

GENESIS
Chapter 22:1-14

Technical Notes of Matthew Henry

(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.

Here is the trial of Abraham's faith, whether it continued so strong, so vigorous, so victorious, after a long settlement in communion with God, as it was at first, when by it he left his country: then it was made to appear that he loved God better than his father; now that he loved him better than his son. Observe here,

I. The time when Abraham was thus tried (v. 1): *After these things*, after all the other exercises he had had, all the hardships and difficulties he had gone through. Now, perhaps, he was beginning to think the storms had all blown over; but, after all, this encounter comes, which is sharper than any yet. Note: Many former trials will not supersede nor secure us from further trials; we have not yet put off the harness, 1 Kings 20:11. See Ps. 30:6, 7.

II. The author of the trial: *God* tempted him, not to draw him to sin, so Satan tempts (if Abraham had sacrificed Isaac, he would not have sinned, his orders would have justified him, and borne him out), but to discover his graces, how strong they were, that they might be *found to praise, and honour, and glory*, 1 Pet. 1:7. Thus God tempted Job, that he might appear not only a good man, but a great man. *God did tempt Abraham*; he did *lift up Abraham*, so some read it; as a scholar that improves well is lifted up, when he is put into a higher form. Note: Strong faith is often exercised with strong trials and put upon hard services.

III. The trial itself. God appeared to him as he had formerly done, called him by name, *Abraham*, that name which had been given him in ratification of the promise. Abraham, like a good servant, readily answered, "*Here am I*; what says my Lord unto his servant?" Probably he expected some renewed promise like those, ch. 15:1, and 17:1. But, to his great amazement, that which God has to say to him is, in short, *Abraham, Go kill thy son*; and this command is given him in such aggravating language as makes the temptation abundantly more grievous. When God speaks, Abraham, no doubt, takes notice of every word, and listens attentively to it; and every word here is a sword in his bones: the trial is steeled with trying phrases. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that he should afflict? No, it is not; yet, when Abraham's faith is to be tried, God seems to take pleasure in the aggravation of the trial, v. 2. Observe,

1. The person to be offered. (a) "*Take thy son*, not thy bullocks and thy lambs;" how willingly would Abraham have parted with them by thousands to redeem Isaac! "*No, I will take no bullock out of thy house*, Ps. 50:9. I must have thy son: not thy servant, no, not the steward of thy house, that shall not serve the turn; I must have thy son." Jephthah, in pursuance of a vow, offered a daughter; but Abraham must offer his son, in whom the family was to be built up. "*Lord, let it be an adopted son*;" "*No, (b) Thy only son*; thy only son by *Sarah*." Ishmael was lately cast out, to the grief of Abraham; and now Isaac only was left, and must he go too? Yes, (c) "*Take Isaac*, him, by name, *thy laughter*, that *son indeed*," ch. 17:19. Not "*Send for Ishmael back, and offer him*;" no, it must be Isaac. "*But, Lord, I love Isaac, he is to me as my own soul.*

Ishmael is not, and wilt thou take Isaac also? All this is against me:" Yea, (d) That son *whom thou lovest*. It was a trial of Abraham's love to God, and therefore it must be in a beloved son, and that string must be touched most upon: in the Hebrew it is expressed more emphatically, and, I think, might very well be read thus: *Take now that son of thine, that only one of thine, whom thou lovest, that Isaac*. God's command must overrule all these considerations.

2. The place: *In the land of Moriah*, three days' journey off; so that he might have time to consider it, and, if he did it, must do it deliberately, that it might be a service the more reasonable and the more honourable.

3. The manner: *Offer him for a burnt-offering*. He must not only kill his son, but kill him as a sacrifice, kill him devoutly, kill him by rule, kill him with all that pomp and ceremony, with all that sedateness and composure of mind, with which he used to offer his burnt-offerings.

(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. (4) Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. (5) 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. (6) 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. (7) 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? (8) And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering; so they went both of them together. (9) 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. (10) And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

We have here Abraham's obedience to this severe command. *Being tried, he offered up Isaac*, Heb. 11:17. Observe,

I. The difficulties which he broke through in this act of obedience. Much might have been objected against it; as,

1. It seemed directly against an antecedent law of God, which forbids murder, under a severe penalty, ch. 9:5, 6. Now can the unchangeable God contradict himself? He that hates robbery for burnt-offering (Isa. 61:8) cannot delight in murder for it.

2. How would it consist with natural affection to his own son? It would be not only murder, but the worst of murders. Cannot Abraham be obedient but he must be unnatural? If God insist upon a human sacrifice, is there none but Isaac to be the offering, and none but Abraham to be the offerer? Must the father of the faithful be the monster of all fathers?

3. God gave him no reason for it. When Ishmael was to be cast out, a just cause was assigned, which satisfied Abraham; but here Isaac must die, and Abraham must kill him, and neither the one nor the other must know why or wherefore. If Isaac had been to die a martyr for the truth, or his life had been the ransom of some other life more precious, it would have been another

matter; or if he had died as a criminal, a rebel against God or his parents, as in the case of the idolater (Deut. 13:8, 9), or the stubborn son (Deut. 21:18, 19), it might have passed as a sacrifice to justice. But the case is not so: he is a dutiful, obedient, hopeful, son. "Lord, what profit is there in his blood?"

4. How would this consist with the promise? Was it not said that in *Isaac shall thy seed be called?* But what comes of that seed, if this pregnant bud be broken off so soon?

5. How should he ever look Sarah in the face again? With what face can he return to her and his family with the blood of Isaac sprinkled on his garments and staining all his raiment? "*Surely a bloody husband hast thou been to me*" would Sarah say (as Exod. 4:25, 26), and it would be likely to alienate her affections for ever both from him and from his God.

6. What would the Egyptians say, and the Canaanites and the Perizzites who dwelt then in the land? It would be an eternal reproach to Abraham, and to his altars. "Welcome nature, if this be grace." These and many similar objections might have been made; but he was infallibly assured that it was indeed a command of God and not a delusion, and this was sufficient to answer them all. Note: God's commands must not be disputed, but obeyed; we must not consult with flesh and blood about them (Gal. 1:15, 16), but with a gracious obstinacy persist in our obedience to them.

II. The several steps of obedience, all which help to magnify it, and to show that he was guided by prudence, and governed by faith, in the whole transaction.

1. He rises early, v. 3. Probably the command was given in the visions of the night, and early the next morning he set himself about the execution of it--did not delay, did not demur, did not take time to deliberate; for the command was peremptory, and would not admit a debate. Note: Those that do the will of God heartily will do it speedily; while we delay, time is lost and the heart hardened.

2. He gets things ready for a sacrifice, and, as if he himself had been a Gibeonite, it should seem, with his own hands he cleaves the wood for the burnt-offering, that it might not be to seek when the sacrifice was to be offered. Spiritual sacrifices must thus be prepared for.

3. It is very probable that he said nothing about it to Sarah. This is a journey which she must know nothing of, lest she prevent it. There is so much in our own hearts to hinder our progress in duty that we have need, as much as may be, to keep out of the way of other hindrances.

4. He carefully looked about him, to discover the place appointed for this sacrifice, to which God had promise by some sign to direct him. Probably the direction was given by an appearance of the divine glory in the place, some pillar of fire reaching from heaven to earth, visible at a distance, and to which he pointed when he said (v. 5), "We will go yonder, where you see the light, and worship."

5. He left his servants at some distance off (v. 5), lest they should interpose, and create him some disturbance in his strange oblation; for Isaac was, no doubt, the darling of the whole family. Thus, when Christ was entering upon his agony in the garden, he took only three of his disciples with him, and left the rest at the garden door. Note: It is our wisdom and duty, when we are going to worship God, to lay aside all those thoughts and cares which may divert us from the

service, leave them at the bottom of the hill, that we may attend on the Lord without distraction.

6. He obliged Isaac to carry the wood (both to try his obedience in a smaller matter first, and that he might typify Christ, who carried his own cross, John 19:17), while he himself, though he knew what he did, with a steady and undaunted resolution carried the fatal knife and fire, v. 6. Note: Those that through grace are resolved upon the substance of any service or suffering for God must overlook the little circumstances which make it doubly difficult to flesh and blood.

7. Without any ruffle or disorder, he talks it over with Isaac, as if it had been but a common sacrifice that he was going to offer, v. 7, 8.

It was a very affecting question that Isaac asked him, as they were going together: *My father*, said Isaac; it was a melting word, which, one would think, would strike deeper into the breast of Abraham than his knife could into the breast of Isaac. He might have said, or thought, at least, "Call me not thy father who am now to be thy murderer; can a father be so barbarous, so perfectly lost to all the tenderness of a father?" Yet he keeps his temper, and keeps his countenance, to admiration; he calmly waits for his son's question, and this is it: *Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?* See how expert Isaac was in the law and custom of sacrifices. This it is to be well-catechised: this is, (a) A trying question to Abraham. How could he endure to think that Isaac was himself the lamb? So it is, but Abraham, as yet, dares not tell him so. Where God knows the faith to be armor of proof, he will laugh at *the trial of the innocent*, Job 9:23.

It is a teaching question to us all, that, when we are going to worship God, we should seriously consider whether we have everything ready, especially the lamb for a burnt-offering. Behold, the fire is ready, the Spirit's assistance and God's acceptance; the wood is ready, the instituted ordinances designed to kindle our affections (which indeed, without the Spirit, are but like wood without fire, but the Spirit works by them); *all things are now ready*, but where is the lamb? Where is the heart? Is that ready to be offered up to God, to ascend to him as a burnt-offering?

It was a very prudent answer which Abraham gave him: *My son, God will provide himself a lamb*. This was the language, either, (a) Of his obedience. "We must offer the lamb which God has appointed now to be offered;" thus giving him this general rule of submission to the divine will, to prepare him for the application of it to himself very quickly. Or, (b) Of his faith. Whether he meant it so or not, this proved to be the meaning of it; a sacrifice was provided instead of Isaac. Thus, *First*, Christ, the great sacrifice of atonement, was of God's providing; when none in heaven or earth could have found a lamb for that burnt-offering, God himself found the ransom, Ps. 89:20. *Secondly*, All our sacrifices of acknowledgment are of God's providing too. It is he that prepares the heart, Ps. 10:17. The broken and contrite spirit is a sacrifice of God (Ps. 51:17), of his providing.

8. With the same resolution and composure of mind, after many thoughts of heart, he applies himself to the completing of this sacrifice, v. 9, 10. He goes on with a holy willfulness, after many a weary step, and with a heavy heart he arrives at length at the fatal place, builds the altar (an altar of earth, we may suppose, the saddest that ever he built, and he had built many a one), lays the wood in order for his Isaac's funeral pile, and now tells him the amazing news: "Isaac, thou art the lamb which God has provided." Isaac, for aught that appears, is as willing as Abraham; we do not find that he raised any objection against it, that he petitioned for his life, that he attempted to make his escape, much less that he struggled with his aged father, or made

any resistance: Abraham does it, God will have it done, and Isaac has learned to submit to both, Abraham no doubt comforting him with the same hopes with which he himself by faith was comforted. Yet it is necessary that a sacrifice be bound. The great sacrifice, which in the fullness of time was to be offered up, must be bound, and therefore so must Isaac. But with what heart could tender Abraham tie those guiltless hands, which perhaps had often been lifted up to ask his blessing, and stretched out to embrace him, and were now the more straitly bound with the cords of love and duty!

However, it must be done. Having bound him, he lays him upon the altar, and his hand upon the head of his sacrifice; and now, we may suppose, with floods of tears, he gives, and takes, the final farewell of a parting kiss, perhaps he takes another for Sarah from her dying son. This being done, he resolutely forgets the bowels of a father, and puts on the awful gravity of a sacrificer. With a fixed heart, and an eye lifted up to heaven, he takes the knife, and stretches out his hand to give the fatal cut to Isaac's throat. Be astonished, O heavens! at this; and wonder, O earth! Here is an act of faith and obedience, which deserves to be a spectacle to God, angels, and men. Abraham's darling, Sarah's laughter, the church's hope, the heir of promise, lies ready to bleed and die by his own father's hand, who never shrinks at the doing of it.

Now this obedience of Abraham in offering up Isaac is a lively representation of the love of God to us, in delivering up his only-begotten Son to suffer and die for us, as a sacrifice. *It pleased the Lord himself to bruise him.* See Isa. 53:10; Zech. 13:7. Abraham was obliged, both in duty and gratitude, to part with Isaac, and parted with him to a friend; but God was under no obligations to us, for we were enemies. [It is a lively representation] of our duty to God, in return for that love. We must tread in the steps of this faith of Abraham. God, by his word, calls us to part with all for Christ--all our sins, though they have been as a right hand, or a right eye, or an Isaac--all those things that are competitors and rivals with Christ for the sovereignty of the heart (Luke 14:26); and we must cheerfully let them all go. God, by his providence, which is truly the voice of God, calls us to part with an Isaac sometimes, and we must do it with a cheerful resignation and submission to his holy will, 1 Sam. 3:18.

(11) And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. (12) 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. (13) 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. (14) And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

Hitherto this story has been very melancholy, and seemed to hasten towards a most tragical period; but here the sky suddenly clears up, the sun breaks out, and a bright and pleasant scene opens. The same hand that had wounded and cast down here heals and lifts up; for, though he cause grief, he will have compassion. *The angel of the Lord*, that is, God himself, the eternal Word, the angel of the covenant, who was to be the great Redeemer and comforter, he interposed, and gave a happy issue to this trial.

I. Isaac is rescued, v. 11, 12. The command to offer him was intended only for trial, and it appearing, upon trial, that Abraham did indeed love God better than he loved Isaac, the end of the command was answered; and therefore the order is countermanded, without any reflection at

all upon the unchangeableness of the divine counsels: *Lay not thy hand upon the lad.* Note: (1) Our creature-comforts are most likely to be continued to us when we are most willing to resign them up to God's will. (2) God's time to help and relieve his people is when they are brought to the greatest extremity. The more imminent the danger is, and the nearer to be put in execution, the more wonderful and the more welcome is the deliverance.

II. Abraham is not only approved, but applauded. He obtains an honourable testimony that he is righteous: *Now know I that thou fearest God.* God knew it before, but now Abraham had given a most memorable evidence of it. He needed do no more; what he had done was sufficient to prove the religious regard he had to God and his authority. Note: (1) When God, by his providence, hinders the performance of our sincere intentions in his services, he graciously accepts the will for the deed, and the honest endeavor, though it come short of finishing. (2) The best evidence of our fearing God is our being willing to serve and honour him with that which is dearest to us, and to part with all to him or for him.

III. Another sacrifice is provided instead of Isaac, v. 13. Now that the altar was built, and the wood laid in order, it was necessary that something should be offered. For

1. God must be acknowledged with thankfulness for the deliverance of Isaac; and the sooner the better, when here is an altar ready.

2. Abraham's words must be made good: *God will provide himself a lamb.* God will not disappoint those expectations of his people which are of his own raising; but according to their faith it is to them. *Thou shalt decree a thing, and it shall be established.*

3. Reference must be had to the promised Messiah, the blessed seed.

Christ was sacrificed in our stead, as this ram instead of Isaac, and his death was our discharge. *"Here am I (said he), let these go their way."*

Though that blessed seed was lately promised, and now typified by Isaac, yet the offering of him up should be suspended till the latter end of the world: and in the meantime the sacrifice of beasts should be accepted, as this ram was, as a pledge of that expiation which should one day be made by that great sacrifice. And it is observable that the temple, the place of sacrifice, was afterwards built upon this mount Moriah (2 Chron. 3:1); and mount Calvary, where Christ was crucified, was not far off.

IV. A new name is given to the place, to the honour of God, and for the encouragement of all believers, to the end of the world, cheerfully to trust in God in the way of obedience: *Jehovah-jireh, The Lord will provide* (v. 14), probably alluding to what he had said (v. 8), *God will provide himself a lamb.* It was not owing to any contrivance of Abraham, nor was it in answer to his prayer, though he was a distinguished intercessor; but it was purely the Lord's doing. Let it be recorded for the generations to come,

1. That *the Lord will see*; he will always have his eye upon his people in their straits and distresses, that he may come in with seasonable succour in the critical juncture.

2. That he will *be seen*, be seen *in the mount*, in the greatest perplexities of his people. He will not only manifest, but magnify, his wisdom, power, and goodness, in their deliverance. Where

God sees and provides, he should be seen and praised. And, perhaps, it may refer to *God manifest in the flesh*.