

Session 6

November 28, 2021

CONFIDENCE IN TIMES OF TESTING

Genesis 22:1-14

“After these things God tested Abraham...” This doesn’t sound good for Abraham!

But there is a difference between being *tempted* and being *tested*. Adrian Rogers used to say, “The devil *tempts* us to do evil that we might stumble. But God *tests* us to do good that we might stand.” This is the sentiment expressed by James when he wrote, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone” (James 1:13). Simply put, Satan tempts us to *hurt* us. God tests us to *help* us. The story unfolds in three scenes.

The challenge (vv. 1-2). The time stamp here is very general. “After these things” tells us an indefinite amount of time has passed, but enough to allow the previous events to fade and Isaac to grow up some. Scholars have placed Isaac’s age at this point everywhere from as young as three to as old as twenty-five. But the narrative suggests somewhere in the middle. I tend to guess between 12 and 14 years of age. That’s old enough to help his father with the wood, and young enough to willfully submit in obedience to his father. Verse 2 is filled with important details that emphasize the severity of the challenge God issued to Abraham. Isaac is *your* son; your *only* son; the son that *you love*. The challenge is not to offer him to God, or dedicate him to God’s service, but rather to kill him, then burn his body as a sacrifice; the type of sacrifice normally required as a sin offering (see Lev. 4 and Num. 15). For reflection: *If God had gone through with the sacrifice, what theological issues would arise? Would God have been just to require such a thing?*

The climb (vv. 3-10). As usual, there is great significance in the details contained in the narrative. The time (early in the morning); the activities (saddling his donkey and splitting the wood in advance); the company (two young servants and his son Isaac); his destination (the land of Moriah that God told him about), all add to the gravity of the situation as well as demonstrating the stoic and stayed obedience of Abraham. Once the destination was revealed to Abraham, it was time to go it alone. The explanation offered to the servants in verse 5 is fascinating. Abraham described the coming sacrifice of his son as an act of worship. But what did he mean by the promise “we will come back to you?” Two possibilities exist: Either Abraham was being discreet with his servants by obscuring his real intentions, or Abraham believed that God would either stay his hand prior to the sacrifice or would raise Isaac from the dead afterward. The evidence favors the latter. Since God had steadfastly promised a nation through Isaac, Abraham’s true test of faith was not in his simple obedience, but whether or not he trusted God to keep His word (see Heb. 11:19). The remaining narrative describes Isaac’s reaction to what was taking place. The boy understood that a blood sacrifice was required but had no idea what would happen once they got there. His father’s explanation was elusive, but honest. God would indeed provide a sacrifice. With no mention of Isaac protesting or fighting back, one must assume that he submitted willingly to his father’s intentions. The foreshadowing of Christ’s sacrificial death is unmistakable (see John 10:18). For reflection: *Looking at the entire story, what other parallels can you identify with the account of Christ’s crucifixion?*

The conclusion (vv. 11-14). Here, God's mercy steps in. Isaac is spared and a ram dies in his place. The doctrinal principle of *substitutionary atonement* is clearly displayed. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and the shedding of blood is required for the forgiveness of sin (Heb. 9:22). Yet God has decreed that the innocent may die on behalf of the guilty, and that is exactly what Jesus Christ has done for us! Paul declared, "He (God) made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter put it this way: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24). For reflection: *In light of substitutionary atonement, what did John the Baptist mean in John 1:29?*