

Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace — study 20



The ULTIMATE TEST (22:1-19)

22:1,2 Why wouldn't Abraham reject this command as inconsistent with the voice of Yahweh?

(1) I think a great deal of confusion in the minds of many concerning the story here told, has been created by the fact that it has been considered as a lonely incident, rather than as a link in a chain. There are seven occasions upon which we are told that Jehovah appeared to Abraham, or dealt with him in some way, in direct, personal, face-to-face communion. Of these, this is the seventh and final one. It is final in point of number, and certainly it is so in depth of value. In this experience Abraham was led into a new and more intimate fellowship with God than he had known before. -- **G. Campbell Morgan**, *Great Chapters of the Bible* p. 27

(2) The father of the faithful is now perfected. The obedience of faith drew Abraham into a strange land; by the humility of faith he gave way to his nephew Lot; strong in faith, he fought four kings of the heathen with 318 men; firm in faith, he rested in the word of promise, notwithstanding all the opposition of reason and nature; bold in faith, he entreated the preservation of Sodom under

THE GREAT TEST
— but not before
seven steps
in the growth of
Abraham's faith

(right — Franz Delitzsch)



increasingly lowered conditions; joyful in faith, he received, named and circumcised the son of promise; with the loyalty of faith he submitted at the bidding of God to the will of Sarah and expelled Hagar and Ishmael; and with the gratitude of faith he planted a tamarisk to the ever faithful God in the place where Abimelech had sued for his friendship and accepted his present, -- now his faith was to be put to the severest test to prove itself victorious, and to be rewarded accordingly. -- **Franz Delitzsch**, *New Commentary on Genesis* Vol.2 p.84

(3) The child-sacrifices around him were not regarded as crimes, but as worship, and, while his affections were the same as ours, and his father's heart was wrung, to slay Isaac did not present itself to him as a crime in the way in which it does so to us. God deals with men on the moral and spiritual level to which they have attained, and, by descending to it, raises them higher. -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *Expositions: The Book of Genesis* p.162

22:3-5 How has Abraham changed? (cf. chapters 11-13)

(4) Luther has pointed out, in his own terse language, how to human reason it must have seemed as if either God's promise would fail, or else his command be of the devil, and not of God. From this perplexity there was only one issue -- to bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." And Abraham "staggered not" at the word of God; doubted it not; but was strong in faith, "accounting" -- yet not knowing it -- "that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead; from whence he also received him in a figure." -- **Alfred Edersheim**, *Bible History* Vol.2 p.101

ISAAC
— like most believers,
the quiet victim, the
servant sacrificed

(5) First of all, he was too familiar with God's voice to mistake it. Too often had he listened to it to make a mistake in this solemn crisis. And he was sure that God had some way of deliverance; which, though he might not be able to forecast it, would secure the sparing of Isaac's life. Besides, he lived at a time when such sacrifices as that to which he was called were very common; and he had never been taught decisively that they were abhorrent to the mind of his Almighty Friend. We must, in reading Scripture, remember that at first all God's servants were more or less affected by the religious notions that were current in their age; and we must not imagine that in all respects they were divested of the misconceptions that resulted from the twilight revelation in which they lived, but have since become dissipated before the meridian light of the Gospel. One of the first principles of that old Canaanitish religion demanded that men should give their firstborn for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul. -- **F.B. Meyer**, *Abraham* p.172

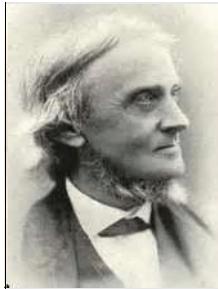
22:6-14 Who has learned — the Lord, or Abraham?

(6) Isaac too comes briefly into his own -- not by what he does but by what he

suffers. Here, it seems, is his role, undistinguished though he may be in himself. Others will do exploits; it is left to this quiet victim, in a single episode, to demonstrate God's pattern for the chosen 'seed': to be a servant sacrificed. -- **Derek Kidner**, *Genesis* p.143

(7) A life of faith and self-denial has usually its sharpest trials at or near its beginning. A stormy day has generally a calm close. But Abraham's sorest discipline came all sudden, like a bolt from blue sky. Near the end, and after many years of peaceful, uneventful life, he had to take a yet higher degree in the school of faith. Sharp trial means increased possession of God. So his last terrible experience turned to his crowning mercy.... That is God's way always. Up to the very edge we are driven, before His hand is put out to help us. -- **Alexander Maclaren**, *op cit*, pp.152,170

(8) Abraham's faithfulness did not take God by surprise. He knew His servant well, but the trial of faith was necessary to mature and develop Abraham's spiritual character. The patriarch triumphantly named the site YHWH *yir'eh*, "Yahweh will see to it," or "Yahweh will provide" (v.14). This mountain would see even more important events than this: Solomon would build his temple on it (2 Chron. 3:1), and the cross of Christ would be positioned in the vicinity. -- **John D. Davis**, *Paradise to Prison* p.219



ALEXANDER
MACLAREN:
'a yet higher
degree in the
school of faith'

22:15-19 In what way is the Abrahamic covenant here buttressed? (Heb. 6:13-20)

(9) Here was a spectacle which must have arrested the attention of heaven. Here was a proof of how much mortal man will do for the love of God. Here was an evidence of childlike faith which must have thrilled the heart of the Eternal God, and moved Him in the very depth of His being. Do you and I love God like this? Is He more to us than our nearest and dearest? -- **F.B. Meyer**, *op. cit*, p.177

(10) The outstanding fact in the history of Abraham is that he obeyed. While Isaac was not slain, in the deep, essential spirit of Abraham, in his intention, volition, and surrender, the thing was actually done. In the previous hour of communion, Abraham had learned that the Judge of all the earth must do right; and therefore without flinching, he went forward in obedience along a pathway, where there seemed to be no light, and which was one of personal, sacrificial suffering. Thus God was bringing him to the final stage of fellowship with Himself in His suffering. ... He was calling him to do exactly what He Himself was doing, and in human history would subsequently do. Through such sacrificial suffering alone could the redemption and restoration of such a race be accomplished. -- **G. Campbell Morgan**, *op. cit.*, p.30

(11) Jahveh here swears what He promises, as He does nowhere else in His intercourse with the patriarchs ... The God who commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac is called [*ha elohim*], and the Divine appearance, which forbids the sacrifice, [*melekh yhwh*]. He who requires from Abraham the surrender of Isaac

is God the Creator, who has power over life and death, and hence power also to take back what He has given; but it is Jahveh in His angel who forbids the fulfilment of the extreme act, for the son of promise cannot perish without the promise, and therewith God's truthfulness and His counsel of salvation also coming to nought. -- **Franz Delitzsch**, *op. cit.*, pp. 90,91

The MOTHER of BELIEVERS (22:20-23:20)

22:20-23:2 How is it possible to overlook the stature of Sarah? (1 Pet. 3:1-6; note a first and an only in this passage)

(12) Perhaps we can never realize how much the members of such a household as Abraham's would be to one another. Through long, unbroken periods they lived together, finding all their society in one another. The course of pastoral life left ample leisure for close personal intercourse; and it was inevitable that human lives spent under such circumstances should grow together; even as trees in a dense wood, wherein they sometimes became so entangled and entwined that no human ingenuity can disentangle one from another. Thus it must have happened that the loss through death of one loved and familiar face would leave a blank never to be filled, and scarcely ever to be forgotten. We need not wonder, therefore, that so much stress is laid upon the death of Sarah, the chief event of those fifty years of Abraham's life; nor need we regret that such ample details are given of her death and burial; since they enable us to get a glimpse of the patriarch, and see if he has altered at all during the quarter of a century which has passed over him. -- **F.B. Meyer**, *op. cit*, p.182

23:3-20 What irony is there in this detailed account of Abraham's transaction? (Acts 7:5)

(13) The first landed property of the patriarchs was a grave. Such was the sole possession which they purchased from the world, and the only permanent one they found here below. -- **Franz Delitzsch**, *op. cit*, p.101

(14) The ultimate then in faith is that of such obedience to the call of God as brings the soul to the point of the giving up, **not of something wrong**, but of **anything and everything**, in order to the accomplishment of Divine purpose, though such giving up entails suffering, which is **fellowship with the suffering of God**, through which alone the redemption of man is possible. This is the ultimate in faith. Beyond this comes vindication by sight. ... When there fell from the lips of an apostle of Jesus the words, "Spare Thyself," the answer of Jesus was, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." The philosophy that expresses itself in the advice "**Spare Thyself**," is the philosophy of hell. It is the philosophy which carries us all the way to the withholding of nothing which brings us into true fellowship with the God Who "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all," which is heaven's philosophy. -- **G.C. Morgan**, *op. cit*, pp.32,33

"Spare thyself" – the philosophy of hell