

Abraham's One God

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In the first commandment (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7), God tells us, "You shall have no other gods before Me." I used to think that this meant simply that I was to make sure God was my first priority. Put God first, then family, job, etc. I have come to see, however, that God is a jealous God (Deuteronomy 5:9) and that what He means, I believe, is that nothing—absolutely nothing—can be worshipped in our lives except Him. God will not abide us placing family, work, or possessions in competition with Him.

The Amplified Bible words verse 7, "You shall have no other gods before or besides Me." In my opinion, the Moffatt translation has it best: "You shall have no gods *but Me* ." How clear that is! None, *nada*, zip, zilch! One God and one God only. Anything that we put ahead of God is "another god." Anything that competes with God for the time that belongs to Him is "another god."

It is imperative that we examine our lives and rid ourselves of any other gods. This does not mean we should leave our families and renounce all material possessions, but we should determine if anything competes with God in our minds and begin to make the changes that will bring matters back into balance. God has a plan for each of us, and for that plan to come to fruition in our lives, He must be first. His overall plan will be completed with or without us. Our continued participation in it is due to His mercy and grace and our humble, yielded obedience.

Through the example of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, God shows clearly that He has a plan, that He will provide, and most importantly for us, that our participation in that plan is contingent upon where God is in our lives.

God Tests Abraham

"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am' (Genesis 22:1). After what things had passed? What had passed was the whole, interesting story of his life up to this point. It has been said that to follow God Abraham gave up more than any other man. Now, at age 133, he is looking back on a lifetime of trials. Perhaps he thought that he had proved his faith and could relax a bit and enjoy his old age. God, however, had another test for him, the biggest yet. Though God does not tempt us (James 1:13), He does test us. Nevertheless, Abraham eagerly responds when God calls his name: "Here I am!" What tremendous humility this shows.

Then God reveals the test: "And He said, 'Take now 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'" (Genesis 22:2). Notice how God phrases this: "your *only* son [the only legitimate son] . . . whom you love." It is not that Abraham does not love Ishmael, but Isaac is the son of promise, the son of his old age, a very special son. God is tender in His phrasing, for what He commands Abraham to do foreshadows Christ's own sacrifice later and so has special meaning to God.

There was absolutely nothing wrong in Abraham loving Isaac deeply, as long as his love did not become worship. We often say we "adore" those whom we love. The first definition of *adore* is "to worship with divine honors," while the second is "to love deeply," which is perfectly acceptable to do. It is important to understand the distinction.

God tells Abraham, "Go to the land of Moriah," and He promises to tell him exactly which peak he should ascend. "Moriah" refers to an area of land in what is now Jerusalem that contains several mountains or small peaks. Abraham lived in Beersheba, more than 40 miles from Moriah.

God also tells him to sacrifice Isaac "as a burnt offering." We can only imagine the thoughts that must have raced through Abraham's mind! How can the promises be fulfilled if Isaac is dead? Is this not human sacrifice, such as was practiced by the heathen nations? Would this not be murder? How will it look to Sarah, his servants, the Egyptians, and others? Even so, his obedience was absolute.

"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 him" (verse 3). Abraham shows no hesitation in obeying God's order. He does not try to stall, but instead, he "rose early in the morning"! This is mind-boggling! Here was a man who understood his position relative to God. Though Abraham was a great man, he was just a man. He fully appreciated who and what God is: He is **GOD** !

Abraham then splits the wood for the sacrifice himself, no doubt his mind whirling the whole time. If we were in Abraham's position, what would our state of mind be like?

"Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off" (verse 4). For three days, as far as Abraham was concerned, Isaac was dead. They walked for over 40 miles, each undoubtedly lost in his own thoughts.

Ironclad Certainty

"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'" (verse 5). The word *lad* means "a boy, a young man." How old was Isaac at this time? The Hebrew word translated "young men," although plural, is the same as the word for "lad." The Jewish historian Josephus gives his age as 25, while rabbinic tradition says he was 36. Other commentators suggest he was 33. Because Isaac's life parallels the life of Christ to such an extent, that he was 33 years old at this time feels right.

Abraham tells his servants, "We will come back to you." Was he lying to them so as not to let Isaac know what was happening? It seems unlikely. Abraham is known as the "father of the faithful," and he had had the time to think the whole situation over. He knew that for God to deliver on His promises, Isaac would have to live. Hebrews 11:19 says Abraham acted as he did, "accounting that God was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead." He knew with ironclad certainty that God would resurrect his son. This in no way diminishes what Abraham had to do, for *he still had to kill his own son!* How many of us have that kind of faith?

"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" (Genesis 22:6). The wood, previously transported by a donkey, was now carried by Isaac, confirming that he was not a child at this time. It is also a mirror image of Christ carrying the stake on which He would be crucified.

"But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' And he said, 'Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'" (verse 7). Notice the affection in this interplay between them. Does Isaac suspect anything? Had they begun to discuss things by this point? We do not know. But Isaac is no simpleton. He might well have figured things out and was seeking confirmation. Abraham is a type of God the Father, and Isaac, as a type of Christ, has complete faith in him. Just as Jesus would rather have not gone through the agonies of crucifixion but did so, trusting His Father completely, Isaac appears to respond similarly.

"And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.' And the two of them went together" (verse 8). Abraham, speaking of "the lamb," probably means Isaac. Abraham knows that, however events transpire, God will take care of things. Of course, God does later provide a ram for the offering. Later still, Christ Himself is offered as the Lamb of God.

"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" (verse 9). This is an amazing verse—the pivotal point of the narrative. We read that Abraham built the altar. Imagine what must have gone through his mind as he piled up rock for a base then laid the wood upon it, knowing all the while he would soon be sacrificing his beloved son on it. Surely by now, Isaac understands what was going to happen; he knows that *he* will be the sacrifice. His total submission throughout the entire story is impressive. He may have even helped build the altar he was to be sacrificed on!

Scripture says that Abraham bound his son and laid him on the altar. How does a 133-year-old man tie up a strapping 33-year-old, unless the younger man consents? Isaac, like Jesus, went willingly to the slaughter. He certainly was not eager to die, but he submitted to Abraham's will and thus to God's will. He had complete confidence in Abraham and in his relationship with God. This verse shows a template of prophecy to be fulfilled in Christ.

"And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son" (verse 10). In Abraham, we see the very pinnacle of human obedience, humility, and faith. He exhibits very clearly that God is first in his life; Abraham has no other gods.

"Now I Know"

"But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am'" (verse 11). This is the One who became Jesus Christ calling out to him. Note the exclamation point. He is not calling to Abraham softly, but excitedly and urgently! Abraham had proved his loyalty and needed to go no further. What was Christ thinking here, as he watched this scene unfold? Could He have been imagining His own sacrifice to come?

"And He [the Angel of the Lord] 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'" (verse 12). God is assured that He has first place in the heart of his servant Abraham. Again, notice

the tenderness in the words. He calls Isaac "your son, your only son," thinking no doubt of His own relationship with His Father.

"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" (verse 13). The ram, a type of Christ, was behind Abraham, so he had not seen it previously. It was offered for Isaac, just as Christ was offered for us.

"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'" (verse 14). The literal Hebrew for this place name is "the Lord will see," which commentator Adam Clarke expounds as, "God will take care that everything shall be done that is necessary for the comfort and support of them who trust in Him." God will provide to those who obey, who have yielded to Him completely. Yielding and trusting in God are just different ways of saying, "Put God first." Notice the proverbial saying that sprang from this: "In the Mount of the Lord *it* shall be provided." Clarke comments: "From this it appears that the sacrifice offered by Abraham was understood to be a representative one, and a tradition was kept up that Jehovah (Yahweh) should be seen in a sacrificial way on this mount." The "it" that will be provided was Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 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, in blessing I will bless you, and in 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. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (verses 15-18)

God's promise to Abraham becomes unconditional here because Abraham obeyed Him. That we live today in peace and prosperity in the most blessed land of man's 6,000-year history is due to God's fulfillment of His promises. Once Abraham proved to God that he had no other gods, these promises were guaranteed.

What an incredible story!

As well as any example in the Bible, these few verses prove that God is working out His plan and that He will provide for us. For this to happen, however, God must be our only God. Yet, without the sacrifice of Christ, this would not be possible, for without His atoning blood we could have no relationship with God. For God's plan to work, sacrifices had to be made.

If Isaac had been sacrificed on that altar, the physical side of the plan could not have happened. If Christ had not been sacrificed, the spiritual side could not have taken place. And for both of these events to happen, Abraham and Isaac could serve only one God, which they did. Their examples set an incredibly high standard for us to follow.

We cannot afford to let anything ever come between God and us. Abraham and Isaac had wealth, prestige, and power far beyond what most of us will ever have in this physical life. Yet, despite all that they owned and all that they had within their power, they practiced a way of life that teaches us a very important lesson: There is room for only one God in our lives.