

Genesis 22:1-14 New Living Translation (NLT)

Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. *"Abraham!"* God called.

"Yes," he replied. *"Here I am."*

2 *"Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."*

3 The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. **4** On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. **5** *"Stay here with the donkey,"* Abraham told the servants. *"The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back."*

6 So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, **7** Isaac turned to Abraham and said, *"Father?"*

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, *"but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"*

8 *"God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son,"* Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

9 When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. **10** And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. **11** At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, *"Abraham! Abraham!"*

"Yes," Abraham replied. *"Here I am!"*

12 *"Don't lay a hand on the boy!"* the angel said. *"Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son."*

13 Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. **14** Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means *"the Lord will provide"*). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: *"On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."*

Leader: The Word of God for the People of God.

People: Thanks be to God.

The Lord Will Provide

7.2.17

Recall Story of Abram and Sarai

Last week we learned through the story of Hagar and Ishmael, that even when times are tough, God is still with us.

Sometime later, Abraham's faith would be tested.

God called Abraham:

"Take your son - your only son- the one you dearly love - yes, I mean, Isaac - and sacrifice him on the mountain I will show you."

Although the text does not reflect what Abraham said or thought, I can only imagine what must've gone through his mind, and perhaps the conversation around the dinner table.

‘Poor Abraham! Surely no greater test of faith and love ever came to any man. After waiting for years and years for this dear boy, after telling all his friends and servants that he was the miracle child that God had promised him, after loving him with all the intense devotion that an old man has for an only son, he was now asked to lay him on an altar and slay him!

“Surely it must be all wrong. Surely he must not have heard God correctly. Surely God would never ask anyone to do such a terrible thing.

“... though he could not understand the command, Abraham decided to obey it. In his heart he was sure that the One Who had called him” so many years ago “would not ask him to make such a sacrifice without good reason.

“So, willingly, but with a heavy heart, he” started out early the next day with his son and two servants, and loaded the animals for a long journey. It was a three day journey.

“What a sad journey that was! It must have been more than Abraham could bear. Every step of the way his heart became heavier and heavier...”

While Abraham had this deep gnawing in his heart throughout this long journey, imagine what Isaac might have been thinking.

What did Isaac make of the fact that they had the wood and the fire, but no animal?

“So the moment Abraham dreaded most had come! Isaac must be told the awful truth - but not yet, not till the last moment. *‘The Lord will provide a lamb.’*”

Somehow, this response seemed to satisfy the boy. But then, the time came when they arrived at the place the Lord had prepared.

“Never had it taken him so long to prepare the wood on an altar, for he kept wondering and wondering whether God would do something to make the next step unnecessary. But nothing happened; and at last, turning to Isaac, he explained what God wanted him to do.

“And here the beauty of Isaac’s character is seen. He was young, strong and vigorous. He could have resisted. He could have overpowered his old father and run for his life. But he didn’t. When he understood that it was God’s will that he should die, he yielded himself willingly, and Abraham tied him up and laid him on the wood on the altar.

After this agonizing journey and preparing the altar and telling his son what was to happen, there he was, holding his knife, ready to slay his own son.

“Isaac closed his eyes, awaiting the fatal cut. The knife flashed in the morning sunlight. But it never touched the boy. Suddenly, the silence was broken by the sound of a voice.

‘Abraham! Abraham... don’t hurt or touch the boy!’

“(It was)... just in time. The knife was then used to cut the ropes and free the boy.

“And the Lord spoke again, ‘Now I know you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son.’

“And then Abraham saw a ram nearby caught by its horns. And Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering.

And Abraham named this place, “The Lord Will Provide.”

(“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 9 “Love’s Greatest Test.” pp. 168-176)

For certain, this is a troubling story for many. Although it is a reminder of God’s provision, it is painful to consider that the God of all creation would expect any of His children to harm their own precious little ones. Some see this text as promoting abuse and child sacrifice. Some quite honestly avoid this text completely.

What kind of God would ask this type of behavior?

Others see this story as simply a testing of one’s faith.

The truth is, many scholars wrestle with this passage.

Dawn Chesser suggests that this is more a story about the strength and perseverance of Isaac... a rite of passage, abuse, violence, and coming of age.

He was, after all, one of the three patriarchs. “The longest living one... (And) the only one faithful to his wife.”

Imagining this story, she recalls her childhood days of wrestling on the floor with her dad. It was torture in a most enjoyable sort of way.

“When we were little kids, one of the greatest memories I have of our family is of my father getting on the floor and wrestling with us. He would pin us down and tickled us almost to the point of pain, until we screamed “uncle.” My dad always stopped the torture at a cry of “uncle.”

Eventually, her brothers got bigger and strong enough to take their dad down, to the point when he would cry “Uncle.”

This changed the relationship of father and children. It signified manhood for the boys.

Perhaps this story is about Isaac coming of age. And breaking away from the abusive patterns in his family.

What happened to Isaac after this?

The text is not completely clear what happened to him.

It appears that he did not return home with Abraham, and also that he did not attend his mother’s burial.

His relationship with his father changed that day on the mountain. (Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

In dialogue with a Jewish Rabbi, Taylor Burton-Edwards has gained some unique insights. Our Jewish cousins wrestle with this story as well, having a difficult time making sense of this story. It appears that because of this event, Abraham severed relationships with Isaac, Sarah and God. and the cycle of abuse came to an end.

Could it be that this was a turning point? Something that Isaac needed to endure to be part of “God’s vision for the Chosen people”?

Good news -

“God was present with Abraham and Isaac in the story, and God provided in the midst of turmoil and chaos.”

“God gave Isaac strength and courage to leave a situation of abuse and seek a new life for himself.”

“God has provided, does provide, and will provide, even in the midst of chaos, abuse and violence.”

“God will provide and make a way.” (*The Last Trial*, Shalom Spiegel) (Taylor Burton-Edwards, Discipleship Ministries)

Stuart Briscoe, pastor, author, host of radio/tv ministry - calls this event in Abraham’s life a High point in the faith.

He suggests that while “some have seen this story as evidence that Abraham had embraced some of the awful practices of the Canaanite culture,” the scripture text clearly points out that this was a test of Abraham’s faith.

He goes on to point out that we often think of God “as a benevolent figure Whose main concern is to make (people) feel good about (themselves).” He described this kind of God as more like a Cruise director, “whose task is to give everyone a good time with no expense spared.”

He reminds us that James (the brother of Jesus) wrote these words to the early believers: “*count it all joy... when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*”

(James 1.2,3)

Faith grows as it is tested. (Communicator’s Commentary, Genesis, © 1987 Word, Inc; D. Stuart Briscoe, OT Vol ; ch. 22 “Faith’s High Point”; pp. 188 - 195)

God gave Abraham a test, not to trip him and watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey God and thus to develop his character. (Genesis 22.1)

God refines us through difficult circumstances. (NRSV Life Application Bible, © 1990 Tyndale House Publishers; Genesis 22; pp. 41 - 42)

Through this difficult experience, Abraham strengthened his commitment to obey God. He also learned about God’s ability to provide. (Gen 22.7,8) (NRSV Life Application Bible, © 1990 Tyndale House Publishers; Genesis 22; pp. 41 - 42)

According to many scholars, Isaac would have been a teenager (maybe in the late teens) when this experience took place. So, as a teenage boy with an elderly father, Somehow he willingly allowed his father to tie him up and trusted that this must’ve been God’s will.

And at that exact moment, the angel of the Lord intervened.

There was a ram nearby, stuck in the bushes.

“God’s people... place themselves in the exact place where God will deliver exactly what is needed at exactly the right time in exactly the right manner.” (Communicator’s Commentary, Genesis, © 1987 Word, Inc; D. Stuart Briscoe, OT Vol ; ch. 22 “Faith’s High Point”; pp. 188 - 195)

This troubling account of the Binding of Isaac is difficult to understand.

Would a God Who promised a great nation to Abraham really demand such a heartless act of violence?

Was this the final test of Abraham’s obedience? Could it have been God’s way of demonstrating that the Lord does and will provide for us... Whatever the need?

Friends, even in the most dire circumstance, God loves us and wants to provide all we need.

Therefore, let us put our trust in God, knowing that God will provide for all of our needs.

Amen.