Abraham Offers Isaac

Bible Stories Anthology — Genesis 22

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Author: John Lobota

Research Assistant: Claude Cowork

papertiq@bellsouth.net

> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Where Is the Lamb?

A father and his son climb a mountain together. The son carries the wood on his back. The father carries the fire and the knife. Halfway up, the son asks the question that every reader since has carried with him up that hill:

"Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb?"

The father's answer is one of the great sentences of the Bible: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb."

Two thousand years later, on a hill in the same region, another Son carried wood on His back up a slope outside Jerusalem. And a man who had watched Him come down to the Jordan some time before had already pointed at Him and answered Isaac's question: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Genesis 22 is perhaps the clearest picture of the Messiah in the whole book of Genesis. It is also one of the hardest stories in the Bible to read — a command that seems to contradict everything God had promised, and an old man who obeyed it anyway. To understand why he did, and why God asked, we have to read it slowly, and in its own words.

The Setting

When. Many years after God first called Abraham out of Ur and promised to make of him a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5), so by the time

of this story he was well past a hundred. Isaac was no longer a baby. He was old enough to carry a load of wood up a mountain.

Where. The story begins at Beersheba, in the dry south of the land, where Abraham had dug a well, planted a grove, and "called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God" (Genesis 21:33). It ends on a mountain "in the land of Moriah," a journey of three days away. About a thousand years later, scripture tells us, Solomon built the temple "at Jerusalem in mount Moriah" (2 Chronicles 3:1). The mountain where Abraham built his altar stood in the same place where Israel's altar would one day stand — and within sight of the place where Jesus Christ would one day be crucified outside that city's walls.

Who. Abraham; Isaac, his son; two young men who served Abraham; a donkey; and God, who speaks at the beginning, and whose messenger speaks from heaven at the end.

The situation. Abraham lived in the second great age of God's dealings with mankind. An **administration** is a period in which God deals with people on a particular basis. This one, the **Patriarchal** administration, ran from the expulsion from Eden to the giving of the Law at Sinai, and through all of it a person stood right with God by faith — by believing what God said. Abraham is the great example. Years before this story, God had shown him the stars and said, "So shall thy seed be," and scripture says: "he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

That promise had hung on one thing: a son. And for twenty-five years it did not come. Abraham and Sarah grew old. In that time Abraham stumbled more than once. He twice passed off his wife as his sister to save his own skin (Genesis 12; 20), and when the waiting grew long, he took Sarah's servant Hagar and had a son by her, Ishmael (Genesis 16). But God did not change His word. "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him" (Genesis 17:19). And at the set time, Sarah, at ninety, bore Abraham a son. They named him Isaac, which means *laughter*.

Then came a painful parting. Ishmael mocked the young Isaac, and God told Abraham to send Hagar and her son away, adding: "for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Genesis 21:12). Every promise God had made to Abraham — the nation, the land, the blessing to all the families of the earth — was now carried by one boy. And scripture records that "Abraham rose up early in the morning" and sent Ishmael away (Genesis 21:14).

It is worth remembering that phrase. We will hear it again.

The Story, Told Faithfully

"Here I Am"

> **Genesis 22:1** *And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.*

"After these things" — after the long wait, after the birth, after the parting with Ishmael. Abraham had just given up one son. Now God would ask about the other.

"God did tempt Abraham." This word troubles many readers, and it should be explained at once. The Hebrew verb is *nasah*, and it means *to test, to prove* — to put something to the proof in order to show

what it is. It is the same word Moses used at Sinai: “Fear not: for God is come to *prove* you” (Exodus 20:20); and in the wilderness: “to humble thee, and to *prove* thee, to know what was in thine heart” (Deuteronomy 8:2). It does not mean that God tried to lure Abraham into sin. James says plainly that God never does that: “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:13-14). Temptation of that kind comes from within, and from the adversary. A test from God is the opposite: it is designed to bring out, strengthen and display the faith that is already there. Peter calls such a trial “much more precious than of gold” (1 Peter 1:7).

“Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.” The Hebrew is one word, *hinneni* — “Here I am,” “I am ready.” Abraham says it three times in this chapter: to God here, to his son in verse 7, and to the angel in verse 11. It is the answer of a servant standing at attention. He did not yet know what God would ask. He was ready anyway.

The Command

> **Genesis 22:2** *And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

Listen to how God names the boy. Not simply “Take Isaac.” Each phrase narrows the focus and presses closer to Abraham’s heart: *thy son — thine only son — Isaac — whom thou lovest*. Every word makes the request heavier. God was not pretending this would be easy. He named exactly what He was asking for.

“Thine only son.” Abraham had another son, Ishmael, and later he would have six more by Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2). But Isaac was the only son of the promise, the only son of Sarah, the one God had said would carry the covenant. The Hebrew word, *yachid*, means *one, unique, only one of his kind*. The writer of Hebrews uses the Greek equivalent when he calls Isaac Abraham’s “only begotten son” (Hebrews 11:17). It is the same phrase John uses of Jesus Christ: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

“Whom thou lovest.” This is the first time the word “love” appears in the Bible. Think about that. Scripture’s first use of the word is a father’s love for his only son — spoken in the very sentence in which that father is asked to give the son up.

“A burnt offering.” The Hebrew word is *’olah*, from a verb meaning *to go up*. It was the offering wholly consumed on the altar, rising to God as smoke — nothing held back for the one who offered it. It was the offering of complete devotion.

Here the reader must stop and fill in a blank, because this command raises a question scripture itself answers elsewhere. The nations around Abraham did sacrifice their children to their gods. Later, when God gave Israel the Law, He forbade it absolutely: “thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech” (Leviticus 18:21); it is “every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth” (Deuteronomy 12:31). And when Israel did it anyway, God said, “which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart” (Jeremiah 7:31). God never desired the death of Isaac. As the story will show, He never allowed it to happen. What He asked was whether Abraham would hold anything back from Him — even the very gift through which every promise was to come.

Rose Up Early

> **Genesis 22:3** *And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.*

There is no argument in this verse. No bargaining, no delay, no recorded word at all. Years before, when God told Abraham He would destroy Sodom, Abraham argued with Him six times (Genesis 18:23-32). Here, when God asked for his own son, he said nothing — and "rose up early in the morning."

It is the same phrase used of him when he sent Ishmael away (21:14). Abraham did hard things early. He did not lie awake and let the morning come and go.

And count the "ands" in the verse: he rose up, *and* saddled, *and* took, *and* clave, *and* rose up, *and* went. This is a **figure of speech** — a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used to add emphasis or feeling. This one is called **polysyndeton**, "many ands." It slows the account down so that every action stands on its own. We are meant to watch him do each thing: fasten the saddle; call the servants; wake his son; split the wood himself — an old man with servants who could have done it for him, choosing to do it with his own hands.

The Third Day

> **Genesis 22:4** *Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.*
>
> **Genesis 22:5** *And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.*

Three days. Three days of walking beside the son he had been told to offer. For three days, as far as Abraham was concerned, Isaac was a dead man. Keep that in mind; the New Testament will come back to it.

"Lifted up his eyes" is a Hebrew **idiom** — an expression whose meaning is not found in its individual words, but in the way a people used it. It means to look up with attention, to take a long, deliberate look. The same words come again in verse 13, at the moment of rescue.

Now listen closely to what Abraham told his servants: "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and *come again* to you." In Hebrew the verb is plural: *we* will come back. Abraham was going up the mountain to offer his son, and he told his servants that both of them would come down.

Was he deceiving them? The New Testament says no. It tells us exactly what Abraham was thinking:

> **Hebrews 11:17** *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,*
>
> **Hebrews 11:18** *Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:*
>
> **Hebrews 11:19** *Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

"Accounting" is a word from bookkeeping — to reckon, to add it up. Abraham added it up. God had promised that his seed would come through Isaac. Isaac had no children yet. God had now told him to offer Isaac. Both things could not fail. So if Isaac died on that altar, God would have to raise him from the dead. Abraham did not know *how* God would keep His word. He only knew that God *would*. No one in the whole Bible had yet been raised from the dead. Abraham believed God could do it anyway.

This was not a new kind of faith for him. It was the same faith he had shown years before, when God promised a son to a man of a hundred and a woman of ninety: "he considered not his own body now dead… neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4:19-21). Abraham had already watched God bring life out of death once — Isaac himself was the proof. He believed God could do it again.

And notice the word "worship." This is the first time it appears in the King James Bible. The Hebrew word means *to bow down*, to lay oneself low before a greater. Abraham did not call what he was about to do a tragedy. He called it worship.

The Wood, the Fire and the Knife

> **Genesis 22:6** *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.*

Isaac carried the wood. It was enough wood for a burnt offering, and he carried it up a mountain. That tells us something about Isaac's age that the popular picture leaves out. He is called "the lad" (22:5, 12), the same Hebrew word used of Joseph at seventeen (Genesis 37:2). He was not a small child. He was a young man, strong enough to bear the load — and, as we will see, strong enough to have resisted an old man if he had chosen to.

The father carried the fire — very likely live coals in a vessel, since there would be no easy way to start one on the mountaintop — and the knife. The Hebrew word for this knife is not the ordinary one; it is the knife used for slaughter and for carving meat.

"And they went both of them together." Hold on to that phrase. It is about to be said again.

The Question

> **Genesis 22:7** *And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*

These are the only words Isaac speaks in the whole chapter. He has watched offerings made before; he knows what is needed. Fire, yes. Wood, yes. But where is the lamb?

It is a question asked for information — but for the reader it becomes something more. It is the question the whole Old Testament asks. Sacrifice after sacrifice would be offered on the altars of Israel, and still the question would hang in the air: *Where is the Lamb?* Where is the offering that will finally take away sin? The prophet Micah would ask it in its most anguished form: "shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:7).

The Answer

> **Genesis 22:8** *And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.*

"God will provide himself a lamb." The word "provide" is the Hebrew verb *ra'ah*, which ordinarily means *to see*. Literally, Abraham said: *God will see to it Himself — God will see for Himself the lamb.* In the East,

to “see to” a need is to take care of it, as we still say in English, “I’ll see to it.” Abraham did not know what God would do. He knew God would see to it.

Notice what Abraham did not say. He did not say, “God will provide *Himself as* the lamb.” The words mean that God would provide the lamb *for Himself* — out of His own resources, for His own altar. And that is exactly what the rest of scripture shows God doing: not becoming the lamb, but providing it — giving “his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

Was Abraham speaking better than he knew? As this series understands it, he was. He was answering his son’s question in the moment, and trusting God for the outcome. But his words reached far past that mountain. God would indeed provide Himself a Lamb.

“So they went both of them together.” The phrase is said again, word for word. The first time (22:6), the son did not yet know. The second time, he had asked, and heard his father’s answer — and he went on. The father and the son walked up the mountain together, one in heart.

The Altar

> **Genesis 22:9** *And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.*
>
> **Genesis 22:10** *And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.*

Polysyndeton again: he built, *and* laid, *and* bound, *and* laid, *and* stretched, *and* took. The account slows almost to a stop. Every movement of the old man’s hands is recorded.

“Bound Isaac his son.” The Hebrew word is *’aqad*, and it appears only here in the whole Bible. Jewish tradition has named the entire chapter after it: the *Akedah*, “the binding.”

Think about what this required of Isaac. He was a young man who had just carried a load of firewood up a mountain. His father was well over a hundred years old. Isaac could have run. He could have fought. Scripture records no struggle and no protest. As this series understands it, Isaac let himself be bound. The son was as willing as the father.

And then Abraham raised the knife.

“Abraham, Abraham”

> **Genesis 22:11** *And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.*
>
> **Genesis 22:12** *And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.*

“Abraham, Abraham.” The name is doubled. This is a figure of speech called **epizeuxis** — the same word repeated immediately, with nothing in between, for urgency and deep feeling. God uses it only at the great turning points of people’s lives: “Jacob, Jacob” (Genesis 46:2), “Moses, Moses” at the burning bush (Exodus 3:4), “Samuel, Samuel” in the night (1 Samuel 3:10), “Martha, Martha” (Luke 10:41), “Saul, Saul” on the Damascus road (Acts 9:4). Here it is the voice that stops the knife in the air: *Abraham! Abraham!* And once again the old man answers, “Here am I.” He was still ready.

“The angel of the LORD” — an angel is a messenger, and this messenger speaks God’s own words. Notice how he speaks: “thou hast not withheld thy son… from *me*.” In the East, a messenger or envoy spoke in the first person for the one who sent him, delivering the sender’s words exactly as though the sender were speaking. That is what we see here and again in verse 16, where the angel says, “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD.” The message is God’s; the messenger carries it.

“Now I know that thou fearest God.” God knew Abraham’s heart before the journey began. This is the figure of speech called **anthropopatheia** — describing God in human terms, as though He learned things the way we do, so that we can understand Him. The point is not that God found something out. The point is that Abraham’s faith was now shown, openly and beyond question, in what he did. To “fear God” in scripture is not to cower before Him. It is to reverence Him so completely that nothing is held back from Him.

“Thou hast not withheld thy son.” The Greek translation of the Old Testament, which the apostles read, renders “withheld” here with the verb *to spare*. Paul uses that very verb when he writes of God Himself: “He that *spared* not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). What God stopped Abraham from doing on Moriah, God Himself did at Calvary.

The Ram in the Thicket

> **Genesis 22:13** *And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.*

“Lifted up his eyes” — the same idiom as on the third day. Then he had looked up and seen the place of sacrifice. Now he looked up and saw the sacrifice God had provided.

A ram, caught by its horns. Not struggling free and running off. Not wounded, not blemished — held fast by the one part of it that could be caught without harm to its body. Ready, and in place, exactly when it was needed.

“In the stead of his son.” Here, in plain words, is the heart of every sacrifice in the Bible: **substitution**. One life given in the place of another. The ram died, and Isaac lived. The son who was bound on the altar came down from it because another took his place.

And notice a small but striking detail. Isaac asked, “Where is the *lamb*?” Abraham answered, “God will provide himself a *lamb*.” But what God provided on the mountain that day was a *ram*. The Hebrew words are different: *seh*, a lamb, in verses 7 and 8; *’ayil*, a ram, in verse 13. The ram saved Isaac that day. But the Lamb Abraham spoke of was still to come.

The LORD Will See

> **Genesis 22:14** *And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.*

“Jehovah-jireh” means *the LORD will see*, or *the LORD will provide* — the same word Abraham used in verse 8. And notice the tense. Abraham did not name the place “The LORD *has* provided.” He named it “The LORD *will* provide.” And the saying that grew out of it, still repeated in Moses’ day, looked forward too: “In the mount of the LORD it *shall* be seen.”

Listen to how the word “see” runs through the whole chapter. Abraham “saw the place afar off” (22:4). “God will *see* for himself a lamb” (22:8). Abraham “lifted up his eyes, and *looked*” (22:13). “The LORD will *see*” (22:14). “In the mount of the LORD it shall be *seen*” (22:14). The same Hebrew verb is repeated in different forms, and this is a figure of speech called **polyptoton** — one word used again and again in varied forms to fix it in the reader’s mind. The story is built around *seeing*: God saw the need, God saw to it, and one day, on that mountain, it would be seen.

In the mount of the LORD it was seen. About a thousand years later, God’s temple stood on that mountain, and daily sacrifices were offered there. And about a thousand years after that, outside the walls of that same city, the Lamb God provided was offered once for all.

The Oath

> **Genesis 22:15** *And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,*
> **Genesis 22:16** *And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:*
> **Genesis 22:17** *That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;*
> **Genesis 22:18** *And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.*

“By myself have I sworn.” God had made promises to Abraham many times. This is the first time He swore an oath. And by what? When men swear, they swear by something greater than themselves. God had no one greater to swear by, so He swore by Himself. The book of Hebrews explains why this matters to us:

> **Hebrews 6:13** *For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself,*
> **Hebrews 6:14** *Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.*
> **Hebrews 6:17** *Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:*
> **Hebrews 6:18** *That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*

Two unchangeable things: God’s promise, and God’s oath. God did not need to swear. He did it for the sake of the “heirs of promise” — so that anyone who took hold of this hope would have “strong consolation,” an anchor that cannot slip.

“In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply.” Here the same verb is doubled — “blessing I will bless,” “multiplying I will multiply.” It is **polyptoton** again, the same figure God used in Eden when He said “dying thou shalt die.” There it meant certain death. Here it means certain blessing, beyond measure.

“As the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.” This is a **simile** — a figure of speech that compares one thing to another using “like” or “as.” The comparison is also a deliberate overstatement, a figure called **hyperbole**, used to say *more than you could ever count*.

“Possess the gate of his enemies.” Another idiom. In the ancient East the city gate was the seat of power: the elders sat there, justice was given there, business was done there, and the city was defended there. To possess an enemy’s gate was to hold his city — complete victory over him. Rebekah’s family later blessed her with the same words (Genesis 24:60).

“In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” God had said “in thee” before (Genesis 12:3). Now He says “in thy *seed*” — and Paul, reading these words centuries later, points out that the word is singular:

> **Galatians 3:16** *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

The seed of the woman, first promised in Eden (Genesis 3:15), would come through Abraham, through Isaac — through the very son who had just been bound on the altar and given back. The promise that seemed to be on the point of dying on Moriah was sworn by God’s own oath on the same spot.

“Because thou hast obeyed my voice.” Here is a question worth answering carefully. Was Abraham made righteous by what he did on Moriah? Scripture says he had already been counted righteous by faith, decades earlier: “he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). James explains how the two fit together:

> **James 2:21** *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*
>
> **James 2:22** *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*
>
> **James 2:23** *And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*

“Faith wrought with his works” — worked together with them. What Abraham did on Moriah did not *earn* his righteousness; it *showed* it. It was faith in action, faith brought to completion. The faith God had counted years before was now on full display, and the scripture that said he believed God “was fulfilled.” He was called, from then on, “the Friend of God” (see also Isaiah 41:8).

Going Home

> **Genesis 22:19** *So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.*

Just as he had told the servants — *we will come again to you* — he came back.

And then, in the very next verses, almost as an aside, Abraham receives news from his relatives far away in the north: his brother Nahor has had children and grandchildren, and among them is a baby girl named Rebekah (Genesis 22:20-23). The chapter that began with the promised line almost ending closes with the name of the girl who would one day become Isaac’s wife. God was already seeing to the next step.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

Genesis 22 is a portrait painted two thousand years in advance. Set the two scenes side by side:

- **An only son, beloved.** “Thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.” At the Jordan, God spoke from heaven of Jesus: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). The Greek translation of Genesis 22:2 even uses the same word, *beloved*.
- **A father who gives his son.** Abraham “hast not withheld thy son.” And “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).
- **A son who carries the wood.** “Abraham took the wood… and laid it upon Isaac his son.” And Jesus, “bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull” (John 19:17).
- **A willing son.** Isaac, strong enough to resist, was bound and laid on the altar. The Messiah “was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7).
- **The same place.** “The land of Moriah… one of the mountains.” Jerusalem, where the Messiah was crucified, stood in that same region, and its temple stood on “mount Moriah” (2 Chronicles 3:1).
- **The third day.** For three days Isaac was as good as dead in his father’s heart, and on the third day he was given back. Hebrews says Abraham received him back “in a figure” — as a picture of resurrection (Hebrews 11:19). And Christ “rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4).
- **A substitute provided by God.** The ram died “in the stead of his son.” And Christ “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25).
- **The Lamb.** Isaac asked, “Where is the lamb?” Abraham said, “God will provide himself a lamb.” Two thousand years later, John the Baptist answered: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Peter adds that this Lamb, “without blemish and without spot,” was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19-20). God had seen to it long before Abraham climbed the mountain.

There is one great difference between the two scenes, and it is the whole point. On Moriah, God stopped the knife. Isaac came down from the altar, and a ram died in his place. At Calvary, no one stopped it. There was no substitute for the Substitute. The Son was given up, all the way to death — and then raised from the dead on the third day, and taken up into heaven, where “this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12).

Jesus Himself said: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). As this series understands it, Abraham saw it most clearly of all on the mountain where the LORD would see.

To the Grace Administration

The blessing of Abraham, now on us. God swore that in Abraham’s seed “all the nations of the earth” would be blessed. Paul says that blessing has now reached people who were never part of Abraham’s family at all:

> **Galatians 3:13** *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*
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> **Galatians 3:14** *That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

The oath sworn on Moriah was kept. Every believer under grace, Jew or Gentile, is one of the "nations" God had in mind that day.

Counted righteous the same way. Paul says Abraham's story was written for us too: "it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:23-24). Abraham believed God could raise the dead. Under grace, righteousness is counted to us the same way — by believing that God did raise the dead, raising Jesus Christ.

All things, freely. Paul's argument in Romans 8:32 runs from the greater to the lesser: if God did not spare His own Son, "how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The hardest gift has already been given. Nothing a believer needs could cost God more than that.

Accepted in the beloved. Isaac, the beloved son, was spared. Believers under grace are "accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6) — received by God on account of His beloved Son.

An anchor that holds. Hebrews says God swore His oath to Abraham so that "we might have a strong consolation" (Hebrews 6:18). The oath of Moriah is part of the believer's anchor today. God does not change His counsel, and He cannot lie.

No more altars of blood. No believer is asked to lay a son on an altar. The one sacrifice has been made: "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). What God asks now is what Abraham showed on Moriah — a whole heart: "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

To the Topic of Faith Under Testing

Genesis 22 is scripture's great lesson on how faith behaves under the hardest test:

1. **Faith answers "Here am I"** before it knows what will be asked.
2. **Faith obeys early** — it does not let the morning go by.
3. **Faith reasons from God's promise.** "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" — so God must raise him. Faith adds it up.
4. **Faith speaks ahead of what it sees.** "We will come again." "God will provide."
5. **Faith holds nothing back.** "Thou hast not withheld thy son."
6. **Faith is shown in action.** "Faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect."

And God's side of the test is just as clear. He did not tempt Abraham to evil. He proved a faith that was already there, stopped the knife before any harm was done, provided the sacrifice Himself, and swore an oath of blessing that reaches to us. "The trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:3) — the same *remaining under* that Romans 15:4 speaks of.

The Main Takeaway

God asks for everything, and then provides everything — and the Lamb He provided is His own Son.

- **Be ready before you know the question.** "Here am I" is the right answer every time God calls.
- **Obey promptly.** Abraham "rose up early." Hard obedience does not get easier by waiting.
- **Let God's promise do your reasoning.** When a command and a promise seem to collide, trust that God will keep both.
- **Speak faith, not fear.** "We will come again." "God will provide." Say what God has said.
- **Hold nothing back.** The gift can never be more precious than the Giver.
- **Remember what it cost.** God stopped Abraham's hand. He did not spare His own Son. Everything else He gives, He gives freely with Him.

For Our Learning — The People

- **Abraham.** The man who "believed in the LORD," counted righteous by faith (Genesis 15:6). He had stumbled more than once, but by this day his faith had grown strong enough to give up the son of promise, trusting God to raise him from the dead. He obeyed at once, spoke faith to his servants and his son, and was called "the Friend of God."
- **Isaac.** The son of promise, whose name means *laughter*; "the lad," a young man strong enough to carry the wood up the mountain. He asked the great question — "Where is the lamb?" — and then let himself be bound without resistance. He came down from the altar, received back "in a figure."
- **The two young men.** Abraham's servants, who waited with the donkey and heard him say, "we will come again to you."
- **The angel of the LORD.** God's messenger, who called from heaven twice — first to stop the knife, then to deliver God's oath — speaking God's own words in the first person, as a messenger in the East always did.
- **The LORD God.** He proved Abraham's faith, never desiring Isaac's death; named exactly what He was asking; provided the substitute; swore by Himself; and in the fullness of time did what He did not let Abraham do — gave His own beloved Son.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **"Here am I" (*hinneni*).** The answer of a servant ready for orders. Abraham says it three times in the chapter (22:1, 7, 11).
- **The burnt offering (*'olah*).** From "to go up" — the offering wholly consumed on the altar, rising to God. Nothing was kept back.
- **Rising early.** In the East, important journeys and serious business began at dawn. Abraham "rose up early" both when he sent Ishmael away and when he set out for Moriah.
- **Carrying the fire.** Probably live coals in a vessel, needed to light the offering far from home.
- **The binding (*'aqad*).** Used only here in the Bible; Jewish tradition names the whole account the *Akedah*, "the binding."
- **A messenger speaks as his master.** An envoy delivered his master's words in the first person. The angel says "from me" and "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD."

- **Swearing by the greater.** Men swore by someone greater than themselves; God, having no one greater, swore by Himself (Hebrews 6:13, 16).
- **The gate of the city.** The seat of rule, judgment and defence. To "possess the gate" of an enemy was to hold his city.
- **Child sacrifice among the nations.** Practised by the peoples around Israel, and later forbidden by God in the strongest terms (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 7:31). God stopped Abraham's hand.
- **Naming a place after what God did.** Abraham named the place "Jehovah-jireh," so that the place itself would carry the testimony.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Polysyndeton** — "many ands." "Rose up… and saddled… and took… and clave… and rose up, and went" (22:3); "built… and laid… and bound… and laid" (22:9-10): every action slowed down so we watch it.
- **Idiom** — an expression whose meaning comes from how a people used it. "Lifted up his eyes" (22:4, 13): looked up attentively. "Possess the gate of his enemies" (22:17): win complete victory.
- **Epizeuxis** — the same word repeated immediately, for urgency and feeling. "Abraham, Abraham" (22:11).
- **Anthropopatheia** — describing God in human terms so we can understand Him. "Now I know that thou fearest God" (22:12): Abraham's faith was openly shown, not discovered by God.
- **Polyptoton** — the same word repeated in different forms. The verb "to see" runs through the chapter (22:4, 8, 13, 14); "in blessing I will bless… in multiplying I will multiply" (22:17): certain, overflowing blessing.
- **Simile** — a comparison using "like" or "as." "As the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore" (22:17).
- **Hyperbole** — a deliberate overstatement for emphasis. The same comparison means *more than can ever be counted*.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Isaac was not a small child.** He is "the lad," the word used of Joseph at seventeen, and he carried the wood for a burnt offering up a mountain (22:6).
- **"Tempt" means "test."** God proved Abraham's faith; He did not entice him to evil (James 1:13).
- **God never wanted Isaac dead.** He stopped the knife, and He later called child sacrifice something "which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart" (Jeremiah 7:31).
- **Abraham expected to come back with his son.** "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (22:5) — because he believed God could raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).
- **Isaac was not Abraham's only child.** He was the only son of the promise. Ishmael was already born, and six more sons came later (Genesis 25:1-2).

- **The animal on the mountain was a ram, not a lamb.** Abraham spoke of a lamb (22:8); God provided a ram (22:13). The Lamb was still to come.
- **"Jehovah-jireh" looks forward.** It means "the LORD *will* see" or "*will* provide," and the saying was "it *shall* be seen."
- **"God will provide himself a lamb" means "for Himself."** God provides the lamb; He does not become it. The Lamb He provided is His Son.
- **The first "love" in the Bible** is a father's love for his only son (22:2).

God's Will and Intent

- **God tests to prove faith, not to destroy it.** His trials bring out, strengthen and display what He has already worked in a person.
- **God never desired the death of Isaac.** He stopped Abraham's hand and provided a substitute.
- **God provides the sacrifice Himself.** "God will provide himself a lamb." What He required, He supplied.
- **God keeps His promises even when they seem to collide with His commands.** Abraham trusted that God would keep both, and God did.
- **God binds Himself by His word and oath** so that His people might have "strong consolation."
- **God planned the Lamb long before Moriah.** Christ was "foreordained before the foundation of the world."
- **God gave what He did not require of Abraham.** He spared Abraham's son. He did not spare His own.