

“...thou fearest God.”

Abraham was the first patriarch of the coming Israelites. The son of Terah, he was only ten generations away from Noah, through Shem. The picture we have of him is that of a nobleman with a private army, much wealth and status, sufficient for him to gain the ear and friendship of kings. He was a powerful man and yet godly, in spite of some failings, and counted a prophet by God Himself, and referred to 72 times in the New Testament. Even the Islamic Koran contains much material about Abraham.

Abraham is given a place of high honour by Christians and perhaps many would therefore dare not put themselves at his side, as his equal. Yet, in matters of salvation, we are all his equal. We may not have the ear of kings, enormous wealth, or an army, or be called ‘prophet’ by God, but each of us has the same propensity for fear of God, which is the foundation of our existence. The lowest Christian can know God in remarkable ways.

Most of us do not obtain the countless benefits of God, simply because we do not see our role as important. But, every Believer is important to God, and if we obey His commands we will be given much to do and many gifts. Who is to know where God wishes to take us, or how many does He want us to affect by doing His will?

The will of God is contained in His word, so there is no excuse such as the one often resorted to by Christians: “But, I don’t know His will”! We must read scripture and do whatever it says. Then, we are doing His will. There is also personal communication with God (NOT the fake communications claimed by charismatics), which come to us by prayer, vision or prophecy. Note that each of these will always be based on scripture and are never external to it. Thus, if such a personal communication does not agree with scripture, it must be rejected, for God cannot and does not contradict His own word. Also, the *outcome* must be consistent with all of scripture, and cannot ever be sinful or appear to be sinful.

Always see your life as a sign of God’s grace. Always see ‘circumstances’ as an opportunity to do His will and to display His power. Never succumb to the weak belief that you have no godly power within, for Paul tells us that there *is* such power in *every* Christian. When we do not obey we come to devalue this power and do not expect to see it in our lives. But, when we obey, the power of God generates faith and, like Abraham, we can strike down our enemies from the south to the north! Never deny that you have God’s power within, for it is our link with heaven and heavenly grace.

Genesis 22

Written by K B Napier
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Verses 1-3

1.

“And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

2.

And he said, 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.

3.

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.”

Sometime after his experiences with Abimelech, “God did tempt” Abraham. Inevitably, many Christians will take this to mean that God deliberately tried to make Abraham sin! This would be to make the fundamental mistake of attributing to God actions that we deduce from improper interpretation... something Christians do every day with scripture.

Yes, God tempted Abraham, but in this text, ‘tempt’ is *nacah*, which means to test or prove. Certainly one meaning is to tempt, but it does not apply in this case. How do we know? Simply because God cannot and does not cause men to sin.

It might be asked why God should test people, when He already knows their minds and hearts, and knows what they will say and do throughout their lives. The answer must be, that the test is not for Him, but for the one being tested. The result of the test will become part of that person’s life and thinking, either as a major turning point, or as a failure to put faith in God. To be tested by God is a privilege, for by applying the test God is strengthening character and resolve and undergirding faith.

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The conversation in this text is very similar to one that would take place much later, between the young Samuel and God. God called Abraham by name, and Abraham responded naturally, as a man would speak audibly with his earthly friend: "See, here I am."

God did not waste time: 'Take your only son Isaac, whom you love, and take him to Moriah. There, you will offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will point out to you later.'

You will notice something in this text that should put us all to shame. There is no record of Abraham arguing or rejecting God's command. He just did it. This was his son. Yet, when God told him to kill him as a sacrifice, he obeyed without murmur.

The text also shows us that when God truly speaks, we will not mistake it for something psychological or a delusion, such as is evidenced thousands of times a day amongst charismatics! Also, when God speaks, the urgency and power of His words give faith instantly, where obedience is imperative to the recipient.

In reformed circles in particular, Christians deny that God speaks to men today. They do so without warrant or proof that God's interventions are now finished. Therefore, either they deny when God speaks to them, calling it a delusion, or they do not even recognise God when He visits them.

Some ex-charismatics, fearful of returning to their former fantasies, reject any form of holy contact and action, but this is wrong. God speaks to men today and acts in their lives. It is right to be cautious, but do not live with this fear. Live, instead, with scriptural truth, which cannot lie.

What we see in Abraham is a true faith, a real trust in God. That is why, in the New Testament, he is listed as a 'man of faith' loved and accepted by God. He made errors (but so do we all) and yet he was counted to be at the top of God's list of accepted men. When people perceive that I have made a mistake, of action or belief, they simply vanish and do not congregate with me again. They say nothing!

How different from God, Who sees the heart! He does not cast me aside if I err, but comes with

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comfort and hope, teaching me where I went wrong and bringing me to an even better understanding! He bears no grudges, unlike so many who say they are my brethren, but goes on from the error and takes me along the true path.

The day after he was commanded by God, Abraham saddled up his ass, and took two young servants along, with Isaac. He had already 'clave' or cut up, wood for the coming sacrificial fire, which he took along with him. It seems from the text that he told the men and his son that a sacrifice would take place – but not that Isaac would be the offering.

Verses 4-6

1.

"Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

2.

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you,

3.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together."

For two days they travelled the wilderness. Then, on the third day, God pointed out the mountain where he was to burn his son. Whilst still in the valley, Abraham told his servants to wait with the ass; he and Isaac would go on alone to worship. The word used in this text is *shac hah* , meaning to be prostrate on the ground in worship.

Abraham implied that both of them would return to the servants later, so as not to alarm either them or Isaac. He picked up the wood and gave it to Isaac to carry. Then, he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and they went up the mountain. We are not told whether he kindled the fire on the spot, or carried a fire-brand with him from his home camp.

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The picture is one of calm resolve, but we can be assured that Abraham's heart was breaking. Yet, he obeyed God's command. I have come across many who cannot be true, even to words. God's word is fixed and true, yet, many Christians prefer their own versions of scripture to the truth. They cling to their favoured 'interpretations' which are false and derived from their own meagre thinking, and deliberately ignore what is genuine. Even so, they truly think that this is 'faith' and real understanding! In reality they are laying the ground for future error, though they claim to be closer to God. Indeed, this is the basis of all delusion – the strong belief that one is right, though the source of truth says otherwise, and is ignored.

Verses 7-10

1.

"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?"

2.

And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

3.

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.

4.

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son."

As the two got nearer the spot where the sacrifice would take place, Isaac became perplexed. He asked his father where the sacrificial animal was... they had the wood, and the fire, but where was the sacrifice? Abraham told him that God would provide a lamb, soon. Abraham stopped at the place designated by God, and gathered stones to build an altar, as Isaac watched. It must have chilled Abraham's heart, to see Isaac passively standing watching the building of his own funeral pyre!

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We are not told if Abraham had to seize Isaac as the lad struggled against his fate, or if he finally told him what God wanted, and Isaac just allowed the action to take place. Either way, Abraham tied his son up and laid him on top of the wood on the altar. He then picked up the knife, ready to kill his son.

What we have here is someone called by God to give up his most treasured thing. If we can give up what we love the most, then we can certainly give up lesser things. Once we give up our most loved thing to God, we effectively hand-over our whole life to Him. As we see in this account, though God demands this, He rarely expects us to actually lose what we love: rather, it is a matter of our heart's desire.

What He looks at is not the loss of something we love, but our hearts – are we willing to lose everything in order to gain God? This is the deepest trust, the most pure form of faith. Do YOU have it? Do I? We all claim to love God, and have faith, but *do* we, truly? Will we rather lose friends, family, money, job, so that God is pleased with us? Then prove it. Do it now.

Verses 11-14

1.

“And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

2.

And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

3.

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.

4.

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount

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of the LORD it shall be seen.”

To this juncture God had spoken directly with Abraham. Now, when the knife was poised in the air, ready for the death-plunge into Isaac's chest, God used a deputy (as the word implies), an 'angel of the LORD (Jehovah)' called to Abraham. He spoke "out of heaven", *shamayim*. This either refers to the place where God lives, or the skies. The angel called out his name, and Abraham once again replied "Here am I."

The angel gave a new command; 'Do not kill the boy. I know now that you fear God, and have not spared even your loved son.' The word 'now' is *attah*, which is rooted in a word, *eth*, meaning 'time of an event' or occurrence. That is, 'I know at this time' that you fear God. It does *not* mean 'I did not know you feared God until you were ready to kill your son'. God already knew.

Interestingly, the angel did not say that he knew Abraham 'loved' God, but that he 'feared' Him. This word means what it says, *yare* – afraid, fearing, reverent. It means to stand in awe of God, to respect Him and to be afraid of what He can do to men who disobey. It even means to be terrified. Today, especially in charismatic churches, people are taught to 'love' God, the result being a thick mess of emotion that *pretends* to be 'love'. God almost becomes an object of sensuality to such people, which makes Him akin to a mere man and not Almighty God.

In Proverbs, we have, right at the start of the book, an important statement: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (1:7). In this text the word is even stronger – *yirah*, meaning terror at something awesome. Such a fear is basic to respect and reverence, for it puts the creature in a position of subjection.

Any love for God must come after this fear, and is nothing like the childish attitude many have toward Him, seeing Him only as a God of love. Scripture is very clear: if we claim understanding, but our knees do not tremble in absolute fear at the thought of God's wrath, then we understand nothing at all. It is now common to preach only the love of God for 'everyone', and to downplay His wrath and anger. The preaching of hellfire is almost extinct. Yet, to be real preaching, hell must feature as the place where men go if they reject God. The modern idea of preaching love, love and more love, is alien to scripture and to the fact of fear.

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You may have noticed that the angel switched from third person to first person... from "I know that thou fearest *God*" to "thine only son from *me*." Here, the angel was using God's direct words; was the angel Christ? Abraham looked behind himself, and saw a ram with its horns caught in a bush. No doubt with overwhelming relief, Abraham took hold of the ram and sacrificed it in the stead of his son. Earlier, God referred to Isaac as Abraham's 'only' son, though he had Ishmael as well. This tells us that in matters of salvation, He only has legitimate sons. All others are illegitimate and will not enter heaven.

Do not take this lightly as you go about your daily business. We all tend to forget the presence of Almighty God as daily woes and tasks get in the way, but it is well to reflect throughout our day upon Him who gives us breath and life in the first place. Do you think about God in your daily life? Do you ask Him to keep you safe? Do you repent of wrongs you have done that day? Do you ask Him to keep you on His path?

After the sacrifice, Abraham named mount Moriah '*Jehovahjireh*', meaning 'Jehovah sees'. That is, God is always with us, even when we feel alone. He sees all. That is why we ought to always have Him in mind, no matter what we are doing.

Verses 15-19

1.

"And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

2.

And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

3.

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

4.

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And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

5.

So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.”

After he had been stopped from killing Isaac, Abraham was called a second time by the same angel. Abraham’s obedience had far-reaching consequences. The angel repeated God’s words which “By myself have I sworn”. God has *shaba* – sworn an oath by Himself. That is, there is no-one higher than God, so He could not have it witnessed as true by anyone else.

Because Abraham had passed the test of faith, and was even willing to sacrifice his beloved son, God would not just bless him, but would pour blessing upon blessing; He would not just give Abraham family, but millions of kinsfolk, who would cover the land with their presence and “possess the gate of his enemies”. That is, they would devour their enemies and take their goods and power, the ‘gate’ being a symbol of the entrance to the possession.

Not only would nations fear the sons of Abraham, but they would also be blessed by them: “in thy seed”, as a direct result of Abraham’s obedience. In this text there is the prophecy of Christ coming from David’s line, which extended back to Abraham.

In our own lives, we must be aware that the consequences of either rejecting or obeying God’s commands can be dire or wonderful, depending on the path we take. When we ignore or reject what God is telling us, we can set in motion a train of events that might even affect our families, friends or nation. When we obey, the train of events can be beneficial not just to ourselves, but to all.

When Christians look upon me as a mere frail man, they do not see if God is using me to have an effect on all mankind. In the same way, I can look upon you and only see a similarly flawed person, when it could be that God is about to use you for the benefit of everyone around you. In the past God has used ordinary Christians to bring about huge changes that have affected the

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whole world. That ordinary Christian could be you or me!

Looking at ourselves in this way, we realise how awesome the presence of God really is! We are nothing in ourselves and unworthy, but, when we obey, God can bring about marvellous things. Only recently I advised someone that they indeed have the power of God within, and should never think of themselves as totally weak and ineffective. Abraham brought about the mighty nation of Israel... what is God's plan for *your* life, and mine? Do not focus on your weakness. Instead, give your life to God and trust Him, and He will use you for purposes you could not imagine.

The promise made, Abraham took his son back down the mountain to meet his servants. Then, they all returned to Beersheba. Abraham's simple but traumatic act of obedience began events that would shake the whole world as well as the immediate nations.

Verses 20-24

1.

“And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother Nahor;

2.

Huz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram,

3.

And Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and Bethuel.

4.

And Bethuel begat Rebekah: these eight Milcah did bear to Nahor, Abraham's brother.

5.

And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, she bare also Tebah, and Gaham, and Thahash, and Maachah.”

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After the events of mount Moriah, Abraham learned that Milcah had given birth to eight children, whose father was his brother, Nahor. Milcah ('queen') was the daughter of Haran. Therefore, she was Nahor's niece.

The children were the firstborn son, Huz ('wooded'); the second son, Buz ('contempt'); then the third son, Kemuel ('raised of God'). He was the father of Aram (possibly means 'highland'. He was the founder of the Syrians).

Other children were: the fourth son, Chesed ('increase'); fifth son, Hazo ('vision'); sixth son, Pildash ('flame of fire'); seventh son, Jidlaph ('weeping'), and the eighth son, Bethuel ('God destroys' or 'man of God'). The eighth son, Bethuel, was the father of Rebeka ('ensnarer'), who would later become Isaac's wife and the mother of Esau and Jacob.

Bethuel also had a concubine named Ruemah ('elevated'), who bore him children: Tebah (meaning not known); Gaham ('burning'); Thahash ('dugong' [?]), and Maachah ('oppression').

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