

God Our Provider

By Mark Jarvinen

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”
“Here I am,” he replied.*

*² Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—
Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt
offering on a mountain I will show you.”*

*³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He
took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut
enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had
told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the
place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, “Stay here with the
donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we
will come back to you.”*

*⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son
Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them
went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham,
“Father?”*

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

*“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the
burnt offering?”*

*⁸ Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt
offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.*

*⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built
an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac
and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out
his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD
called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”*

“Here I am,” he replied.

*¹² “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him.
Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from
me your son, your only son.”*

*¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its
horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt
offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD
Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it
will be provided” (**Genesis 22:1-14**).*

Thinking back on your school days, what was the most trying aspect of school for you? How many of you would say, **“Taking tests?”** Tests are nerve racking, aren’t they? Do teachers give them just to make their students anxious or to make them spend sleepless nights studying? Hopefully, they give them for their benefit. Our text illustrates that tests benefit the ones taking them. When God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac, God did so for Abraham’s benefit – to demonstrate that His name is **Jehovah-Jireh – God provides**. In today’s text, what is it that God provides? Two things – **a deeper trust and a sinless substitute**.

I. GOD PROVIDES A DEEPER TRUST.

The test God placed before Abraham was indeed difficult.

“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering’ (Genesis 22:2).

Think about it, God was asking Abraham to do something extremely costly and exceedingly confusing – to kill the son he and his wife Sarah had waited 25 years to have – a son miraculously conceived when Sarah was already 90, well past menopause, and Abraham was 100 years old. Needless to say, their joy had been immense at his birth. They had named him Isaac, which means **“Laughter.”** What could God be thinking in commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son? Logic must have screamed at Abraham, **“This can’t be right!”** Luther comments on this passage by suggesting that to Abraham’s logical mind such a command could only mean one of two things: either God had been lying all along about the promise He had made concerning Isaac, or that this command was actually from the

devil. After all, God had very specifically said that it would be through Isaac – not some other son (remember the incident involving Hagar & Ishmael?) that His promise of salvation would be fulfilled. Also, hadn't God already changed his name from Abram to Abraham, which means ***“the father of many?”*** How would his many descendants inherit the Promised Land if now Isaac, his only son, was sacrificed?

Yet, by faith, Abraham obeyed God. This was the seventh time God had spoken to him and Abraham was learning, not without several failures along the way, that when God spoke, He could be trusted to work things out – no matter what. **Whenever God speaks, there's always a crisis of faith.** Will I act, (or not act), based only on what makes sense to my rational mind? Or will I believe God, trusting Him to work out the details? The text tells us that Abraham exercised the obedience of faith without delay. **Verse 3** says, ***“Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac,” (who was likely about 15 years old.)*** Though the journey was three days – plenty of time to think – he didn't turn back. Once on his way, Abraham didn't question or complain, he simply obeyed. Upon arriving at their destination, Mt. Moriah, in confident faith, Abraham told his servants -

“Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5).

And then, the most meaningful and dramatic exchange of all took place between Abraham and his only beloved son, Isaac, who in all innocence asked, ***“Where is the lamb for the burnt offering? (v. 7).*** With his heart in his throat, Abraham, the father of faith, replied, ***“God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (v.8).***

I consider Abraham's faith in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac and feel a twinge of conviction. I hear the words of Jesus who said in **Matthew 10:37** - ***"... anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ..."*** and I stumble. My children are grown now, but I still remember. We do everything for our kids. We provide for them. We guide them. We protect them. We sign them up for numerous sports and school activities. We help them plan for college. Isn't this what parents are supposed to do? **Ah, but how does Abraham's story speak to us?** All of us say God is important to us. But here we are confronted with the truth that God doesn't want to be just **"important,"** He wants to be **"most important"** – more important than job or career, college plans or retirement package, spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, and yes, even more important than our kids.

Where did Abraham's deep trust in God come from? Only by walking closely with the Lord and by faith clinging to His promises. God had trained Abraham to trust his Word to the extent that even though a command didn't make total sense, he could count on God to work things out. **Hebrews 11:17-19** makes an astonishing claim in this regard, saying –

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

Abraham had walked with God for 40 years by this time and still God tested him. **We're never too old or too mature for our faith to be tested.** That's because God continually wants to bless us. He wants to include us in His Kingdom plans. He's continually shaping us for our next assignment. He loves us too much to let our faith just cruise along on auto-pilot. Perhaps you're being tested in your life right now. Will you stand firm, trusting in God to see you through? Cultivate your inner garden. Believe God's Word. Walk by faith. Jehovah-Jireh will provide all that you need.

II. GOD PROVIDES A SINLESS SUBSTITUTE.

Certainly Abraham's obedience in today's text provides us with a stunning example of faith in a most difficult and demanding situation. But let's be clear, God doesn't test us simply to make our faith stronger, but to remind us of the object of our faith.

Everybody today is talking about faith, except that it's usually called "**spirituality.**" What's that? Does that mean trusting what's inside of us, our true feelings? Getting in touch with our essential goodness as human beings? Is it trusting in some non-specific higher knowledge? Or is it simply a belief that there does exist a generic god – a higher power as defined according to each individual's specifications? There's even some who have faith in faith – saying "I just believe." But I ask you, "**Doesn't it matter supremely what we put our faith in?**" Today's text shows us what (or shall I say Whom) to put our faith in. We put our faith in the **SINLESS SUBSTITUTE** that God has provided.

Remember Isaac's question in v. 7? ***“Where's the lamb?”*** And Abraham's confident answer in v. 8? ***“God himself will provide the lamb....”*** Abraham's words were prophetic, for moments later, just as the knife hovered in the air over the bound body of his precious son, lying on an altar stacked with wood, an angel of the Lord called out to him –

“Don't lay a hand on the boy, ... Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” (Genesis 22:12).

Can it be any clearer? Isaac doesn't die, but the Lord provides a substitute. We read in v. 13 –

“Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.”

In God's eternal plan, there's a picture behind the picture here. **Isaac is a type (a foreshadowing) of Christ.** Consider this – Isaac carried the wood on his back; Jesus bore the weight of his cross as he walked to his death on a hill called Calvary. Both Isaac and Jesus were **“obedient unto death,”** as they quietly submitted to the will of their fathers. Both Isaac and Jesus were “bound” in preparation for death. Mount Moriah, where this incident unfolded, is where the Temple in Jerusalem was eventually built. The very place where the blood of the ram soaked into the wood of the altar intended for Isaac was where countless offerings of blood were later presented in the Temple. **Are you ready for this? Scholars tell us that Mount Moriah is another name for Calvary, the place where Jesus gave His life for our sins, where his blood stained a wooden cross in payment for the sins of all humanity.**

This is **great news** for us because no matter how hard we try, we stumble when it comes to complete obedience. Abraham's example of faith seems somehow beyond our reach. How often do we vacillate, failing to trust, instead, reasoning with Him, arguing that His expectations are too high, unrealistic, old-fashioned, unfeasible, and overly complicated? What should God do with such arrogance? How should he deal with creatures like us who talk back to our Creator? He could destroy us, but by grace, he saves us. **As the ram took Isaac's place on the altar of Mt. Moriah, Jesus, God's one and only Son, took our place on Calvary and suffered the piercing blow of God's wrath for our sins.** Yes, Isaac learned about a substitutionary sacrifice when the ram found in the thicket was killed in his place. Likewise, Jesus as the perfect "**lamb of God**" gave his life for us, in our place. Abraham was spared the trauma of slaying his only beloved son. But God wasn't. Nor did He wish to be. He chose to offer up His one and only Son as our sin offering. After hearing all this, it's clear that Abraham was saying more than he realized when he called the place of his greatest testing – (**Jehovah-Jireh**) "**THE LORD WILL PROVIDE**" (v. 14).

CONCLUSION

I can understand father Abraham's love for his son, Isaac; I have children of my own. But I can't fully comprehend the depth of my heavenly Father's love, who offered his only Son as my sinless substitute. **Fortunately, God doesn't ask us to understand it. He simply invites us to believe it.** And he promises that those who do believe it have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus, while speaking to the Jews, once said in **John 8:56** – "**Your father**

Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it, (looking forward through eyes of faith) and was glad.” May we too rejoice in the salvation that **Jehovah Jireh**, has provided for us through our Lord Jesus Christ; and based on that precious gift, be comforted by the words of ***Romans 8:32 – “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*** A-men.