of God in this word don’t make sense from a human standpoint. If you are only going to obey the ones you can figure out and those you think make sense, you won’t obey most of them. He trusted God’s plan.

This is a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ. There was one beloved son and God said about Jesus, “This is my beloved son. Listen to him.” Just as Jesus carried the cross up Calvary, thousands of years earlier, the only beloved son of God’s promise carried the wood up Calvary. Did you notice Isaac had to be a willing sacrifice? We don’t know exactly how old Abraham was, but we do know he is a hundred years older than Isaac. Imagine Isaac is 16. Don’t you think a 16-year-old boy can overpower a 116-year-old man? Do you think when Isaac was tied up with that rope and laid up on the altar, don’t you think a 16-year-old boy could have said, “Wait a minute! What are you doing, old man? Stop it!” No not only did Abraham trust God’s plan, but Isaac also was a willing sacrifice. Always remember that about Jesus. They didn’t murder Jesus. He was not a martyr. He willingly laid down his life! And that was God’s plan all along.

Abraham was so certain of God’s plan that he said to the servants, “We are going to come back to you.” Some of you may struggle with this story and wonder how in the world Abraham could be willing to do that and how a loving God could give a command like that. Actually, there’s a very easy answer to the question in Hebrews 11:17-19. “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son. Even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did raise Isaac back from death.’” That means when Abraham laid Isaac out and tied him down and when he took the knife; Isaac was as good as dead! When God said, “Stop! Abraham.” and released Isaac it was as if God brought him back from the dead. Hebrews said, “figuratively speaking” Take it one step further back. Abraham literally believed that even if he killed Isaac, he had so much faith in God and God’s promise, that he believed God was going to raise Isaac

from the dead on the spot. Abraham believed God so much he thought, “If I cut the throat of my son and he bleeds until his heart stops beating, until he is stone cold dead, I have so much faith in God, I believe God is going to raise him back from the dead and both of us are going to come walking down that mountain. And God is going to keep his promise!” That’s *faith!*

2. Abraham had faith in God’s provision

Number two Abraham had faith in God’s provision. That’s why he named the place, “Jehovah Jireh” our God will provide! We throw that word around, don’t we? Provision. You buy provisions. God provides. *Provide* means comes from two Latin words *pro*, meaning “before” and *video*, meaning “to see.” The word *Provide to see before what is needed*. In other words when the Bible says, God provides for you and provides for me, it means God sees before the fact what we need. We really don’t know what we need, but God does. He can see before we need it! That’s what it means. He provides for our needs.

Isaac, being an inquisitive young man said, “Daddy, I see the fire. I see the wood but where’s the lamb?” That’s the question of the Old Testament “Where is the lamb?” Abraham said, “God will provide a lamb.” There are three pinnacles you can connect starting with that one question in Genesis, 22. the cry of history is “Where is the lamb?” You see the cry of holiness when John the Baptist points his finger at Jesus when he starts his ministry and he says, “Behold the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) And Isaac asked the question, “Where’s the lamb?” Thousands of years later, John the Baptist answered the question. “Behold. Look. The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus died on the cross and the third pinnacle in this theme is in Revelation 5:12. You and I all the redeemed of all the ages will be gathered around the throne of the Lamb of God and we are going to sing, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” God’s word is so wonderful in the way it is connected from the beginning to the end. Genesis: “Where is the Lamb” John: “Behold the Lamb” Revelation: “Worthy is the Lamb.” Our God is the God who provides. He sees what we need and he provides that.

Somebody said, “Have you ever thought that while Abraham was building that altar and while he was tying Isaac up that he saw that ram in his peripheral vision?” No. I don’t think that at all. Year ago, when I was preaching on this, a man with Australian accent came up to me after the service. I didn’t say anything about how long the ram was caught in the thicket, and this Australian came up to me and said, “Did you know that when Abraham was sacrificing Isaac that ram was not caught in the thicket at that time?” I said, “No I didn’t know that. It’s not in the text is it?” I went back and I read it and it doesn’t say anything about that. He said, “No it’s not in the Bible. But I’ve been a shepherd all of my life and I’ve learned one thing about rams. I’ve learned that they are mean and ornery. I have seen rams get caught in a thicket and they don’t stay caught in a thicket. If a ram catches its horns in a thicket, it will either break free or it will break its neck but a ram doesn’t just stand in a thicket and wait for somebody to come along and take it out. So you can be certain that in the whole process of building the altar, tying up Isaac, getting ready to sacrifice him that the ram was not caught.” At precisely the right time, God provided a substitute. That’s the key. God provided a substitute for Isaac and they took that male ram and put it on the altar and Isaac watched as in his place the ram became his substitute and the throat of the ram was cut until its blood poured out. Then they lit the wood of the altar and it burned

and it became a sacrifice to God. The ram became the substitute for Isaac. Instead of Isaac dying, the ram died in his place and Isaac lived.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who became my substitute and your substitute. As that beautiful old song by Dottie Rambo: I should have been crucified / I should have suffered and died / I should have hung on that cross in disgrace / But Jesus, God’s son, took my place.

Dr. John Phillips wrote one short paragraph about this in his commentary on Genesis. “Was there ever such a dark, tragic work performed beneath the wide vault of heaven in all the ages of time or all the annals of eternity? God saw his only son led like a lamb to the slaughter, laid out upon the wood and the spikes driven home. God watched the whole dark, dreadful business on Golgotha’s Hill not far from Moriah. Then, God himself had taken the great knife of his own fierce wrath against sin and had lifted it up as the darkness swept in and had wreaked on his son the eternal hell that our sins deserve. That was the work of the cross. The work that was enacted in type by Abraham on that lonely mountain in the land of Moriah and enacted in fact at the place called Calvary.”

Aren’t you glad when Abraham came to kill his son God said, “Stop! You don’t have to kill your son. Here’s a substitute.” When God’s only son carried that wooden cross upon his back and climbed perhaps the very same mountain, there was no substitute. He *was* the substitute. As Isaiah 53 says, “And God has laid upon him the iniquities of us all.” You see Jehovah Jireh is still Jehovah Jireh. He not only provided a substitute for Abraham, he provided a substitute for me and you. So when you are tested, trust him. Trust God’s plan and trust God’s provision.

III. GREAT BLESSINGS RESULT FROM OBEDIENCE

The third lesson is great blessings result from obedience.

Genesis 22:15-18. “The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 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, and through your offspring all nations on the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.’”

God repeats the promise the stars the sands of the sea but this is the first time he said all the people of the earth are going to be blessed. Why? Because you have obeyed me. When you are tested and trust and obey, God will bless your obedience. You say, “Well that’s a great Old Testament story. Does the New Testament talk about that?” Look at James 1:12. “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”

Is God calling upon you to go to a new place or to give up something precious and you don’t know what is going on? Don’t worry! It could be God is just testing you and now God wants you to trust and he wants you to obey. When you pass the test, you’ll graduate to the next grade and God will test you again. You will be blessed as you continue to obey.

OUTLINE

I. GOD TESTS HIS CHILDREN

1. Go to a new place
2. Give up what is most precious to you

II. DURING OUR TESTING, WE MUST TRUST GOD

Abraham had faith in God’s:

1. Plan
2. Provision

III. GREAT BLESSINGS RESULT FROM OBEDIENCE



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes