**The sermon**

**Intro**

This week is all about divine testing. What I really wanted to do this morning was highlight the topic of God-sent trials/tests. I was going to go through numerous trials that occur in Scripture. I thought understanding the nature of God's testing and the purpose of God's testing would be very helpful to you. I had a lot to say about trials. But that will have to wait till next week.

As I worked through the chapter there was so much material. So much material that intersected with Jesus. His death on the cross. His future triumph.

So this week we'll tour through Genesis 22. We'll understand what's going on. We'll connect these events with the big picture of the Bible. We'll make some brief comments on trials. Then next week I'll dig into the practical ramifications of trials as best I can.

**Body**

**READ 22:1-2**

**Point 1: Abraham tested (22:1-2)**

After the departure of Ishmael and the covenant with Abimelech, God tested Abraham (20:1).

**Test** = testing, or proving, Abraham's faith, loyalty, obedience. The test?

***"Take 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."*** – 22:2

Ishmael's gone. So Isaac's the only son Abraham has left. Take what you love, the son who you waited for, the son I gave you, the son who's supposed to inherit the covenant promises, the only son you have left, and give him to me as a burnt offering.

God's demanded a lot of Abraham. Leave your homeland. Send Ishmael away. Now take Isaac's life.

***"your only son"*** bears a strong resemblance to God the Son, Jesus.

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* – **John 3:16**

***"burnt offering"*** = the whole body would be burned to ashes. When animals were offered this way, none of the animal was eaten. The entire animal was consumed by fire.

There's debate about ***"the land of Moriah."*** In 2 Chronicles 3:1, Mount Moriah is the place where Solomon's temple was built in Jerusalem. Some dispute that Beersheba to Jerusalem is less than a three day journey. But it's likely day one was the day the test was given. Day two was a travel day. And day three was a partial travel day.

**Application**

God won't test you in the same way, but test you he will.

**Practical question**: how am I being tested by God these days?

**READ 22:3-10**

**Point 2: Abraham obeys (22:3-10)**

***"So Abraham rose early in the morning"*** (22:3) = prompt obedience the next day. Abraham takes two young men, Isaac, a donkey, and some wood for the burnt offering.

By the third day, Abraham could see Mount Moriah from a distance (22:4). The two young men behind are left behind with the donkey (22:5).

***"I and the boy*** [Isaac] ***will go over there and worship and come again to you"*** (22:5) = Abraham's going to go through with the sacrifice. And he believes he'll return with a living Isaac. From Hebrews 11:19 we learn that, *"He* [Abraham] *considered that God was able even to raise him* [Isaac] *from the dead."* It seems like Abraham was willing sacrifice Isaac in part because he trusted God would raise Isaac from the dead. God's promised me countless offspring, a nation, and everlasting possession of the land. I'm going to have offspring. I guess God's going to raise him from the dead.

***"boy"*** is the same word for ***"young men."*** The word was used for infants to young adults. A good number of years have passed since Isaac was weaned (21:8). We can't be sure how old Isaac was. Maybe grade school age or a teenager?

***And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son.*** – 22:6

The wood is placed on Isaac for carrying.

This bears a strong resemblance to Jesus, who began carrying his cross (John 19:16-17) before Simon of Cyrene carried it the rest of the way (Luke 23:26).

Isaac detects something is off. ***"Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"*** – 22:7

Abraham responds, ***"God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."*** – 22:8

We can't be sure what Abraham was thinking here. It appears ***"the lamb"*** is Isaac and Abraham's still concealing God's command.

***When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.*** – 22:9

Verbatim compliance. Down to the right place.

We're not told when, but at some point, Isaac discovers what's going on. We're not told how Abraham broke it to him. We're not told if Isaac struggled. We're not told why Isaac was bound.

Some commentators suggest Isaac willingly submitted. If Isaac was 18, that would make Abraham 115. Making Isaac strong enough to resist.

What if Isaac was eight? What if Isaac resisted? What if Isaac's still struggling to get out of the binding? An eight year old tied down against their will trying to escape death by fire. A gruesome picture.

Another suggestion. The binding is to keep Isaac in place for minimal suffering when the knife comes. If Isaac were to move and shake and flail during the cutting, the suffering would be much worse.

No mention of struggle argues for Isaac's submission.

In any event, ***Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.*** – 22:10

The proper procedure was to cut up the offering before burning.

**Application**

Abraham surrendered all. God said you need to do this. Abraham said, okay, I'll do it. Our surrender might be obeying a biblical command. Our surrender might be submitting to God's will. Our surrender might be maintaining an unpopular doctrine that makes people angry.

**Practical question**: Where is God calling me to surrender today?

**READ 22:11-12**

**Point 3: God speaks (22:11-12)**

At this point, the angel of the LORD intervenes by calling out to Abraham: ***"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."*** – 22:12

The angel of the LORD is God himself. Abraham passed the test.

God now knows that Abraham fears him. Was God uncertain previously? I wonder if Abraham fears me? No. God already knew where Abraham stood. God knows our thoughts and our motives (Jer 17:9-10). Can God look inside your mind to determine if you believe in Jesus? The test showed Abraham where he stood. The test shows us where Abraham stood.

**Application**

What's happened here is God's evaluated Abraham's response to the test.

**Practical question**: How is God evaluating my response to the test(s) I'm being given?

**READ 22:13-14**

**Point 4: God provides (22:13-14)**

Abraham looks up and sees a ram caught in a thicket (22:13): shrubs, bushes, or small trees close together. Instinctively Abraham ***"offered it up as a burnt offering <u>instead of</u> his son"*** (22:13). The ram's a substitute for Isaac. A burnt offering will be given, but it won't be Isaac.

***"instead of"*** bears a striking resemblance to the substitutionary atonement of Jesus on our behalf.

*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom <u>for</u> many."* – **Mark 10:45**

*"for"* = a replacement = instead of, in place of.

Like Jesus took our place on the cross, the ram takes Isaac's place on the altar. Abraham names the place, ***"the LORD will provide"*** because God provided a ram to take Isaac's place.

**Application**

God has provided Christ. So that we sinners can experience God's forgiveness and blessing.

**Practical question**: Have I trusted in Jesus? Am I trusting in Jesus?

**READ 22:15-19**

**Point 5: God speaks again (22:15-19)**

God speaks a second time.

***"By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,*** – 22:16

Because Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, God has sworn = take an oath. What has God sworn?

***I will surely bless you,***

Because Abraham was willing to go through with the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham will experience blessing.

The oath of blessing is repeating a previous promise (Gen 12:2). Abraham has been experiencing this promise all along (Gen 12:16; 20:14; 21:22).

***and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.***

Because Abraham was willing to go through with the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham's offspring will be so numerous they can't be counted. Previously, I've told you this has dual fulfillment. Abraham will have numerous ethnic offspring: the Jews. Abraham will have numerous spiritual offspring: those who believe, whether Jew or Gentile. The ethnic offspring will dwell in the land in this age. The spiritual offspring will dwell in the land forever and ever as an *"everlasting possession"* (Gen 17:8).

Multiplied offspring like ***"the stars of heaven"*** is repeating a previous promise (Gen 15:5). The sand of the seashore is a new analogy.

***And your offspring shall possess the gate of <u>his</u> enemies,***

***"his enemies"*** (singular) indicates one particular offspring of Abraham. The word ***"offspring"*** can be used of a group or an individual. Context (***"his enemies"***) dictates one specific offspring ***"shall possess the gate of his enemies."*** That singular offspring is Jesus. Paul understood Jesus to be Abraham's singular offspring (Gal 3:16).

The gate was the entry point of the city and its defense. When the gate was broken down, the city was left defenseless. If you possessed the gate, you possessed the city. God's saying Jesus will conquer his enemies and take their land.

Psalm 2:8-9 speaks of Jesus breaking the nations and dashing them in pieces like broken pottery. Psalm 110:1 speaks of the Father making Jesus' enemies Jesus' footstool. 1 Corinthians 15:25 speaks of a time when all of Jesus' enemies will be under his feet.

***and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed***

***"your offspring"*** is still talking about Jesus. All the nations of the world will be blessed in Jesus. It's in Jesus that God's blessing comes to fallen sinners who are living under God's curse.

*And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."* – **Revelation 5:9-10**

The *"you"* who's worthy to open the scroll, who was slain, who ransomed people for God, who makes people a kingdom and priests, is Jesus. The song is about what Jesus has done. By his death on the cross, Jesus has *"ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."* ***"ransomed"*** (or "purchased" in other translations) is purchase language. *"ransomed"* means Jesus' death is the price Jesus paid to acquire us as his property. The ESV's

***"ransomed"*** indicates Jesus didn't buy people from one slave master (sin) to enslave them similar manner. Rather, Jesus purchased people to release them from the bondage and punishment of sin.

In the new heavens and the new earth, there will be peoples *"from every tribe and language and people and nation."* The words tribe, language, people, nation go from smaller to larger. Tribe = a group of people from the same blood line, a clan. Language = a group of people who share a distinctive and common dialect/language. People = a group of people with cultural and territorial bonds. Nation = a group of people composed of various tribes, perhaps various languages, and perhaps various peoples who, together, constitute a distinct political entity.

Those people Jesus purchased Jesus also made a kingdom and priests. Only some people become part of the kingdom. Meaning Jesus purchased some people, not all people. Those people Jesus purchased include people from every nation. All the nations will be blessed ≠ universalism (every person will saved). Rather, it means there will be people present in the new heavens and new earth from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. When the kingdom comes, believers will have been gathered from every language group in the earth!

**The point**? People from all the nations of the earth, down to tribes and language groups, will experience God's blessing in Abraham's one offspring Jesus Christ. When Jesus takes the gate of his enemies, those he's ransomed will reign with him in the land forever and ever.

***because you have obeyed my voice***

This is quite perplexing, at least to me, because previously the promises were stated as sure and certain and without conditions. But here it seems like, after the fact, we learn that the promises were conditional on Abraham's obedience.

Regardless, the Abrahamic covenant won't end in failure because it's God's answer to the fall. The Abrahamic covenant promises the salvation of sinners from all nations. In the end, the eternal aspects of the covenant (e.g., everlasting possession of the land) are conditional on Christ's work, not Abraham.

**Does God commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac tarnish God's moral character?**

No. First, God never intended for Abraham to actually kill Isaac. God would ensure no harm would come to Isaac. God intended to test Abraham with the ultimate sacrifice, not slay an innocent boy.

Second, God forbids murder (Exod 20:13). God commands the death penalty for murder (Gen 9:6). God wiped out the peoples who possessed the land before Israel in part because of child sacrifices (Lev 18:21, 24-25; 20:2-5; Deut 18:10).

**BIG IDEA**: Abraham passes the test. Passing the test results in an oath that restates the previous covenant promises. The events of Abraham's test are eerily similar to Christ. These promises are ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

**READ 22:20-24**

**Point 6: God will continue to provide (22:20-24)**

Why the genealogy? To reintroduce us to Abraham's family. To introduce us to Rebekah, who in chapter 24, will marry Isaac and make the multiplication of offspring possible.

**Conclusion**

Jesus will *"possess the gate of his enemies."* One day, Jesus will conquer his enemies and take possession of the whole earth.

When Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for sinners, he purchased a group of people from all the nations of the earth, from all the language groups. These people will reign with him in the land forever and ever. In a renewed world without death, decay, sin, and suffering. Sin means doing life our own way, not God's way. Breaking God's commands.

If you wouldn't say I've trusted in Jesus, I've repented of my sins, I'm born again, I'll be in the land, I would say to you, become one of those people blessed in Jesus.

Tell God something like this. You can do it right now while you're sitting. God, I've sinned against you. I deserve your punishment. But Jesus died for a people. I want to become one of those people. Thank you for sending Jesus to the cross so those who believe could be forgiven. I believe. Forgive me God. Help me to follow you.

If you trust in Jesus, you'll find him forgiving. You'll find him faithful. You'll find him patient. You'll find him wise. You'll find him changing your heart.

Tell us if you believe.