



Genesis - Chapter Twenty Two

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.a Genesis 11:27-25:18 - Abraham (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Two

The main story of this chapter, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac to God, is one of the most remarkable in the OT, both from the perspective of the faithfulness of Abraham and its clear links to God's sacrifice of his own Son.

Abraham responds positively to God's command to take Isaac on a three day journey, arriving at the scene of where Christ would be crucified nearly two thousand years later. After tying Isaac and placing him on the altar to become a burnt-offering, an angel appears to Abraham and allows him to release Isaac, supplying a ram nearby to sacrifice instead.

The chapter concludes with the genealogy of Abraham's brother Nahor, who had still lived beyond the Euphrates. The importance of this list will become clear later on because it contains Rebekah, the future wife of Isaac.

II.a.xvi Genesis 22:1-19 - The Command to Sacrifice Isaac

This episode brings to a climax God's ongoing interaction with Abraham, resulting in an important divine oath. The conditional promises of 12:1-3 are now unconditionally guaranteed as a result of Abraham's preparedness to sacrifice his son. Put to the test, Abraham displays remarkable trust in God, especially when the death of Isaac would appear to contradict all that God had promised to Abraham. The passage conveys two truths for its original audience:

1. It shows the kind of faith that Abraham had, and commends it for Israel.
2. It shows that 'substitution' is a part of the 'atoning sacrifices' that God will direct Israel to offer.

This further enables the people of Israel to see their very existence, even in the desert, as part of God's plan, which they must embrace. James 2:21-22 says that by Abraham's works here, his faith from Genesis 15:6 was <<**brought to completion**>>, i.e. brought to its full and proper expression. This shows that 'justified' in James 2:21 probably has the sense 'shown to be righteous,' rather than the sense 'reckoned as righteous' often found in Paul's writings; refer to the comments made on James 2:21.

¹ After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'

Genesis 22:1

God tested Abraham. The particular form of the verb **tested** makes this phrase a summary of the whole passage and clarifies the meaning of the events. The genuineness of Abraham's obedience to God is **tested**. This was not so much a test to produce faith, as it was a test to reveal faith. God built Abraham slowly, piece by piece, year by year, into a man of faith.

While it is not unknown for God to test individuals, testing must be clearly distinguished from tempting. God does not tempt anyone to do evil, refer to the comments made on James 1:13; he does, however, test the commitment of people, for example: <<*He cried out to the LORD; and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test*>> (Exodus 15:25), and: <<*Then the LORD said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not'*>> (Exodus 16:4).

² He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.'

Genesis 22:2

Your only son Isaac, whom you love. With the departure of Ishmael from Abraham's household, Isaac had become Abraham's only son. As such, he was held with much affection by his father. There can be no greater gift than giving up a son: <<*God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him*>> (1 John 4:9).

The language used here to describe Isaac as the beloved son of Abraham is very similar to that used by God of Jesus at his baptism: <<*And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'*>> (Matthew 3:17), <<*And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with*

you I am well pleased’>> (Mark 1:11), and: <<Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’>> (Luke 3:21-22); as well as at his transfiguration: <<While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’>> (Matthew 17:5), <<Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’>> (Mark 9:7), and: <<While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’>> (Luke 9:34-35).

The land of Moriah. According to 2 Chronicles 3:1, Solomon constructed the temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. While this chapter does not specify that the sacrifice of Isaac took place at or near Jerusalem, v.14 seems to imply such a connection.

A burnt-offering involved the entire sacrifice being consumed by fire. The outcome of the incident makes it clear that God never intended the directive to be fulfilled. Thus, taken as a whole, in terms of both the command and the outcome, the incident cannot be seen to conflict with God’s moral law. Because this was by far the greatest demand that God could have made of Abraham, it confirmed the depth of the Patriarch’s commitment. Abraham was willing to kill his own son, although as the author of Hebrews observes (Hebrews 11:17-19), he prepared to do so believing that God was able to bring Isaac back to life again; refer to the comment made on vv.5-8.

On one of the mountains that I shall show you. There was a specific place God commanded Abraham to go, a particular spot where this would happen. God carefully directed each detail of this drama.

³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.

Genesis 22:3

Abraham rose early in the morning. Abraham promptly responds to the challenge placed before him. There is no indication that he discussed his mission with Sarah. However, her likely response had she heard the intentions of her husband can only be viewed as speculation.

Early in the morning is a time for action: <<*Early the next morning Joshua mustered his army, and he and the leaders of Israel marched before them to Ai*>> (Joshua 8:10 NIV).

Abraham saddled his donkey, he cut the wood for the burnt-offering. The phrasing suggests that Abraham did this work personally; although he had plenty of servants to do this for him, Abraham did it himself because even in his old age, he was possibly a bundle of nervous energy.

The place in the distance that God had shown him. The language would suggest that God had appeared to Abraham in a vision and had shown him the mountain where he was to take Isaac. The view may well have also included Calvary!

⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.

Genesis 22:4

On the third day. It requires about two days to travel on foot from Beer-sheba to Jerusalem, a distance of about 45 miles or 72km as the crow flies. Elsewhere, two days also represents the time set aside to prepare for a special encounter with God on the third day: <<*the LORD said to Moses: 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people'*>> (Exodus 19:10-11). Perhaps this sets the pattern for the significant 'third day' on which Christ rose from the grave, as confirmed in: <<*From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*>> (Matthew 16:21), and: <<*For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures*>> (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.' ⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' ⁸ Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.

Genesis 22:5-8

The boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you. While Abraham is committed to sacrificing Isaac, he plans to do so in the belief that both of them will return: <<*By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, 'It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.'* He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead – and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back>> (Hebrews 11:17-19). That is, he expected Isaac to die and then be raised to life as Jesus would be many generations later.

We will come back to you. Since Abraham uses the first person plural many commentators believe this means that Abraham and Isaac would return as indicated above. However, it should also be considered that it would be natural for Abraham to say this rather than the first person singular as this may have given rise to concern either to Isaac or the servants.

We will worship. This is the first use of the word worship in reference to God in the Bible. The Hebrew word *shachah* simply means, to bow down. While Abraham and Isaac did not go to the mountain to have a time of joyful praise, they did go to bow down to the Lord to honour him alone.

Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac. Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice up the hill, just as Jesus was made to carry the wooden Cross for his own sacrifice many generations later.

He himself carried the fire and the knife. Abraham took on the responsibility for carrying the two main implements for making the sacrifice; there would be no pretence of forgetting to bring along the tools for this terrible work he was prepared to undertake in faith. Spurgeon wrote, *“That knife was cutting into his own heart all the while, yet he took it. Unbelief would have left the knife at home, but genuine faith takes it.”*

So the two of them walked on together. This literally means the two of them went in agreement. Isaac did this knowingly and willingly. The phrase is repeated twice for emphasis. At this time, Abraham did not know how God would provide. He still trusted in the ability of God to raise Isaac from the dead, he would not stop trusting just because he did not know how God would fulfil his promise.

God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering. It is unclear whether Abraham is speaking ironically here, i.e. Isaac is the lamb, or whether he is expressing faith that somehow God will preserve his son. As it turns out, God does provide a substitute for Isaac as commented on in v.13.

⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Genesis 22:9

They came to the place that God had shown him. It would seem that, even on Mount Moriah, there was a specific place God told Abraham to stop, because this was the place to do this.

Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. At this time, Abraham was very old and Isaac would have been able to escape his coming death had he chosen to. Yet he submitted to his father perfectly. In remembering Abraham's faith, Isaac's faith too should be contemplated. Most Jewish commentators think Isaac was in his thirties at the time of this event and therefore Abraham was over 130 years of age. As an obedient son, Isaac simply laid down on the wood, ready to be sacrificed, trusting in his father for it seems that he was not told that it was on the instruction of God.

The building of the altar and the careful laying of the wood are features of later sacrifices too, such as: <<*The sons of the priest Aaron shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire*>> (Leviticus 1:7), and: <<*Next he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, 'Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt-offering and on the wood'*>> (1 Kings 18:33).

¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

Genesis 22:10

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. It must be believed that Abraham was completely willing to plunge the knife into Isaac, because his faith was in God's ability to raise Isaac from the dead, not in God's desire to stop the sacrifice. Abraham did not think this was a drama or playacting, he trusted in God's promises: <<*No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him*>> (Genesis 18:19).

One may say, "It's not fair or right. God told Abraham to do something and then told him not to. If God really wanted to test Abraham, he should have made him plunge the knife into his son's chest." Yet God often takes the will for the deed with his people. When he finds them truly willing to make the sacrifice he demands, he often does not require it.

¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'

Genesis 22:11

The angel of the LORD. The Hebrew word for angel may also be translated 'messenger.' There is an element of mystery about this figure. Some commentators view this as a pre-incarnate appearance of the Christ.

The repetition of the name Abraham, Abraham underscores the urgency of the intervention, as confirmed in v.1. Such repetition is seen elsewhere in Scripture, such as: <<*God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob.' And he said, 'Here I am'>>* (Genesis 46:2), <<*When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am'>>* (Exodus 3:4), <<*Then the LORD called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!>>* (1 Samuel 3:4), and: <<*Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat>>* (Luke 22:31).

¹² He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.'

Genesis 22:12

Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. With this, God emphatically showed Abraham that he was not like the pagan gods worshipped by the Canaanites and others, gods that demanded human sacrifice and were pleased by it. God strongly and clearly demonstrated that he did not want human sacrifice, other than that of his own Son: <<*Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings you have taken no pleasure>>* (Hebrews 10:5-6).

For now I know that you fear God. Abraham's action confirms his faithful obedience to God. While Abraham's faith was earlier the means by which God counted him as righteous (15:6), that faith is now <<*active along with his works>>*, and the faith is <<*brought to completion by the works>>* (James 2:21-23), so that his faith resulted in obedience, which is its expected outcome. On God's knowledge, refer to the comment made on Genesis 18:21.

Since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. Abraham displayed his heart towards God in that he was willing to give up his only son. God displays his heart towards all people in the same way, by giving his only Son: <<*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life>>* (John 3:16).

¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son.

Genesis 22:13

Abraham looked up and saw a ram. Although Abraham has passed the test, God provides a ram so that it may be sacrificed as a burnt-offering. In Genesis such sacrifices are associated with solemn promises made by God; refer to 8:20-22.

Caught in a thicket by its horns. The sacrifice here, just as at Calvary, wore a crown of thorns!

Instead of his son. The fact that a ram died in the place of Isaac has led many Christian interpreters to see introduced here the principle of substitutionary atonement, which would later become a reality in the substitutionary sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross, as <<*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*>> (John 1:29).

¹⁴ So Abraham called that place ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’

Genesis 22:14

Echoing Abraham’s earlier comment to Isaac in v.8, the location is named The LORD will provide. On the basis of this, the belief developed, i.e. as it is said to this day, that God would provide the sacrifice necessary to atone for sin.

The term used in the Hebrew is *Jehovah Jireh*, which is often translated as the ‘the Lord will provide.’ However, Jewish sources have always translated it as ‘the Lord will be seen’ and thus they say that it is on this mountain that the Lord will be seen, a reference to the coming of the Messiah in their understanding. In Christian understanding Jesus’ Second Coming will be on this very mountain.

On the mount of the LORD almost certainly denotes the hill on which the temple was later built in Jerusalem, as indicated by: <<*Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*>> (Isaiah 2:3).

¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,
¹⁶ and said, ‘By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the

stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.’ ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

Genesis 22:15-19

The divine oath recorded in these verses should not be overlooked, for it brings to a climax a process that started with the conditional promises made by God to Abraham in 12:1-3.

By myself I have sworn. The fact that God swears by himself gives to these words a unique authority, assuring Abraham that they will indeed be fulfilled, refer also to Hebrews 6:13-18. The oath falls into two parts: whereas the first half focuses on Abraham’s many descendants, the second part concentrates on a single descendant who will overcome his enemies and mediate blessing to all the nations of the earth. Although the second half of the oath is often taken to refer to all of Abraham’s descendants, Genesis as a whole is interested in tracing a single unique line of offspring that will eventually bring forth a special King who will rule over the Gentiles, and the reference to his enemies points in this direction; refer also to the comment made on 3:15. This is why Paul in Galatians 3:16 can insist on one offspring, who is Christ, i.e. the Messiah, as confirmed in Genesis 3:15 and 24:60 for offspring as a particular descendant. And this explains why Isaac is clearly set apart from Ishmael as Abraham’s heir. From the perspective of the whole Bible, this oath to Abraham comes to fulfilment in Jesus Christ: <<*You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, “And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways*>> (Acts 3:25-26), and: <<*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, ‘And to offsprings’, as of many; but it says, ‘And to your offspring’, that is, to one person, who is Christ*>> (Galatians 3:16).

Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son. The central focus of God’s words to Abraham is on the way in which Abraham’s actions are a vindication of his faith: <<*For what does the scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’*>> (Romans 4:3), <<*Therefore his faith ‘was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ Now the words, ‘it was reckoned to him’, were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also*>> (Romans 4:22-24a), <<*Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’, so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham*>> (Galatians 3:6-7), and: <<*Thus the scripture was*

fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness', and he was called the friend of God>> (James 2:23). Many also see an allusion in: <<He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?>> (Romans 8:32) to this verse.

II.a.xvii Genesis 22:20-24 - The Children of Nahor

Genealogies often demarcate major sections of material in Genesis. These verses, which function like a minor genealogy, divide the main part of the Abraham story (Chapters 12-22) from several episodes that serve as an appendix to the life of Abraham: the death and burial of Sarah (Chapter 23); the acquisition of a wife for Isaac (Chapter 24); and the death of Abraham (25:1-11).

²⁰ Now after these things it was told Abraham, 'Milcah also has borne children, to your brother Nahor: ²¹ Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, ²² Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.' ²³ Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴ Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

Genesis 22:20-24

The special reference to Rebekah in v.23 anticipates the events of Chapter 24 when Abraham sends a servant to Paddan-aram to find a bride for Isaac from among his relatives.

Concubine probably refers to Hagar and Keturah, refer to Chapter 25, who both bore Abraham children, although neither woman shares the status of Sarah, Abraham's first wife. The term concubine, Hebrew *pilegesh*, may give the impression that no formal relationship existed between Abraham and these women. Yet since their sons are publicly recognised as Abraham's children, some type of formal relationship evidently existed.

In Judges 19:9, the father of a man's concubine is designated as his father-in-law, suggesting that a form of marriage has taken place between the man and the woman. However, the sons of Hagar and Keturah are clearly distinguished from Isaac, refer also to 1 Chronicles 1:28-34.