

Abraham 6 — God Tests Abraham

Introduction/Review

God's test of Abraham in asking him to offer up Isaac on the altar is the third of three pivotal moments in the life of Abraham that are recorded by the Holy Spirit as examples to us who live as Christians under the New Covenant. Each of them was set forth as something we should imitate and follow. As God revealed to Isaiah, everyone seeking righteousness must look to Abraham and follow his example.

"Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, You who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. 2 Look to Abraham your father, And to Sarah who bore you; For I called him alone, And blessed him and increased him." Isa 51:1-2

Abraham is the rock from which all of us are hewn. Since his faith and life are set forth as examples of greatness in the sight of God we must be of the same substance and quality, we must look to him. If we truly follow after righteousness and truly seek for the Lord, Abraham is the way forward.

and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. 22 And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, Rom 4:21-24

just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. Gal 3:6-8

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. James 2:22-24

It is therefore of the highest importance that we know and understand exactly what Abraham did and how God felt about it along with how we too can follow these examples with our own faith and works. Although God is a friend to everyone, Abraham is the only one who was called the friend to God.

But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend. Isa. 41:8

Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? 2 Chr. 20:7

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the "friend of God." Jas. 2:23

Although it is imperative that we learn as much as we can about Abraham from the account of his life in Genesis 12-24, there are three important examples that are recounted in the New Testament and then give specific duties, responsibilities and doctrines as a result of them.

1. When God called Abraham went.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Heb 11:8-10

*Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, 6 among whom **you also are the called of Jesus Christ**; Rom 1:5-6*

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, **to those who are the called according to His purpose**. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 **Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified**; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. Rom 8:28-30*

*and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 **even us whom He called**, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? Rom 9:23-24*

*God is faithful, by whom **you were called into the fellowship of His Son**, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Cor 1:9*

*but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but **to those who are called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Cor 1:23-25*

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to **walk worthy of the calling with which you were***

called,... 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as **you were called in one hope of your calling**; Eph 4:1, 4

that you would walk worthy of God **who calls you into His own kingdom and glory**. 1 Th 2:12

to which **He called you by our gospel**, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Th 2:14-15

who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, 2 Tim 1:9-10

Therefore, holy brethren, **partakers of the heavenly calling**, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, Heb 3:1-2

And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, **that those who are called** may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Heb 9:15

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him **who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light**; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1Pet 2:9-10

But may the God of all grace, **who called us to His eternal glory by Christ** Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 1 Peter 5:10-11

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to **make your call and election sure**, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 2 Peter 1:10-11

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, **To those who are called**, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: Jude 1

2. When God made an Impossible Promise he believed.

(as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed-- God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; 18 who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." 19 And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. 22 And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Rom 4:17-25

From this man's seed, **according to the promise**, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus— Acts 13:23-24

And we declare to you glad tidings — **that promise which was made to the fathers. 33 God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.** Acts 13:32-33

And now I stand and am judged **for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.** Acts 26:6

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being **fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform**. 22 And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 **but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,** Rom. 4:20-24

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, **are children of promise.** Gal. 4:28-29

by which have been given to us **exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2Pet. 1:4

And **this is the promise that He has promised us** — eternal life. 1 John 2:25

3. When God Made an Impossible Demand and He Fulfilled it.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. James 2:21-24

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." 15 And so, after

he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. 16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. Heb. 6:13-18

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. Heb 11:17-19

God Tests Abraham

The term test has different meanings throughout the Bible. Some tests are good while others are evil. We are generally accustomed to see temptation as an evil thing and tests as a good thing. While this generally holds true, not all translators have followed this. So it is better to see the terms in the light of who is testing. When God tests it is always a good thing with God's hope that we will pass that test. God never tempts or tests for an evil outcome, nor does He use evil as a means of testing.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Jas. 1:13-15

This test is a test of good following the same example of what God himself would do. There was nothing evil in this test.

nāsâ test, try, prove, tempt, assay, put to the proof, put to the test. (Other renderings infrequently found: ASV adventure, proveth ; RSV make a test, attempt, venture, be used to; ASV and RSV make trial.) ... *massâ* ... trial, test, proving. Used also as a place name (Massah) where the "trial" over water happened in the wilderness (cf. Ex 17:1-7). In most contexts has the idea of testing or proving the quality of someone or something, often through adversity or hardship. The rendering tempt, used frequently by the AV and ASV, generally means prove, test, put to the test, rather than the current English idea of "entice to do wrong." The verb *nāsâ* occurs 36 times in the OT. (TWOT OT:5254)

Even when it is for good purposes, God never allows one to be tempted above what he can accomplish. God knew Abraham was up to this test, just as He knew Jesus was up to it in the garden of Gethsemane.

Take Your Only Son Isaac and Offer Him as a Burnt Offering

Most of us can understand this as it relates to a father and a son. How difficult it would be to take someone you love and offer them. Yet though even under this fundamental level this would be a great test, it was not really the issue. The most vital aspects of God's promises to Abraham could only be fulfilled with Isaac. How was Abraham to become a great nation and the father of many nations without Isaac? How would all nations of the earth be blessed without this seed? Everything Abraham had done for God up to this point was summed up in Isaac. If Abraham does what God commands here, he will lose everything, and everything he has done in service to God and all the sacrifices he has made would be for nothing. Not only this, but all the promises God has given to Abraham would be violated if he does this deed. He could have gotten angry and thrown a tantrum. He could have worked like a lawyer and challenged God's wisdom and honor in asking him to do this thing. He did none of these things. Instead Abraham got up the next morning and went.

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. Gen. 22:3-4

Another element of this is that it was not quick. Abraham had to go out and cut the wood and he had to travel for a few days. As he rode on his donkey and watched the miles pass, he had plenty of time to consider the implications of what he had been asked to do. He also had at least three nights to pray and meditate on it. In his conversations with Isaac and the men, things would have arisen that might have tempted him to discuss this matter. But just as he never wavered when God promised this son, he never wavered at the need to fulfill this command.

Abraham had one defense that he must have quoted over and over again. After I offer him, God will raise him from the dead. Surely God will raise him from the dead. God will have to raise him from the dead.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. Heb 11:17-19

Abraham and Isaac Go to the Mountain Alone

As the long trip comes to a close and the distant mountain becomes clearer, Abraham asked the two men who had accompanied them to remain with the donkey while he and Isaac completed the journey on foot. Clearly Abraham had given careful thought to these events and did not want to give the men an opportunity to interfere. It is important to note that Abraham used “we” not to deceive, but by his faith that “*God would raise him from the dead.*”

5 And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." Gen 22:5

As they left the young men behind, Isaac is carrying the wood and Abraham is carrying the fire and a knife. There is no indication how much time had passed from Isaac being weaned until this event. He is clearly old enough to carry the wood and to understand the nature of sacrifice. His question about the “*lamb for a burnt offering*” must have cut Abraham’s heart. His answer reveals his faith and his tact.

6 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. 7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. Gen 22:6-8

The time finally arrived when Abraham had to make the decision final. He was not in the right place, and he built an altar. From later instructions it is clear that God did not want elaborate altars. It was made of earth or unhewn stones.

An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. 25 And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. Ex 20:24-26

Abraham Prepares to Sacrifice Isaac

After the altar was complete, He placed the wood properly and all was ready. At that moment Isaac must have become very alarmed. First Abraham tied him up so he could not resist, then he laid him on the altar. One can only imagine Isaac’s wide eyes and pleas and the torment in Abraham’s heart as he reached for the knife, picked it up and made the final decision that he would complete what God had asked him to do.

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

This was the moment God had waited for and there was no longer any doubt. Man’s free will could have led Abraham to change his mind at any moment in the journey and preparation, but there was no longer any opportunity to change his mind. Abraham had passed the point of obedience and there was no need for it to go any further. So the “*Angel of the Lord*” stopped him at the moment when he picked up the knife. It is not stated whether both Abraham and Isaac heard these words, but it would have been a blessing for Isaac to hear them and to know why Abraham had done this.

11 But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 12 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, 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." Gen. 22:11

The expression “*now I know*” illustrates James words regarding faith and works. Up until that very moment Abraham’s faith could have faltered. Up to the very moment when he picked up the knife and determined to give no more thought was going to fulfill God’s command, Abraham could have changed his mind and rebelled against the command.

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Jas. 2:20-24

Abraham named the Place the–LORD–will–Provide

Since it was not until that moment that those words were spoken, it is not until that moment that faith is genuine faith. When that moment arrived God provided the way of escape. For as Abraham lifted up his eyes from Isaac he looked and saw a ram caught in a thicket, waiting for Abraham to come and take him. One can only dimly imagine the feelings Abraham must have felt at that moment as the words of the Angel and the sight of the ram brought the new set of circumstances into Abraham’s consciousness. Isaac was safe, He had been trusting and obedient and a ram had

now been provided to fulfill the words he had spoken to Isaac.

Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided." Gen. 22:13-14

By Myself I have Sworn says the LORD

After Abraham untied Isaac and took him off the altar, tied up the ram and put him on the altar and offered him as a burnt offering, the Angel of the LORD spoke again. This time he revealed to Abraham (and Isaac?) the great favor that God now felt toward him. God had sworn with an oath by Himself

Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son — 17 blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Gen. 22:15-18

The power of this event is captured by the Hebrew writer. Abraham left Ur with a simple covenant promise from God that he would make him a great nation. He lived by faith in Canaan from the age of 75 until this moment trusting in the promise of God.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." 15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. 16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, Heb 6:13-20

But with this act, God wanted to give something greater. So "God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath." Just as Paul had said in Romans, "Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead," (Rom. 4:23-25) These things were spoken for Abraham, for his fleshly offspring and for his spiritual offspring.

God wanted to show the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel. **IT WOULD NEVER CHANGE!** Because of two immutable things.

TWO IMMUTABLE THINGS:

1. God made a **promise** to Abraham
2. God **swore/confirmed** it with an **oath** (an end to all dispute!).

Then stamped over both of these: **IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO LIE**

This the basis of the hope which is the anchor of the soul that enters into the veil and ties us directly to God. God first made a promise (*and it is impossible for God to lie*). Then God swore with an oath in his own name that he would keep that promise (*and it is impossible for God to lie*). By these two (and really three) immutable things, we have strong assurance and hope.

Sarah's Death

About thirty years later, God records the death of Sarah. She was ninety when Isaac was born, so Isaac would be about thirty-seven.

Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. 2 So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Gen 23:1-2

Abraham then purchased the cave of Machpelah. For his entire life, Abraham had sojourned in the land of Canaan with no property. But after the death of Sarah, God recorded in detail the purchase of the one piece of property in Canaan that Abraham owned, a place to bury his dead.

in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. Gen 49:30-32