

Abraham's Sacrifice (Part Two): Love Exemplified

The Father Loves the Son of Promise

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When the first time something happens, it is a fairly big deal. Baby's first word, baby's first steps, or things we mark, we remember, we cherish. We can always remember our first car or first job. We mark as historic first events things like the first internal combustion engine, the first telephone call, the first airplane flight, the first man in space, or the first man to step on the moon. Dignitaries get to throw out the first pitches at the ball game or dignitaries christen the bows of ships and such with champagne for their first voyage. Business owners often frame their first dollar that they make. Mothers sometimes keeps her baby's first booties or the first shoes or first blanket or something just to mark that occasion. Human beings down through the ages have treated their firstborns as special—first to open the womb.

So being the first thing is unique. It is important. Something we remember. It marks the beginning, the opening, the inauguration of a thing, an event, a concern, or even an idea or a way of life. The Bible does this too. It marks first things. There are lots of first in Scripture. The first man, the first sin, the first murder, the first city. Lots and lots and lots of references to the firstborn, the first Temple, the first martyr. We can go on and on with firsts that the Bible marks.

Most of you are aware of something we have used quite extensively in this church in our sermons. That is, the principle of first mention. Long time president of the Institute for Creation Research, a man named Henry M Morris, defines it in his commentary, *The Genesis Record*, this way: "When an important word or concept occurs for the first time in the Bible, usually in the book of Genesis, the context in which it occurs sets the pattern for its primary usage and development all through the rest of Scripture." If you want to look that up, see if I quoted it accurately, it is page 374.

Genesis 22, the narrative of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, contains at least three first mentions, if not more, but these are major biblical and theological words and concepts. Today, I want to consider the first of these and leave the others for part three, and the way this sermon turned out, I will probably end up having a part four too. But these are vital, underlying themes of the story that is told there in Genesis 22, meaning that they are concepts God wants us to understand so that we grasp as much as we can of the meaning of the event. One could say that in terms of character, they are of first importance, these particular themes that we are going to go into.

I would like to turn back to Genesis 22 and read the first two verses because this is actually the first, and another one of these first mentions appears, but I am going to actually only focusing on one of them here.

Genesis 22:1-2 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 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."

The first of these first mentions is the word "love" right there in verse 2 where He said "your only son Isaac, whom you love." It is the Hebrew word *ahabta*, from the root *ahab*. It is *Strong's* 157, if you care to look it up. But it means "to love." That is pretty easy. "To have great affection or care for" or "loyalty toward." So it can have any one of those nuances—to have a great affection or care for or loyalty toward. It has a range of meanings that run all the way from the Greek *phileo* to the Greek *agape* love. That is, from "to care for" or "to love as a brother" to "love unconditionally and sacrificially."

Here we have God describing Abraham's affection as love—his affection for Isaac as love. Now, we tend to think humanly that mother love, the love of a mother for her child, is the ultimate in human love and there is good reasons why we think that. But God here in chapter 22 emphasizes father love, a love of a father for his son. He seems to think that father love is primary. Mother love is a deep and wonderful bond and it is a great thing to see and in many cases it has helped hold the world together. But in God's purpose, father love is theologically more important than mother love.

Now, the reason for this is that His love for His Son is the foundation of His sovereign purpose, and of our salvation and eternal life. It all begins with the love of the Father for the Son. Abraham had the closest human equivalent of this kind of love for his promised son, Isaac. So, God points it out, God emphasizes Abraham's love in this narrative. As we go through the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, we will see aspects of Abraham's love for him, but God is not so concerned that we grasp Abraham's love, as He is that we see God's love for His Son—the true Promised Seed—through it. He wants us to recognize Abraham's love as a weak human reflection of His own love for the Son. It is very difficult at this point in the game for Him to explain this without the Son having come yet. Now that the Son has come, 2,000 years ago for us, we can see a lot of these connections. But at this point, back about 2,000 years before He came, it was easier to show His love for His Son, in the love of Abraham for his son.

So, this is a type that we can see how it works. In many respects, this sort of illustration here that He gives in the narrative of Genesis 22 is a lot easier for us to comprehend because it is so concrete. We know fathers, we know sons, we know fathers who love their sons, and sons who love their fathers, and we can see it in these human examples. So even though it is a weak reflection of the love of the Father for the Son, it still can teach us something, give us a head start on understanding even the fuller, what we call, anti-type in the Father God or God the Son.

As a matter of fact, we do this throughout the narrative on many subjects and levels. It is something that we need to understand as we go through here, and I am sure you know it, but it is a typical story. That is, it is a type that has an anti-type and the anti-type is the fullness of God's own nature and His actions. So when we see Abraham, we should be thinking, "This is an example. This is a type of the way the Father acts," and when we see Isaac we should see in our mind's eye, the acts and the example of Jesus Christ the Son. So even though there are human actors in this story, God wants us to transfer our insights that we get out of it to the reality, and the reality is the Father and the Son as they work toward the salvation of humanity and the addition of many sons of daughters to the Family of God. The point is that we need to transfer our thoughts from the the physical Abraham and Isaac, to the spiritual Father and the Son. And then further see that this is not just

God's love for the Son, but God's love for all His children, all the sons and daughters that He will eventually have. So from this, we can see that His bottomless love for the Son, Jesus Christ, is a type in itself, it is a type of how He loves us. (Is that not funny? This is what we were hearing this morning and dad and I came up with these things separately and it just worked so well, went so so well together.)

Now, how do I know this? How do I know this idea that the type of the Father and the Son being also a type of His love for us? How do I know this? Because it comes from another set of first mentions of love. But this time the first mentions are in the gospels, the four narratives of the life of the Son as a human. Now, this is really neat. When I found this, this was astounding to me. Let us go to the gospels and we will start in Matthew and then go to Mark and then Luke and then John. We will find one of the first of these first mentions in Matthew 3. This is at the end of Jesus' baptism by John.

Matthew 3:17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying,
"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Let us move to the gospel of Mark, same scenario.

Mark 1:11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Luke 3:22 [Same scenario.] And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

Each one of these verses contains the first occurrence of the word "love" in each of those gospels. The word "beloved" is the one we are looking for. All of these first mentions of love occur just like this in the same way in these three synoptic gospels (synoptic means they have the same view, they are very much alike). Of course John is not alike and we will go to that one next, in a minute. But each of these, this one verse in Matthew, the other one in Mark, and the other one in Luke, proclaims and celebrates the love of the Father for the Son. He shouts it out from heaven, as it were, it is a heavenly proclamation of the Father's affection and praise of His Son who had been

separated, that is, sanctified by the Holy Spirit to begin His ministry. He gets the ministry off with a bang, letting everybody know, "I love this kid, He makes Me happy, He pleases Me! Hear Him!"

So He starts off His ministry with this fanfare from heaven, as it were. You could say He begins His walk to Mount Moriah, where He would be sacrificed as a payment of sin, to redeem sinners because that is what is happening. His three years of ministry are like the three days that Isaac and Abraham walked to Mount Moriah and the goal was the sacrifice, the offering that He was supposed to make there on the mount. But God starts that journey, which we would think normally as something rather morose, "Look at My Son! Is He not wonderful? I love this guy. He can do great things." So He starts it off on a high note because He was going to do *good* work.

Now let us go to John. John is the oddball among the gospels. John probably wrote his gospel quite a bit after the others. He saw, "Hey, Matthew, Mark, Luke, they all put basically the same thing in there. I'm going to fill in where they didn't go. I'm going to raise this spiritually. It's not going to be just the life of Christ. I'm going to fill in a lot of what He *said*. A lot of those important themes that we need to know." I am sure he was obviously guided by the Holy Spirit so he wrote a different Gospel. You know it is far different from the other three, but notice where his first mention of love is. The most famous verse, probably, in all the Bible. Notice how his is:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the *world* that He *gave* His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (emphasis added)

So, the first mention of love in the gospel of John not only alludes to His singular love for the Son, which is in the phrase "only begotten Son," that singular One, but also specifically states His love for the world. It is like He said, "Okay, three times I've told you in these other gospels that I really love My Son." And then in the different gospel, the one that John wrote, He said, "I love all of you, too." And He is specifically talking about not the world-world out there, He is talking about the ones whom He would call into His church, into His Family. And yes, it includes them out there, because His ultimate goal is to convert everybody.

Right now, it is only confined to those whom He calls and chooses. But ultimately, He wants that sacrifice to cover every single human being. And so He states there His purpose, that He loves everybody. And ultimately, everyone will benefit from His love through the sacrifice of His Son, whom He really loves. And you know what? He really loves you too, and that is why He is doing all that He is doing.

So what we can see here is that God's love for the Son stands at the head of the process by which we are saved and ultimately enter the Kingdom of God and enjoy everlasting life. The first step in that entire process of all human salvation is the fact that God loved His Son. The relationship between those two Beings is the foundation for everything. The love of the Father for the Son, and the reciprocal love of the Son for the Father, that is where it all starts. And as They do, They give it away. Everybody who comes into their purview—which is everybody—benefits from that love. And as my father was saying this morning, it is our job to do that with each other, to follow the lead that we have seen between the Father and the Son. They share Their love with everybody and now They have given us the opportunity through the Holy Spirit to do the same thing. And so we have got to be shedding that love by the Holy Spirit just as He does.

This sermon is part two of a series of sermons I am going to be giving on Abraham's sacrifice and I am going to split the narrative up into a couple parts, at least. We will see how I do next week, but I only got through two verses today. We have already read them and we will talk about them for a bit longer, but maybe on the last day of Unleavened Bread, I can get all the other ones done. But do you know me. It will probably go to a fourth sermon.

But my purpose is to help us more deeply understand the magnitude of this monumental act of devotion to God by Abraham and how it applies to us. As we have already seen in my introduction here, it stands as a preeminent type of how godly love works among God's elect children, though it is only a mere reflection of God's own love for us.

Last time we saw that the apostle James writes in James 2:21-24, that Abraham sacrifice—a work, an action, a deed—perfected or completed, or fulfilled or demonstrated, his profession of faith. First, as we found out, he

believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And then he went many years being converted by God in various ways under various trials, and then this act on Mount Moriah, the giving of Isaac was, let us say, the final thing that really proved to God that Abraham believed Him, was faithful, and would always follow Him. That he was loyal and he loved Him. So by this, James says, he showed his faith by his works, his works manifested the faith that he had internally. Internal faith became external works. What was inner became outer, what was just thought and conviction within him was actually manifest, was able to be seen in the actions that he did. So it proved his faith was real.

Now, God knew his faith was real and Abraham knew his faith was real. But God wanted to see if Abraham's real faith, the real conviction, would come out in an act of love, an act of devotion. And it did. So he became a supreme example for us and how our faith is supposed to be manifested, as it is supposed to be seen in the world. As the father of the faithful, Abraham stands as a pattern for all the elect, all the faithful, and how their inward faith should be seen and done as behaviors in the world. Like I said, the inner became the outer, the inward became the outward, mere thought and belief became action and works.

Also, getting to the background of the story, we saw in Genesis 21 that Abraham was becoming more settled in the land. He was still living in tents; he never stopped doing that, but he had rights to well now in Beersheba, because he had made a covenant with Abimelech. We saw the people of the land were beginning to accept him as a prince among them a Lord, a man of great wealth and power, and he had peace with them too. He did not have many problems after the end of chapter 21. He was prosperous and people recognized it.

Then it appears that at the end of chapter 21, as we go through the blank space there between 21 and 22, that a long time seems to have passed. It just says, "after these things," but it also says that he, in verse 34 of chapter 21, "dwelt in the land of the Philistines for many days." We just do not know. It is a very ambiguous way to phrase things. It was it was a long time. We know that there was a period of time between his covenant with Abimelech and this sacrifice that he was commanded to do.

So, we have to ask ourselves: Over this long period of time, did he begin to get comfortable because he was now a little bit more settled? He had peace. He was making money. Was he becoming complacent in his old age? Did he not have the fire and the zeal that he had as a younger man? Also think about that this was the time that Isaac was growing up and his attention was focused on Isaac, his heir. He was rearing him, he was teaching him, he was getting him ready to take over the family business, become the next patriarch. Did he love Isaac more than he loved God? You know, we frequently say that we can tell what we love by what we spend our time doing. Was he spending an inordinate amount of time with Isaac and not with God? As a matter of fact, there is no indication that God had talked to him for quite a long time. It was at least from the time that Isaac was weaned as the last time we have in Scripture an indication that God had spoken to Abraham. So it could have been 20, 25, 30 years that God had been silent. We do not know. It just does not say in God's Word.

We have to ask that question. Did God feel that perhaps Abraham's faith was waning? I do not think so. But it could possibly have happened to me and to you. Normal people, when they are settled and peaceful and prosperous, they can tend to get a little bit lackadaisical. Dare I say Laodicean. And so we have chapter 22. Let us go there, please. We are going to read the first sentence here.

Genesis 22:1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham.

That is where I am going with my thoughts right now.

The opening sentence informs us that God's test of Abraham is connected to this long period among the Philistines. It starts right in. Verse 34 of the previous chapter. "Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days. Now it came to pass *after these things* that God tested Abraham." So you get the idea that He tested him because it had been so long; that the time had passed and so He gave this test to Abraham. Like I said, we are given no indication that God had appeared or spoken to Abraham since chapter 21, verses 12 and 13. And it says specifically there, that was when Isaac was weaned. So it had been a few decades or more.

We do know from the end of chapter 21 that Abraham went back to Beersheba and called upon the name of the Lord. In the meantime, it seems, he was maintaining his worship. Remember, I mentioned in that sermon last time that calling upon the name of the Lord is often circum-speak, another way of saying that he preached or that he told others about God.

So we start out here with these kind of questions. What is going on? What had happened? Why had God not talked to him? Why I had such a long time passed with nothing happening?

I do want to mention just as kind of interjecting this thought here, that we do not know when this took place. Not exactly. Specifically, we do not know whether it was in the spring, the summer, the fall, or the winter, whenever. It does not tell us any specific time, although we think that it perhaps occurred at Passover time if all the types are going to line up properly, but we do not know that for sure. But it would sure be a nice time to travel, I think. Even so, whatever it was, God felt He had to test Abraham. (By the way, this is the first mention of the word "test.")

Now the King James has "tempt" which is a very poor translation, at least in these days. Test is much better. The word means "to test for fitness" or "to prove," "to verify," or "confirm as to worth," ability, loyalty, whatever it is you are trying to find. It does not by any means imply inducement to sin or to make fail. He is not trying to get Abraham to make a mistake. He is not trying to trip him up in any way. He is trying to prove him and prove him positively.

It is the same process that an engineer, confident in his invention and all the smarts that he has and all the materials that he has used to make this invention what it is, that he would put his invention through. He does not want to see it fail. He is confident that it will run properly, but he needs to demonstrate its ability or worth to others. Let us say his supervisor, or if he is putting something on the market, he has to test it so that he has proof to say, "Look, this thing works. It'll do the job for you." He is not trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes. He is just putting it through the paces so he can say, "I ran this test 15 quadrillion times and it passed every time. And if we put it in your building or we use it for your manufacturing process, it's going to work."

This is what God was doing to Abraham. He was not trying at all to see if Abraham would fail. He was saying, "Okay, we've done all this work together, Abraham. I've taught you all these things. Here is a test to see how it works, how you work. And I'm not testing you because I want you to fail. I'm testing you because I want you to prove to everybody that your faith is real, that what you have inside you will come out, be manifest, in the work you do in the world." God does this to us too. You have probably noticed. You probably had a few of these.

Let us go to I Peter 1 where the apostle tells us very plainly that this happens to all those who are called.

I Peter 1:6-10 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials [There is the test.], that the genuineness [Notice, He is not looking to see that you fail. He is testing the genuineness. . .] of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets had inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you.

So God does test each of us in the same way that He tested Abraham, though, perhaps not to the same extent. What he did with Abraham was pretty rough, pretty tough. Something a lot of us would have trouble meeting. But our trials are tests in which we can prove our faith, our quality, our mettle, our integrity, our character, our loyalty to God.

Notice that Peter says that God tests our faith in fire. He puts the heat up. He wants to see if we are the deal. He wants to see that we were absolutely 24 Karat gold, that we are genuine and that we will bring glory to God. It is not to find mistakes, not to find faults. He gives us tests that He knows we can pass with flying colors because He is not sadistic. But He often gives us tests that make us stretch just a little. He is not going to put something on you that He knows you cannot pass. But He knows that if He puts this test on you, that you have

what it takes, even if you have to sacrifice just a bit more than you are comfortable doing. It would not be a test if there was not a bit of discomfort. He gives you something that may be more than *you* think you can take, that you could pass. But He knows that you can. So He gives us these tests that He knows we can pass if we stretch.

Finally Peter says here that the purpose with all these things is to bring us to salvation. That is the reason for the test. He is moving us a little bit further and a little bit further and a little bit further toward the image of Jesus Christ and our full salvation at His return. Because that is the end of our faith. That is the *goal* of our faith. And this is why we can rejoice in them because they have such a good purpose and they are being given to us by the most loving person in the whole galaxy, the whole universe. We do not have to worry that these things are done to beat us down or to find fault. He is stretching us into the image of His Son whom He loves, and He loves us and He wants us to be just like His Son so that when we do arise, when the fullness of salvation comes through, we see Him as He is, because we will be like Him. That is what He is doing all this for.

Back to Genesis 22. You might want to put a bookmark somewhere in all this because we will be flipping back and forth. But if you just memorize the first two verses, you will have what you need here. Let us go to Genesis 22 and read the last part of verse 1.

Genesis 22:1 God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!"
And he said, "Here I am."

God says only the man's name. He does not say "wake up, little one" or whatever. He does not add anything up more. He just says, "Abraham!" Remember I mentioned earlier that he had not had a communication that we know of for perhaps 20-25, 30 years, depending on how old Isaac was at this time. He had not spoken to Abraham since he had been weaned, say he was 2 or 3 when he was weaned. But all God had to say was "Abraham!" and the man was ready—after all that time. This gives you an immediate indication of where Abraham stood with God because the first thing he did when he says, "Here I am," he responds immediately and he says, "I'm right here and ready to go sir." It is that sort of thing.

So this exchange says volumes about their relationship, especially if it had been many years since God had spoken to him directly. Abraham was ready and willing to go right away. There is no indication that this was a dream or a vision or even a personal appearance by God. All it was was a voice, the word Abraham. So Abraham responded immediately, ready and willing, eager, loyal, ready to serve God at His call. He was at full attention and prepared to act—even though he may have been caught by surprise. It did not matter that suddenly a voice came saying his name. He knew who it was and was ready to act at God's word.

Now let us go on to verse 2.

Genesis 22:2 Then 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."

Right now, I want to just focus on the first part. "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love." Many commentators say that God is applying real emotional pressure here on Abraham. He is raising the emotional stakes for him. ". . . your son, your *only* son Isaac, whom you love." I mean, it is like, if nothing else, He is striking Abraham where he is most vulnerable. That is, in his most valued possession. The thing he loved the most, the *person* he loved the most. To an old man like Abraham, who knew he did not have another chance to have another kid, it would seem like a knife in the gut, twisted with each new poignant description. Your only son Isaac, whom you love. Most of us, probably, in Abraham shoes (or his sandals) would probably either faint away at that point or rise in defiance. "What are you going to do with my son?"

Now, I am sure Abraham's guts were roiling. He was a man just like we are. But the Bible indicates not one iota, one sense of any kind of negative reaction, whatever that might be. He was a man who was made of stern stuff. A faithful man who put God first. This made me think of Luke 14:26, which we make sure we explain to people who are getting baptized. But it is the same thing that was happening.

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

And so God was testing Abraham on this point. Are you going to love Me? Love Me by keeping My commandment." And the commandment was go to Mount Moriah and offer your son. Are you going to love Me? Or are you going to love your son? What is it going to be? Where are your priorities? And Abraham, being made of stern stuff, chose God over his own son, whom he loved.

Now He tells him to go to the land of Moriah. Moriah is a country section of geography around Mount Moriah. That is one of the mountains that is now in Jerusalem. Mount Moriah is the same mount where David bought Araunah's threshing floor. He's also called Ornan the Jebusite. A Gentile owned that place for a long time, but David bought it and it was there that his son Solomon built the first Temple. And if you want to go check out those two places they are II Samuel 24, that is where he buys the threshing floor after the plague had stopped right there, and II Chronicles 3:1 where Solomon built the Temple on Mount Moriah.

The word Moriah means "Yah sees" or as an extension of that, because God sees, He sees needs that He provides. So the name Moriah means "God sees and provides." Now from Beersheba, where Abraham and Isaac were, to Jerusalem is about 30 miles as the crow flies, and they were walking uphill pretty much the whole way because Beersheba is down low in the wilderness toward the coast and of course Jerusalem or Mount Moriah is up in the mountains. So they had to go about 30 miles, pretty much uphill with every step. It was not an easy trek for a man that was 125 or 30, whatever it was that he was at the time. It was a good three day journey.

The next next phrase here, "go to the land of Moriah," (and this is the phrase we are looking at) "and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains." Notice what is not said here. A lot of people say, "Oh, God told him to do a human sacrifice." But He does not say go slay Isaac on the mountain. He says go offer him. There is a subtle difference there that we

need to understand. Yes, when He says make him a burnt offering that implies killing the sacrifice and totally immolating the sacrifice in fire. But offer need not mean kill or slay. Just the verb '*alah* in Hebrew. It means "to go up," "to ascend," "to present from a lower to a higher."

Now if you think about if you were a lowly servant and you are giving a gift to someone of higher rank, let us say you were on your knees or whatever, when you offered the gift, you would naturally offer it from carrying it here to giving it here. This is what the verb '*alah* implies. It implies taking something from a lower position to a higher. You offer it. This is the way you offer things to people when you are of a lower rank and you are giving it to someone who is higher rank than you. This is the sort of thing that happens when a peasant or a regular person, a regular citizen, would give a gift to a king or he presents something to a high official of some sort. Or as a worshipper would offer something to his God. It comes from a lowly person—a worm—and it goes to the great master and lord whom he worships.

So God tells Abraham to *present* Isaac as a burnt offering. He is not necessarily telling him to kill him. But Abraham assumed that he meant that he should go through with the entire process because that is what offering a burnt offering entails. In this way, Abraham knew from the very beginning that this was a test of his commitment and his love for God. If God would tell him to do such a thing, he knew that this was a test, specifically. But because he had him offer Isaac as a *burnt* offering, he knew the overall theme, the overall subject was his devotion. That is the meaning of the burnt offering. Are you going to be devoted to God? When he would normally have taken a lamb or some other animal to give as a burnt offering to God, that would be what he was saying. The big difference here was that the sacrifice that God seemed to demand of him was his own son.

So he understood that the theme of the test was how devoted are you, Abraham? Are you going to give the burnt offering in good conscience even though it is your son? Are you going to be totally devoted to Me, that even though I seem to be giving you a command that seems totally out of character, that he would still go through with it. But he knew that God never

got out of character, which was the foundation of his thinking here. So technically God does not command human sacrifice here of Abraham, but just for Abraham to make a gift of Isaac to Him. That is sacrifice enough.

But from what ensues, Abraham clearly assumed, because he could not do otherwise, that God wanted him to take His command to the ultimate degree of slaying his son on the altar. To go through the process as far as God allowed it to go until God stopped him or until God resurrected Isaac after the deed was done. Because he was obedient to God first. He knew that this was a test of his devotion. He had to obey the command because this is what his God had asked of him.

Now he already knew, and I am sure of this, that human sacrifice which was part of the religious practices of the people of the land was wrong. God told him to walk before Him and be blameless back in Genesis 17:1. So that implies that God told him what he would have to do to remain upright or blameless before Him. He had to know what the rules were. He had to know what the laws were. He had to know what the parameters for righteous living were and that would certainly have included the Ten Commandments and also His commands about human sacrifice. So he would have known that these things are sin, that human sacrifice is sin and out of the character of God.

Let us go to Leviticus 20 where God gave Israel the command about human sacrifice. This is part of the holiness code. You might want to just jot down Deuteronomy 18:10, which is a summary scripture of the same sort of commands here.

Leviticus 20:2-5 "Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: 'Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him [meaning they kind of just ignore him purposely],

then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from the people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.'

So Molech was well known as a god who demanded human sacrifice and so God says "I don't want you people to have anything to do with that kind of worship. It's not right." And He used some pretty strong language there about how He is going to deal with people who do that sort of thing. This was the kind of thing that Abraham would have known was wrong.

Human sacrifice was widely practiced before, during, and after Abraham's day. He knew about it. He probably knew people had done it. He likely knew of it from Mesopotamia in his youth and certainly he had probably seen or heard about the Canaanites practicing it in his own lifetime when he lived there, especially from those who worship Molech, because it was a present thing there at his time. These people would sacrifice their children to seek good crops, a good crop for plenty of rain and sunshine so that their crops would grow. They would do it to appease a god who seemed angry with them, let us say there was some sort of natural disaster or destruction. They would slay people to accompany their kings into the afterlife. They would kill all the servants of the king and place them in the tomb with him when he died. And they even did it for such a small thing as to bless important buildings so that they would not have an influence of evil spirits. So they would lay a child at the foundation of a new, important building. And because of their interactions with the Canaanites, the Israelites fell into some of these practices as both kingdoms, Israel and Judah, began to slide and decline toward their falls.

So Abraham knew about it. It was something that God would have addressed at some point and told him that it was wrong. That is not the way He wanted to be worshipped. Let us go back to Genesis the 18th chapter to give you a proof of why I think that Abraham knew these things. This was after the time he had told him and Sarah that they would have a son. And then He was at that point going to go punish Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 18:16-20 Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on their way. And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,

since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" [Notice God's confidence in Abraham here. God says Abraham is going to be a great nation. He was already confident that it would all work out just fine.] For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

This indicates that Abraham knew God's laws. He knew the way of righteousness. And he would certainly have known that human sacrifice is wrong. I mean, just think of it. If Abraham knew the perversities practiced in Sodom were sin, surely he knew that human sacrifice was also sin. So it is this knowledge that he had that makes what he did in sacrificing Isaac so much more poignant and reasonable and faithful. If he knew God forbids human sacrifice, and like I said, I am sure he did, his knowledge of God's character, knowing that He was against it, becomes a piling in the foundation of his assurance that God would not kill Isaac. God does not want human sacrifice. He does not want me to worship Him this way, maybe the logic went in his head. So there must be something going on here that I am not exactly aware of, But I know because I know God God's character, that He does not want me to kill my son. So I will move forward and I will do as He said. But I know that God will find a way out of this. I know He is not going to put me through this. He might have thought, He might take me to the ultimate, which he did. That is, right before the the knife came down across Isaac's throat, He stopped him. But he knew that, ultimately, God did not require him to slay Isaac.

That was part of the process of how he in faith could go forward and do what he did, and tell Isaac when he asked him, "where is the sacrifice?" he said, "God will provide." He was certain because he knew God's character, that God would not require that of him. He would not require the ultimate of him. God required the ultimate of himself, but not Abraham. Only so far and that was enough. It would prove to God that he was faithful. He knew that God does not capriciously change His law. That if He said human sacrifice was wrong, He meant it. He was not going to change that in this situation and so he could go forward.

Something that God calls an abomination does not suddenly become acceptable to Him. If it is an abomination with Him at one time, it is an abomination with Him at any other time. So whether it is homosexuality or all kinds of other perverse things, or human sacrifice, in the Old Testament, it is an abomination now. The same would go with unclean meats. He calls those things abominations. It is an abomination. You shall not eat it. He does not change His mind. It is still an abomination. This is this kind of reasoning he had to make through the time that he was getting ready to go and walking up to Mount Moriah.

He would conclude then at a certain point that God will provide a substitute sacrifice for him. He would want him to go through the burnt offering which he told him to do, but He would not require him to give his son. He would find something, he would give him something to offer in his place, in his stead. That is what he clung to, this idea that there would be a substitute. So then, during his hike up the hill over those three days, he could go in confidence. I am sure his stomach was still roiling, I am sure he was still thinking, did I get this right? And so it was still a test of his faith. But he was confident enough in God and His character that he knew, probably 99 percent, that this is how it would turn out, because God does not go against His own law.

By the way, the narrator's statement as we begin the whole narrative here, that God tested Abraham, actually dispels any doubt about God's intention. It was not in God's mind to kill Isaac. It was in God's mind to *test* Abraham. It was an exercise to see if Abraham would react properly. If he would think his dilemma through and come to the right conclusion, to see if his mind was right. To see if he was thinking like, well we would say, Jesus Christ. If he had the mind of Christ and come up with the right solution, the right answer, and all the while obey God's word, obey Him faithfully without reacting so emotionally that he could not think straight.

Let us finish verse 2 in Genesis 22. There is just one extra phrase here that I think is important. He tells him "to go offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So, when he goes off to Mount Moriah, or the country of Moriah, he does not know exactly where God wants him to make the sacrifice. Now, this is an allusion back to chapter 12 and verse 1, the first things God actually tells Abraham. We read there

that God's original command to Abraham is get out of your country and go to a land that I will show you.

So again, when He speaks to him and gives him this test, He does not give him all the specifics. He says, "I will guide you, I will give you direction to where you need to go." In both cases, Abraham does immediately what God says to do, even though he does not have any idea where he is going. Maybe a general idea, but he does not quibble. He does not say, "Hey God, I need to know the exact way so I can punch it into my GPS and be able to go there without Your help." No, no, no, it is nothing like that. He says, "Fine. I'll go." and then gets up and goes without any reluctance or complaint. He just does what God says. "Abraham, get out of Ur and go to the land and I'll show you," "Sure God, on my way." and out the door." That is kind of the impression you get.

Same thing here. God says, "Abraham!" "Here I am." He says, "Go offer your son on Mount Moriah. I'll tell you exactly the mountain you're going to go to." "Okay." And he goes. I am sure it was not that flippant. But the idea is that God spoke, gave them a command, he did it even though the directions were vague. He did he did not know the exact place he was going to. It is almost as if even at this late date, when Abraham was 130 years old or whatever he was, that God is further directing Abraham to a more specific place than just the land of Canaan. That is what He had told him to do in chapter 12. He said go to a place that I am going to show you and He shows him Canaan.

Big place, about as big as New Jersey or something like that, but that is big enough. There is a lot of places in New Jersey just as there are a lot of places in the land of Canaan that he could have settled. He came in and he settled in one place and then went to Hebron and then down to Beersheba and he ended up in Egypt for a while and then back and he was in various places in the land. You know one place he never went to before this? Jerusalem or Jebus as it was at the time. He had not gotten there, but yet when he has told to sacrifice his son, God tells him go to a place that I am going to show you. And where does He send him? Mount Moriah, to Jerusalem. He is guiding him to His place on earth.

Abraham had been circling around God's place on earth, where He had set His name. He had set His name in Jerusalem from way back. We think that perhaps even the Garden of Eden was there in Jerusalem and things have just been changed so much because of the Flood and such that it is unrecognizable as the Garden of Eden. But God has always set His name at Jerusalem. And finally, when He gives this command to Abraham, He says, "This is the ultimate test, Abe. I'm going to send you to a place. I'll show you where this place is and there you'll make your sacrifice." It is like He is guiding him back to Eden, if you will. Back through the garden gate because the angel has been taken away with his flaming sword. Nobody knows that that is where Eden was. But God does. And He is taking the man, the faithful man, the father of the faithful, back along the way, backwards to the way that Adam and Eve left the Garden. He is sending his faithful man and his son through the garden gate and to the Tree of Life.

It is interesting that this place, Moriah, and its meaning "God sees and provides" are emphasized in in two places in this very chapter. Chapter 22 verse 2 where He talks about the land of Moriah and then in verse 14, 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." He is saying, "Abraham come back to My place and this is where everything happens, everything that is good, everything that is going to work towards salvation happens right here."

God brought faithful Abraham into His presence on the mount of the Lord through the type of the sacrifice of the Promised Seed. There, God provides redemption and salvation an eternal blessing.