The Patriarchs from the book of Genesis Part 16 – December 3, 2023

With input from https://www.bibleref.com/Hebrews/11/Hebrews-11-19;

The Genesis Record by Henry Morris; https://biblehub.com/genesis/22-4.htm

**Hebrews 11:17-19:**

*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, 18 of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 19 He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

Faith, in a biblical sense, is not blind. It is based on prior experience, and means trusting that God can work in ways we cannot immediately see (remember Hebrews 11:1–3 – “the substance of things hoped for). The ultimate example of this type of faith is Abraham's obedience to God, when commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac. This was the same son through whom God had sworn to fulfill His promises to Abraham. In literal terms, this command would seem to be a violation of God's nature, as well as a break in His agreement with Abraham.

And yet, Abraham had seen God provide him with a son despite doubts and delays. Abraham had seen God rescue Lot, despite Abraham's fears about the judgment of Sodom. So, when God gave His mysterious command, Abraham was willing to trust in God and obey—proving by his actions that he possessed a true, godly faith:

**James 2:14–23:**

*14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

*Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”, and he was called God’s friend.*

For this reason, Abraham was not only rewarded by God, who never intended to let Isaac die, but he became an example of faith for the rest of humanity.

Here, the writer of Hebrews offers one of the justifications Abraham would have held as part of his faith in God. At the time Abraham spoke with God, Scripture had not recorded any instances of God bringing someone back from the dead. And yet, Abraham's faith in God's assurances was strong enough that he felt God could resurrect Isaac, if need be. Poetically speaking, God did "bring back" Isaac from death, by sparing him after Abraham had committed to follow through with the sacrifice.

**Genesis 22:1-34:**

*22 After these things…*

The words "after these things" indicate that some time has passed since the events of Genesis 21. We will learn that Abraham is still living in Beersheba, but that Isaac has grown some. The last direct statement about Isaac's age referred to his being weaned (Genesis 21:8), which would have been around the age of two or three.

In the upcoming verses we see that Isaac can travel without his mother (Genesis 22:3–4), can converse in an adult manner (Genesis 22:7), and can carry wood for the sacrificial fire (Genesis 22:6). Later verses indicate that Isaac will be around 36 or 37 when his mother, Sarah dies at the age of 127 (Genesis 23:1). Most likely, he is at least a teenager when he climbs the mountain with his father.

Genesis chapter 22 will describe God's terrible test of Abraham's faith. The word "test" is to be understood as something clearly different from a "temptation." God will never tempt His people to do evil (James 1:13 *When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone*). We see God test His people in Scripture, asking them to trust Him and obey in spite of their difficult circumstances (Exodus 15:25; 20:20; Deuteronomy 8:2; 13:3; Judges 2:22). This is the key element missing when people misunderstand this part of Abraham's story. His obedience is based, not in blind faith, but in an experienced, established trust based on what he has already seen God do.

**Continuing verse 1***: God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 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 of which I shall tell you.”*

Notice: *your only son -* not ἁγαπητὸν, meaning the only son of Sarah, the only legitimate offspring he possessed, the only heir of the promise, the only child that remained to him after Ishmael's departure.

Even to those who are familiar with this verse, the words of God to Abraham here land like a blow. Our first instinct is that this can't be right. Having followed the story of God in Genesis, through His relationship with Abraham and then, finally, the joyful birth of Isaac, the long-awaited son of God's promise, these words of God just don't fit.

That, of course, is exactly the point of God's test. Would Abraham trust God even when God's command did not seem to make any sense? That is the key element many people miss when interpreting this story. This is not the first time Abraham has heard from God. Nor is it the first time God has acted in ways Abraham did not—at first—fully understand. And yet, in all of those past encounters, Abraham found that God's unseen plans led to a righteous outcome. Abraham's response, shown in the next verse, is not an act of blind faith. It is an act of faithful trust.

Our second human reaction to God's command is that it feels cruel. Even knowing the end of the story, it challenges us to wonder about God's character. Earlier in Genesis, Abraham and then Ambimelech had both asked the Lord directly, "Will you kill the innocent?" The answer in both cases was "no." God's character was vindicated, as it will be here. In the meantime, the command God has given seems impossibly harsh.

God's specific command to Abraham is to take the son he loves, the only son he has left (Genesis 21:9–14), to a mountainous area called Moriah, which would have been about 50 miles away. Once there, Abraham is to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. God will show him on which mountain to make the sacrifice.

A burnt offering involved slaughtering an animal and then burning it on an altar until it was completely consumed. Such offerings were practiced by many religions. Abraham had offered animal sacrifices to the Lord. Human sacrifices of children to various false gods may well have been practiced in the land of Canaan at the time. Later, God would forbid Israel from participating in child sacrifice.

*3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.*

We have seen Abraham express emotion and resistance in response to God's commands before. He was very displeased with the idea of sending his firstborn son Ishmael away, but he did so when God told him to do it (Genesis 21:9–14). He laughed at the idea of Isaac's birth in his old age (Genesis 17:17), and he even expressed his emotional desire to have Ishmael "live with God" (Genesis 17:18). His lack of emotion or even any follow-up questions is the clue that Abraham believes God will intervene to preserve Isaac's life. In any case, his actions reveal his great confidence in God.

*4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”*

*On the third day* -we could compare Abraham’s feelings during these two weary days of travel with those of Hagar as she wandered in the wilderness, and each day felt the death of her child growing nearer and more certain. But hers were human sorrows only, while Abraham was giving up the son on whom his spiritual hopes depended.

Abraham tells them that he and the boy will go, worship, and come back again. One way or another, Abraham seems to suggest that he expects Isaac to accompany him on the way back.

*6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” 8 Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.*

Isaac's simple trust in his father remains intact. A young man who can carry wood up a mountain could not be overpowered by an elderly man—when Isaac is bound on the altar, he has to allow it to happen (Genesis 22:9). The two obviously care for each other. Abraham continues to show his willingness to give to God this boy he loves, trusting the Lord to do what is right.

*9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.*

Like Christ on the cross, Isaac trusted his father in complete obedience. This sacrifice would reflect the sacrifice God would make of his one and only Son Jesus Christ.

*11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”*

The repetition of Abraham's name and the cry of the voice from heaven indicates the urgency of the moment. Abraham responds as he did when God first spoke to him in verse 1, and as he did when Isaac asked him about the lamb: "Here I am."

Once more, none of Abraham's emotion is revealed to us. He appears to be ready to do next whatever the Lord asks of him. He was certainly prepared to commit the act God had asked of him, right up until the moment he is stopped by this voice.

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

The angel of the Lord, truly the Lord in another form, goes on: Now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your only son from me. In the Old Testament, especially, to "fear God" means to have such great respect and reverence for the Lord's power and righteousness that you obey Him above all others. God's test satisfied the question of whether Abraham "feared" God once and for all.

*13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.*

The lamb, a ram, was presented ready-made to Abraham for the sacrifice. It was caught in a thicket right behind him. Abraham had only to replace Isaac with the ram and continue the offering. The ram given by God served as the substitute for Isaac in Abraham's burnt offering.

*14 So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”*

The phrase "to this day," is a reference to the writing of the book of Genesis. So, at least until that point, the name given to the mountain by Abraham stuck. It was the mountain of "The LORD will provide." It became a saying, apparently: "On the mountain of the LORD, it will be provided."

*15 And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven 16 and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,*

This encounter with God is not over, yet. The angel of the Lord—the Lord Himself—has more to say to Abraham. He calls down a second time.

*17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,*

*18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.*

Now the Lord adds one more promise that applies to everyone who might read these words. The Lord says that in Abraham's offspring, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This promise, too, is repeated from previous interactions with the Lord (Genesis 12:3; 18:18), with the addition that this blessing on the peoples of the earth will come through Abraham's descendants and not merely through him.

How will this happen? Most significantly, the offspring of Abraham will lead through Isaac to Jacob and down through history to Jesus Himself. All the peoples of the earth have the opportunity to be saved from sin and included in God's family through faith in Abraham's offspring Jesus (Galatians 3:7).

This verse concludes that the Lord will do all of these things because Abraham has obeyed the Lord's voice. It's interesting that the Lord made all of these promises to Abraham without any condition in earlier encounters. Then, the promises were given merely because God wanted to give them. Now, Abraham's obedience is included as a reason for these gifts from the Lord.

It's beautiful circle. The gifts are given unconditionally by the grace of God. The receiver of the gift recognizes God's goodness and obeys God's commands. God now cites the receiver's obedience as reason to give the gifts He would have given, anyway.

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