

*First Things – Genesis*  
**Genesis 22:1-19**  
**“The Toughest Test”**

- I. DON'T FIGHT WHAT GOD HAS REQUIRED OF YOU**
  - A. The heavenly side of this requirement
  - B. The human side of this requirement
- II. DON'T FORGET WHAT GOD HAS REVEALED TO YOU**
  - A. What God has revealed about your future
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- III. DON'T FORFEIT WHAT GOD HAS READY FOR YOU**
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1. High School students everywhere know and fear the three letters, A.C.T. They stand for *American College Testing*, and it represents the standardized test for admission to college in the U.S.

2. The test covers four different areas of study, and a composite score of 1-36 is determined from those different areas.

3. The test is difficult, indicated by the fact that only one out of four High School graduates in 2011 could meet the college-ready standards in all four subjects.<sup>i</sup>

4. In Genesis 22, the patriarch Abraham was well beyond high school age when he faced his toughest test.

5. Abraham had faced times of testing before, but when God called upon him to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, the Father of the Faithful found his faith stretched in a way that he could not have imagined.

6. John Calvin writes of the importance of our “diligent and constant meditation” upon this Bible chapter.

7. He goes on to say that this chapter teaches us that, “...the faith, which is more precious than gold and silver, ought not to [exist]...without trial; and experience teaches, that each will be tried by God, according to the measure of his faith.”<sup>iii</sup>

8. As we read over this gripping and dramatic story from the Word of God, we must be mindful that spiritual tests will come to all of us who know and follow the Lord.

9. I Peter 4:12 says, “*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*”

10. When God decides to test our faith, we may not see it coming, but we should not be surprised that it has come.

11. There are many powerful truths to be found in this chapter, not the least of which are the clear pictures of Jesus and the gospel that we find here.

12. As we read through this chapter, Abraham provides us an example of how we are to face the tests God sends us, as well as what we will find in those tests.

13. Consider some of the lessons we draw from the record of Abraham's toughest test. The first is this:

## **I. DON'T FIGHT WHAT GOD HAS REQUIRED OF YOU**

1. After the birth of Isaac, Abraham had sort-of settled down in a place called Beersheba. He had dug a well and planted a grove of trees in that little settlement, where he watched day by day as the promised-son, Isaac, sprouted up right before his elderly eyes.

2. Things were peaceful and pleasurable; then one day Abraham heard the familiar voice of God calling his name. "Abraham."

3. Abraham answered the call, and then came an instruction that must have covered the brightness of Abraham's heart with midnight blackness.

4. The Lord said to His servant, *"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."*

5. We try to imagine how this must have sounded to Abraham, but the Holy Spirit only tells us that as soon as the morning came, Abraham packed up and headed out to do what the Lord had commanded him.

6. As we look at what the Lord asked of Abraham, there are two sides of this requirement we need to consider. First of all, think with me about:

### **A. The heavenly side of this requirement**

1. R. Kent Hughes says that the opening line of chapter 22, "...serves to cushion the reader from the shock that follows."<sup>iii</sup>

Verse 1 says, *"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham..."*

2. Notice that word "tempt". It does not speak of a temptation to sin. James says that God cannot tempt us to sin (James 1:13).

3. The word is translated in other places as "prove". The idea is that God put Abraham to the test in order to prove the firmness and the fullness of his faith.

4. F.B. Meyer said, "Satan tempts us that he may bring out all the evil that is in our hearts; God tries or tests us that He may bring out all the good."<sup>iv</sup>
5. Though it sounded as though God was asking something horrible and unthinkable from Abraham, from heaven's perspective, this test was for Abraham's ultimate good!
6. God does not test us merely to mess with us, or to play games with our lives! No, He tests us that He might make us into something better and stronger than we are now.
7. I recently purchased the biography of an evangelist named Manley Beasley. Manley was a unique man of God, who had a great influence on Baptists throughout the 70's and 80's.
8. In one of the recommendations for the book, a dear pastor's wife says, "[Manley Beasley's] words, 'God won't hurt you,' will forever ring in my ears."
9. From the heavenly side of this requirement, we are reminded that God wasn't trying to hurt Abraham; He was trying to help him.
10. Consider not only the heavenly side of this requirement, but think with me also about:

### **B. The human side of this requirement**

1. I found it interesting how the famous preacher and theologian, John Calvin, in his commentary described what God had asked of Abraham. He used the word "cruel", and spoke of God tormenting the holy man, "as if he had been stretched upon the rack..."<sup>v</sup>
2. While we are told in the opening verse that this was a test, Abraham was not given that information. As far as He knew, God was actually going to require him to kill his son, and offer him as a burnt offering.
3. No doubt, in Abraham's mind, there *was* something cruel and torturous about this. No doubt this felt like a heavy, heartbreaking blow coming down from heaven upon his life.
4. In most cases, the tests God sends to us do not immediately make sense, and at times they even feel cruel and punishing.
5. However, as we look at how Abraham responded, we are reminded of how we must respond, even when what God is doing doesn't seem to make sense.

6. The text says that the very next morning, Abraham got the necessary things together, and headed out to obey God's command for his life.
7. Rather than arguing with God, or fighting against what seemed to be a cruel and unusual request, Abraham simply set out to do what God had asked of Him.
8. Just as Jesus in the Garden prayed, "Not my will, but Thine be done," so also must we submit to what God requires of us, no matter how bitter the cup may seem.
9. As a child I learned the little song that says, "Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe."
10. As Abraham's faith was tested by God's requirement, it is his obedience that showed that he really did believe God.
11. That leads us to a second lesson we draw from this story. The first is this: *Don't fight what God has required of you.* Secondly, we see this lesson:

## **II. DON'T FORGET WHAT GOD HAS REVEALED TO YOU**

1. Someone reading over this story might say to themselves, "How could Abraham, if he really loved Isaac as God said, follow through with this, and take his son up to that mountain, intent on killing him?"
2. As the text depicts for us the long journey up that mountain, Abraham's words indicate exactly how he was able to go through the crucible of this toughest test.
3. As with the other tests in Abraham's life, it was his total trust and firm faith in the truth of His God that propelled him as he sought to do what would seem impossible.
4. Likewise, when a test comes, and we don't know exactly what God is doing, that is when our faith must cling to what it *does* know about God and His character.
5. Notice what Abraham teaches us about trusting in what God has revealed to us. He reminds us firstly to trust in:

### **A. What God has revealed about your future**

1. After a long, three-day journey to the particular place that God had led him, Abraham says something that indicates what must have been going on in his mind.

2. He had brought a couple of men along with him and Isaac, but once they got to the foot of the mountain, Abraham told them to stay there and wait.

3. In verse 5, Abraham said to them, “...*I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.*” Did you catch that? Abraham said that he *and* Isaac would be back.

4. Though Abraham was absolutely committed to offering his son as a sacrifice, he still nonetheless believed that he and his son would come back down the mountain together!

5. The writer of Hebrews indicates what led Abraham to this conviction. Hebrews 11, beginning in verse 17, says this:

*“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead...”*

6. In other words, Abraham had heard the promise of God that Isaac was the son from which all of Abraham’s multitude of descendents would eventually come.

7. Therefore, knowing that promise, Abraham believed that even if he sacrificed and killed that boy, God was able to raise him from the dead and restore His life just to keep His Word!

8. What a great faith this is! Abraham knew the promises God had made for his future, and he knew that somehow, someday, God would keep those promises!

9. In your time of testing, don’t ever forget the promises God has already given to you! Don’t forget that, “...*he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” (Philippians 1:6)

10. Even when the tough tests come, and you don’t know everything that God is up to, remember what you do know! Say with Paul in I Timothy 1:12, “*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*”

11. Abraham reminds us to remember what God has revealed to you about your future. Furthermore, we see from Abraham that we must not forget:

### **B. What God has revealed about His faithfulness**

1. As Abraham and Isaac started up the mountain, Isaac asked a question that must have caused even more angst in the heart of his father.

2. Verse 7 says, *“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?”*

3. Isaac had been on this kind of journey before. He knew what it meant to go and make a burnt offering to the Lord. However, the usual sacrificial lamb was missing.

4. Look at Abraham’s answer in verse 8. *“And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.”*

5. Literally, Abraham said, “God will see to it!” Abraham didn’t know exactly what was going to happen on that mountain, but he knew in his heart that God would see to it Himself!

6. Preaching on this text, my friend, Tom Hayes, said, “Abraham truly believed that in his hour of crisis, God would be faithful. He had faith in God’s faithfulness!”

7. F.B. Meyer says that we ought to ask ourselves if we are like this, “...holding our treasures with a loose hand; loving God most of all; prepared to obey Him at all costs; slaying our brightest hopes if God bid it – **because [we are] so sure that He will not fail or deceive us.**”<sup>vi</sup> (Emphasis added)

8. The only way we can walk up the mountain, prepared to pass the test is if we are absolutely convinced of God’s goodness and faithfulness to us!

9. Abraham may have had questions about what *he* was doing, but he did not question what God was doing! He knew God would be faithful!

10. The first lesson Abraham teaches us is this: *don’t fight what God has required of you.* The second, then, is this: *don’t forget what God has revealed to you.* Consider with me a third lesson we find here. That is this:

### **III. DON’T FORFEIT WHAT GOD HAS READY FOR YOU**

1. Verse 9 of our text says, *“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.”*

2. Verse 10 continues, *“And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”*

3. Most of you, no doubt, know this story. You know that God is about to intervene and demonstrate powerfully what Abraham had always believed personally.

4. However, I want you to consider the fact that it was not until the knife was raised and Abraham had fully proved His faith in God that God showed up and proved Himself to Abraham.
5. In your own life, if you are not willing to follow God onto the mountain of testing, you will never see what God can really do.
6. If you are not willing to obey His voice and give Him what He requires of you, you will forfeit the opportunity to see the awesome things God has ready for you!
7. Consider what you might miss if you are not willing to submit to the tests God sends to you. First of all, you might miss the blessing of:

#### **A. Hearing Him speak your name**

1. Abraham's trembling hand squeezed tightly around the grip of the knife, and through his tears he focused on the spot where he would land the fatal blow to Isaac's body.
2. Just before his muscles tensed into the downward motion, the Bible says, "...the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham..."
3. R. Kent Hughes said, "Never was there a more welcome voice! Abraham's old heart soared, as did that of young Isaac."<sup>vii</sup>
4. I will assure you, the voice of the Lord has never sounded as sweet to your heart as when in the moment of testing, He calls your name and says, "You don't have to go any further! I will take over from here!"
5. The truth is, however, you'll never hear Him call your name at the height of the test, if you weren't willing to answer His call at the start of the test.
7. In verse 11, Abraham answered the voice from heaven by saying, "*Here am I.*" Yet, before he could joyfully answer that way in verse 11, he first had to willingly say in verse 1, "*Here I am.*"
8. If God is calling you into a season of testing, be willing to go and do whatever He asks of you! If you will, there will come a moment when you will hear His voice again, and this time, the test will be over!
9. Don't miss what God has ready for you on the other side of your test. Don't miss hearing Him speak your name. Furthermore, don't miss:

#### **B. Having Him supply your need**

1. In verse 12, the angel of the Lord told Abraham that he need not harm the boy. The test was over, and he had passed with flying colors.

2. Then in verse 13, we read, *“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.”*

3. While Abraham and Isaac were coming up one side of that mountain, God was leading a ram up the other side to take the place of Isaac on the altar.

4. Abraham had confidently spoken that God would provide Himself a ram. Now, what Abraham had predicted by faith, He saw with His eyes!

5. But, that ram would never have been found, and never have been offered to God had Abraham and Isaac simply stayed home and refused the test.

6. Likewise, you will never know the glorious, miraculous provision of God if you are not willing to follow Him into the test.

7. God has a mountain-sized test for all us at some point. At the peak of that mountain God will show us that He is “Jehovah-Jireh”, the God who provides.

8. On that mountain, as He did for Abraham, God wants to confirm again to us His promises for our lives. He wants to bring us to a greater assurance of His love and grace to us.

9. However, if we stay home and refuse to follow His call and submit to His test, we will forfeit all He has for us, and miss out on the glory of having Him supply our every need.

1. When we talk about God supplying our needs, we would miss the truest meaning of this text if we did not mention God’s greatest provision for our greatest need – that is the Lord Jesus.

2. As I mentioned in the introduction, this passage is rich with pictures and reminders of Jesus and His sacrifice for us.

3. It is not just Abraham and Isaac that we see walking up that mountain. It is God the Father, along with His only, beloved Son, making their way to Calvary!

4. The wood of the cross is on the back of Jesus, and He is submissive to His Father’s will. There carry no lamb with them, for Jesus is the Lamb!

5. Wait, look now at the ram caught in the thicket! Now the picture has changed. Isaac on the altar, as good as dead, is a picture of you and me lost in our sins.

6. There stands Jesus, the crown of thorns tangled upon His head, ready to lay down His life in our place!

7. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are enabled to hear the Father call our names and bless us with promises for eternity!

8. You see; God was preaching the gospel to Abraham that day, and He still preaches it to all who will see it and believe!

9. Because of His love for us, let us enter the tests of this life willingly, knowing that He is faithful, and that He will surely prove Himself to us!

10. Don't forfeit what He has ready for you at the top of your toughest test!

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<sup>i</sup> Granderson, LZ, "Parents, time to panic about our kids' education", 8/23/11, *CNNOpinion*, accessed 10/6/11, [http://articles.cnn.com/2011-08-23/opinion/granderson.education.dream.team.1\\_basketball-nation-school-funding-scores?\\_s=PM:OPINION](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-08-23/opinion/granderson.education.dream.team.1_basketball-nation-school-funding-scores?_s=PM:OPINION)

<sup>ii</sup> Calvin, John, *Commentary on Genesis: Vol. 1*, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), *Amazon Kindle edition*

<sup>iii</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2004), p. 300

<sup>iv</sup> Meyer, F.B., *Abraham*, (Christian Literature Crusade, Fort Washington, PA, 1993), p. 131

<sup>v</sup> Calvin, John

<sup>vi</sup> Meyer, F.B., p. 136

<sup>vii</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, p. 304