

The Fear of Man or Faith in the LORD

Genesis 20:1 – 22:24

Living in the flesh can be a fearful thing. In the flesh we fear man. But the Bible also speaks of the fear of God which is produced by faith in the LORD. The fear of man is a product of living in our flesh; self-centered and self-reliant. The fear of man hinders us in our walk with the Lord. Faith in God produces the fear of God in us. The fear of God is essential to experiencing all that God has for us and wants to do in and through us. In these chapters we have these two kinds of fear contrasted with one another. As we examine this portion of scripture we will gain great insight into these two types of fear.

The Fear of Man

Genesis 20

And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. ² Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She *is* my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she *is* a man’s wife.”

⁴ But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? ⁵ Did he not say to me, ‘She *is* my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He *is* my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.”

⁶ And God said to him in a dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who *are* yours.”

⁸ So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. ⁹ And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.” ¹⁰ Then Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?”

¹¹ And Abraham said, “Because I thought, surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. ¹² But indeed *she is* truly my sister. She *is* the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³ And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This *is* your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, ‘He *is* my brother.’ ’ ”

¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave *them* to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, “See, my land *is* before you; dwell where it pleases you.” ¹⁶ Then to Sarah he said,

“Behold, I have given your brother a thousand *pieces* of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who *are* with you and before everybody.” Thus she was rebuked.

¹⁷ So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore *children*; ¹⁸ for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

We are not told why Abraham went on this journey to the South other than Abraham attributing the move to God (20:13). Gerar was a large merchandizing town located between Kadesh and Shur and the capitol of a Philistine city located on the outskirts of Egypt (20:1). Whatever the reason Abraham chose to go on this journey, it led to a lapse in faith similar to the one he had experienced 25 years before (12:10-20). Just as Abram and Sarai had done before, Abraham and Sarah would do again, rely on their own deceptive devices and try to use a lie to protect themselves (20:2, 12-13). This is all the more difficult to understand given what Abraham and Sarah have experienced with God during those 25 years: God’s Covenant Promise (13:14-18); God’s empowering Abram to rescue Lot (14); Abrahamic Covenant confirmed (15); God’s revelation of Himself as *El Shaddai*, God Almighty (17); and the encounter with God, His messengers, and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (18-19). 25 years ago Abram and Sarai blew their witness and now Abraham and Sarah would repeat the offense.

Abraham and Sarah chose to rely on a lie. They conspired to tell the people in this foreign land that they were brother and sister rather than husband and wife; a half truth (20:12; a heresy is a *half-truth*). Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah to add her to his harem (20:2). Sarah was close to 100 years old and still must have been a beauty for this king to desire her.

But in the night God warned Abimelech in a dream that he was “a dead man” because the woman, Sarah, whom he had taken was another “man’s wife” (20:3). The king claimed to have done this “in the integrity of my heart” (20:4-5). One has to wonder just how much integrity one has who is accumulating a harem, something that was not in line with God’s plan. But God acknowledged the ignorance of the king and told him that God had prevented him from sinning with Sarah (20:6). God had intervened before Abimelech went any further. This was to preserve the messianic line as well as to spare Sarah from complete disgrace.

Notice the words of the LORD. “For I also withheld you from sinning against Me” (20:6). Abimelech was in danger of committing adultery with Sarah, but ultimately this sin would have been against God. In fact, all sin is ultimately against God. Another example of this is that King David’s sin of adultery was recognized by him as being against God (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51:4). This is why God alone can forgive sin (Isaiah 43:25; Micah 7:18). And this sheds light therefore, on the nature of Jesus as in the New Testament He forgave sin (Luke 5:17-26). If only God can forgive sin, and Jesus forgave sin, then Jesus is God.

Abraham was apparently known as a “prophet” which makes this lapse in faith all the more terrible (20:7). He failed to act as a prophet, one in contact with God. He acted like and depended on his own wits. He acted like an unbeliever without faith. Abraham was old and spiritually mature (Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:9-20). He should have known better. To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Not only that, but Abraham was a repeat offender in this regard (1 John 5:14-21). His sinful actions were putting God’s plan in jeopardy. If Abimelech had intercourse with Sarah, the identity of the “Seed” could have been confused and polluted or at least disparaged by the enemies of God.

Even though Abraham lapsed in faith and acted without integrity, God intervened to preserve His plan. God always protects His plan and program (Esther 4:14; 8:17). God will work His work and see that His will is done.

But there are always consequences to such lapses in faith. Abraham was rebuked by a pagan king (20:8-10). Abraham not only blew his witness before this king, but he lost an opportunity to credibly share His God with this pagan king. Compromise of integrity in leadership always diminishes one’s position of authority (e.g. Saul - 1 Samuel 13:5-15; David - 2 Samuel 11:24; Solomon - 1 Kings 11:4-40).

Why did Abraham and Sarah have this lapse? They lost sight of God. And when you lose sight of God everything seems big and ominous to you. When you lose sight of God, you fear. Abraham knew *about* the fear of God because he commented he didn’t think it was in this pagan land (20:11). But he didn’t *have* the fear of God himself. Without God factored into his life situation he seemed smaller and smaller and the things around him seemed bigger and bigger, more threatening (cf. Numbers 14). The result was that God’s plans, a pagan king and his family (20:18) and Sarah were all endangered.

How do you repair lapses in faith? The road to recovering from a lapse in faith begins with telling the truth (20:12). Speaking the truth in love is always the best road to recovery (Ephesians 4:15). It also involves humility. Abraham humbled himself and received the gifts from Abimelech with everyone knowing that all this trouble had been caused by Abraham (20:14-15). Sarah was also rebuked for going along with her husband’s plan (20:16). God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5-6). Maybe Abraham took this journey for granted and proudly felt he could handle the protection for his family. If so, he was sadly mistaken. Finally, to deal with a lapse of faith the most important thing is to turn back to God in prayer (20:17). Not just prayer for yourself, but prayer for the victims who have suffered as a result of your lapse in faith. Humble confession of sin (1 John 1:9) and intercession for the lost is a part of recovering from a lapse of faith (1 Timothy 2:1).

The fear of man is a product of not factoring God into your life equation or circumstances. The results of acting on the fear of man are always troublesome. There is a better way.

The Security of God’s Faithfulness

Genesis 21

And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. ² For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. ³ And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him— Isaac. ⁴ Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ And Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, *and* all who hear will laugh with me.” ⁷ She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne *him* a son in his old age.”

⁸ So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

⁹ And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. ¹⁰ Therefore she said to Abraham, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *namely* with Isaac.” ¹¹ And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight because of his son.

¹² But God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. ¹³ Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he *is* your seed.”

¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting *it* on her shoulder, he gave *it* and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. ¹⁵ And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down across from *him* at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, “Let me not see the death of the boy.” So she sat opposite *him*, and lifted her voice and wept.

¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, “What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he *is*. ¹⁸ Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation.”

¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. ²⁰ So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. ²¹ He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

²² And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, “God *is* with you in all that you do. ²³ Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt.”

²⁴ And Abraham said, “I will swear.”

²⁵ Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech’s servants had seized. ²⁶ And Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard *of it* until today.” ²⁷ So

Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. ²⁸ And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

²⁹ Then Abimelech asked Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?”

³⁰ And he said, “You will take *these* seven ewe lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well.” ³¹ Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because the two of them swore an oath there.

³² Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba. So Abimelech rose with Phichol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. ³⁴ And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.

God is faithful to accomplish His plan in His time. God gave Abraham and Sarah a son “As He had said . . . As He had spoken” (21:1, 2). God is always true to His word. If God said it that settles it. You can depend on God and His word. You can take security in God and His word.

In these first two verses the timing of God is mentioned. God has a plan and He will bring it to pass *in His time*. That is sometimes hard for us. We are inherently impatient. It often seems to us as if God is moving too slowly. We are very limited. We don’t see all of the variables, the networking of circumstances required to bring God’s grand plans into being. God is not limited by time. And so what is just the right timing for God is often *too long* a wait for us.

The Bible says there is a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1-17; 8:6). Jesus came at God’s appointed time (Mark 1:15; John 7:6; Galatians 4:4). Daniel the prophet spoke prophetically of the time of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24-27). The Bible speaks of a “day of salvation,” or a time to be saved for the individual (John 7:6; 2 Corinthians 6:2). While there is a “day” for us to be saved, that “day” or time will not go on indefinitely (Acts 2:17; 2 Peter 3:9, 15). The Bible speaks of the “Last Days” or a time when final prophetic events will come to pass (2 Timothy 3:1; 2 Peter 3:3). There is a time of final culmination (John 12:48; Revelation 1:3). In light of the time, our attitude should be one of taking every opportunity to use our time redemptively (Ephesians 5:15-16). We should not foolishly or godlessly waste our time (Luke 12:13-21).

God is eternal and in no hurry. We are temporal and have a sense of urgency. But too often the things we are urgent about are temporal and not eternal. In our flesh we try to hasten the time of God’s planning (e.g. like Sarah with Hagar – Genesis 16). That always results in complications and trouble. Instead we need to wait on the Lord in faith.

The name of the child of Promise was Isaac (21:3). “Isaac” means laughter. It’s a joyful thing to see the handiwork of the Lord come to pass. All our fleshly efforts are laughable in light of God’s glorious plan and timing (21:4-7). When you see God defy the odds and work His miracles all anyone can really do is just sit back, take it in, and laugh. Isaac, laughter, was a fitting name for this boy.

But the ways of the flesh are always at odds with the ways of God. Isaac and Ishmael become types of the conflict that always exists between the works of the flesh and the ways of the Spirit (21:8-14). Hagar and Ishmael represent the human fleshly efforts to fulfill God's plans. All they brought about was conflict, division, and jealousy. Sarah and Isaac represent the fruit of the Spirit, how God's Promise is obtained by faithfully trusting in God. They resulted in blessing. The child of promise is always going to be in conflict with the child of the flesh. They could not coexist and so that produced by the flesh was sent away (cf. Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 4:21-31; 5:16-26).

The product of the flesh is misery and like the fruitless desert (21:15-16). But God is merciful. He led Hagar to water in the desert (21:18-19). God oversaw Ishmael and provided limited blessing for Hagar and Ishmael (21:20-21).

From that point on it was clear to everyone around Abraham, Sarah and Isaac that they were a blessed family. Abimelech and his commander Phichol recognized this and so sought to be at peace with Abraham and his family (21:22-34). Abraham was the man of faith who had a relationship with "the LORD, the Everlasting God" (21:33).

Faith in the LORD

Genesis 22

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!"

And he said, "Here I am."

² Then He said, "Take now 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."

³ So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴ Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. ⁵ And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."

⁶ So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid *it* on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. ⁷ But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!"

And he said, "Here I am, my son."

Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where *is* the lamb for a burnt offering?"

⁸ And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.

⁹ Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. ¹⁰ And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

¹¹ But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”

So he said, “Here I am.”

¹² And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me.”

¹³ Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind *him* was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said *to* this day, “In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

¹⁵ Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, ¹⁶ and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son*— ¹⁷ blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

²⁰ Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, “Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: ²¹ Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, ²² Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.” ²³ And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. ²⁴ His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah.

The notes on this passage from *The Scofield Study Bible* are worth considering. It states:

The spiritual experience of Abraham was marked by four great crises, each of which involved a surrender of something naturally most dear. These were: (1) country and relatives (Gen. 12:1). . . . (2) His nephew, Lot; especially dear to Abraham by nature, as a possible heir and as a fellow believer (Gen. 13:1-18; 2 Peter 2:7-8). . . . (3) His own plan about Ishmael (Gen. 17:17-18). . . . And (4) Isaac, “your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love” (Gen. 22:1-19).

Abraham is a model of faith for us (Romans 4; Hebrews 11). As we look at Abraham’s life and how God builds his faith we see that *faith building requires surrender*. True faith is focused on and dependent upon God. Faith based on or dependent upon anything or anyone other than God is limited and doomed to eventual failure. Therefore, God works to remove hindrances to our faith so that we will put it where it will be most solid and dependable, on Him.

How’s your faith? Are you willing to surrender up anything the Lord asks you to so that He can build your faith, even something that is most precious to you? Would you surrender to God something that you’ve been waiting for all your life? That is what it may take to build your faith. That is what God required of Abraham to build his faith.

Are you willing to trust God no matter what? Full surrender and coming to that point in life is how God builds faith in us. *Man's extremities are God's opportunities*. Abraham is a picture of this.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians he said that he “preached the gospel according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The New Testament had yet to be formed, so what “scriptures” was he referring to? He was referring to the Old Testament. Genesis 22 is a picture of the gospel.

It's valuable to try and ascertain the age of Isaac during the events of chapter 22. This can be done by comparing Isaac's age with that of his mother Sarah. Sarah was 90 years old when God said He was going to give her a child (17:17), After nine months of pregnancy she was approximately 91 years old when Isaac was born (18:10). A child was weaned in this culture when they reached 3 years old (21:8). That would make Sarah 92 or 93. She was 127 years old when she died (23:1). If Sarah was 92-93 when Isaac was born and 127 years old when she died, that leaves a window of 36 years from Isaac's birth until his mother's death. At the end of chapter 21 it says, “many days” passed while Abraham remained in the land of the Philistines (21:34). Chapter 22:1 uses the phrase “after these things” implying duration of time. Isaac is referred to with the term “lad” in 22:5, 12. What is interesting is that the word “lad” and the words, “young men” (used to refer to Abraham's servants) are translated from the same term NAAR (Strong's 5288). NAAR in this context would appear to refer to someone who is between the ages of 20-35. Isaac was not a child (22:1).

God hadn't spoken to Abraham for some years now. Abraham and Isaac would have established a close bond by this time. Isaac was a miracle boy; his parent's pride and joy. He had been worth waiting for. Now the promise of God would come to pass. But this life of bliss would be shaken.

When God called Abraham He used his covenant name. And when God called, Abraham answered with a ready response of “Here I am.” (22:1). Abraham was ready at the beck and call of God. He didn't forget God in the good times as is so often the case with believers.

The context of the chapter is God testing Abraham (“God tested Abraham” – 22:1). It is clear that Isaac, a young man, would also be tested during the events of this chapter. The word “tested” means “to prove; show approved; try.” (Strong's # 5254 - נָצַח - *nâçâh*, *naw-saw*; a prim. root; to *test*; by impl. to *attempt*:— adventure, assay, prove, tempt, try.¹)

¹Strong, J. (1997, c1996). *The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words* (electronic ed.) (H5254). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God's test? "Take now 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). In this chapter God would test Abraham's faith and love as well as his priorities.

There are a few things to note about God's command. God referred to Isaac as "your only son" (22:2a). This shows that God *did not recognize Ishmael as a son of Abraham*. God does not recognize that which is produced by our fleshly efforts. God must be the Builder of what we do (Psalm 127:1). Only that done through faith in God is acceptable to Him (1 Corinthians 3:5-17; Galatians 4).

God's command includes the first mention of "love" in the Bible (22:2b - Strong's #157 - אָהַב *âhab aw-hab*). It's interesting that the first mention of "love" in the Bible is not between a husband and wife, a mother and daughter or even a mother and son, but *between a father and son*. The word "love" here refers to "the sense of having a strong emotional attachment to and desire either to possess or to be in the presence of the object."² Now that presents us with some interesting grist for our mill to think on. This may be a bit speculative, but suppose Abraham's love for Isaac had gotten out of place . Suppose Abraham had begun to ignore or be distracted from his quality time with the Lord. If love here is to desire to be in the presence someone, and our love for God is to be supreme (Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:29-30), then Abraham's supreme love for God should have manifested itself in a supreme desire to be in the presence of the Lord. But what if Abraham's love of Isaac began to encroach on his love of God? What if Abraham had begun to have more of a desire to be with Isaac than with God? What if there were times when Abraham's time with God became drudgery, or even seen by Abraham as an inconvenience that kept him away from being with the son of his love? What if Abraham was rationalizing his relationship with the Lord? He may have been excusing himself to God saying, "You know I love you supremely Lord, even if I'm not spending as much time with you as I used to." If this is what was happening with Abraham in his relationships with the Lord and Isaac, then that is a big problem.

You see whenever we begin to "love" something or someone more than the Lord, whenever anything distracts us from our "love" or desire to be with the Lord it is called *idolatry*. Our "God" is our *master passion*. The thing or person we spend the most time on, is the thing or person we love the most. That is true based on our definition of love in this chapter. God was going to test Abraham not because God wanted to see if Abraham loved Him or had faith in Him, but so that Abraham *and* Isaac would learn to love the Lord supremely. And here is the link; *true faith loves the Lord supremely*.

How about you, is there something or someone in your life that is distracting you from the desire to be in the presence of the Lord? When you do spend time with the Lord, are you just *putting in time*? Are your times with the Lord rushed, cut short, drudgery, an

²Vine, W., Unger, M. F., & White, W. (1997, c1996). *Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (electronic ed.) (1:141). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

inconvenience? If so then you have probably allowed some form of idolatry to creep into your heart and life. This is easy to determine. Ask the Lord to show you what you most desire to spend your time on. Is there anyone or anything you prefer to spend time with more than spending time with the Lord? If so you are not loving the Lord supremely. If so there is idolatry in your life.

John ended his first epistle with the words, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” (1 John 5:21). The closer you come to Jesus, the more clearly you will see your sin. The closer you come to Jesus, the more power over sin you will have. The key to exposing and solving the sin of idolatry is to spend time with the Lord. The key is to fall passionately in love with the Lord and that means spending time in His presence, and enjoying it! Abraham was known for building altars wherever he went and spending time worshipping in the presence of the Lord (Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:4,18). It’s no accident that God instructed Abraham to offer Isaac on an altar. Perhaps Abraham had begun to worship his son. If so, what happens in this chapter is God’s corrective call to Abraham to fully surrender his idol and reestablish God to the proper place of the primary object of his love. It is a test to Isaac as well because he had to trust the Lord in presenting himself as a sacrifice. And it is a test for us. If there are idols in our lives, and we want to grow in our faith, we will have to surrender them to God by putting them on the altar as God commands.

There is a Principle of First Mention which states that the circumstances surrounding the first mention of a term establishes a grammatical base and sets the tone for how the word is defined in subsequent occurrences. This chapter is going to teach us something very significant about love. And the relationship God uses to teach us about love is the love between a father and son. That relationship points us to the relationship between our heavenly Father and His only Son Jesus. To know what love is all about, you really ultimately have to look to the love shown by God the Father and His only Son Jesus.

God instructed Abraham to, “go to the land of Moriah” (22:2c). Moriah is an interesting geographic location that we will speak more about later in the study.

God instructed Abraham to take Isaac his only son to the land of Moriah, “and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (22:2d). I wonder if Abraham could believe his ears when God spoke those words. Other pagan gods were worshipped in such a way, but the LORD? There was no precedent for such a command from God. Abraham must have been confused and baffled. This was the miracle child of promise that God had provided. Now he was to be sacrificed in a distant land? It didn’t make sense.

But “Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.” (22:3). Abraham didn’t understand all that was being asked of him and his son, but *he proved his faith in God by obedience* (Philippians 2:8; James 2:21-24). For faith to be proven, it must be tested. The test of faith often involves following God in the midst of uncertainty.

There was something else being put to the test here. Abraham's love of God was being tested. There was probably no one, not even Sarah, who Abraham loved more than his son Isaac. At this point his focus was on the young man of promise. His entire future was wrapped up in Isaac. Everything was riding on him. And it is this particular reason why God likely chose to use Isaac as the object of testing with Abraham. What would Abraham do when asked to sacrifice the one he cherished so much? What would he do? Was Abraham's faith in God and love for God strong enough to surpass even his love for his child of promise?

On the third day Abraham came to "the place" God wanted him to go (22:4). Once "the place" was in sight, Abraham told the "young men" who had accompanied them to remain behind with the animals while, "the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." (22:5). This is the first mention of the word "worship." The word "worship" is translated from the Hebrew term SHAWKAW (Strong's # 7812 - - שָׁחָה **shâchâh**, *shaw-khaw*) which means, "to *depress*, i.e. *prostrate* in homage to royalty or God; bow (self) down, crouch, fall down (flat), humbly beseech, do (make) obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship."³ Abraham was going to worship the Lord with his son Isaac. At this point as far as Abraham knew, this time of worship would cost Isaac his life. Isaac was not aware of this. This worship would be intense, sacrificial to the maximum. And yet, Abraham spoke in faith, "and we will come back to you." Abraham did not understand everything God was requiring him to do with Isaac, but he knew God had told him Isaac was central to His plans and so *by faith Abraham trusted God to work it all out*. That's what faith does in confusing and trying times, it trusts God to work it out. Another way of saying this is *Abraham was fully surrendered to God. Abraham's worship would involve bowing down His will to the will of God*. Worship is not just going to church and singing some songs, it is providing yourself, your life, everything you have as a sacrifice to God. That is what Jesus did at the cross (Matthew 26:39). That is what picking up your cross and following Jesus is all about (Luke 9:23-26; Romans 12:1-2).

An interesting comment from the New Testament sheds light on Abraham's faithful thinking in this situation. In Hebrews it states:

Hebrews 11:17-19 - ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "*In Isaac your seed shall be called*," ¹⁹ concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Abraham's faith was so strong, his relationship with God so close, that he trusted God with the life of his most precious son. Abraham believed in God even to the point of life and death!

³Strong, J. (1997, c1996). *The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words* (electronic ed.) (H7812). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Just as Abraham laid the wood for the sacrifice on the shoulders of Isaac, the cross was laid on Jesus' back (22:6; John 19:7-18). At this point Isaac asks Abraham his father where the lamb is for the sacrifice (22:7). Abraham answers, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (22:8). This is a word of prophecy in that God would indeed provide "the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29, 36). What is interesting is that later in verse 13 God provides a "ram" not a "lamb." The prophecy therefore was not directly relating to that immediate circumstance, but pointed to the future of Christ as the Lamb.

When they got to the place of sacrifice Abraham built an altar, put the wood on the altar and then took Isaac and bound him and laid him on the altar (22:9). All this time Isaac, (certainly old enough and strong enough to overpower his aged father), passively went along with what his father was doing. Isaac's faith was being built and strengthened too as he *cooperated* with the faithful actions of his father Abraham. In the same way Jesus wasn't forced to lay down his life but laid it down of his own free will (John 10:17-18).

As Abraham stretched out his hand and took hold of the knife and then raised it high to slay his son, both he and his son were trusting God through the impending suffering that would apparently occur (22:10). We can only imagine what was going through Abraham's and Isaac's mind and heart. Surely the question, "Why?" was entertained. But the answer would not come for about another 1500 years. Sometimes what the Lord asks us to do will not have an immediate explanation. Sometimes it takes time, a lot of time for God to reveal His plan. During that duration of time, we need to trust the Lord. That is how faith is built strong.

Man's extremities are God's opportunities. God brought both Abraham and Isaac to the extreme point of faith. There are few points as extreme as taking a life or giving up your life. And that is all the more true when a loved one is involved. But that is where God brought these two men, this father and his son. Certainly their love for one another and God and their faith in God was peaking.

It is at this point that God intervenes. God sent "the Angel of the LORD," (who is likely the Son of God in a Christophany) to halt Abraham's stroke that would take the life of his only son Isaac (22:11-12). What relief Abraham must have felt! What relief Isaac must have felt! Faith is proven by the fruit of its works (James 2).

There is something very important to learn from verse twelve which states, "And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me.'" The phrase that I'd like to focus on here is the Angel of the LORD's assessment that "now I know that you fear God." The phrase "fear God" introduces us to the fear of the LORD. The fear of the LORD is important to the child of God.

When the Bible speaks of "fear" in relation to God or the LORD it is speaking of awe, respect and reverence. There are times when people actually trembled with fear at the presence of the LORD such as at the foot of Mount Sinai when Moses met with God

(Exodus 19). But the fear of the LORD is not something that should keep us away from the LORD but rather it is something to enhance and facilitate our walk with the LORD.

The phrase “fear God” occurs 25 times in the NKJV Bible. The wicked does not “fear God” (Psalm 36:1; 55:19; Romans 3:18). It is in the fear of God that holiness is matured and perfected (2 Corinthians 7:1). The Bible states that believers ought to live in mutual submission to one another “in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). We are exhorted to “fear God and give glory to Him” (Revelation 14:7).

62 times we are exhorted in scripture to “fear the LORD” (NKJV Bible). Why is it so important for people to fear the LORD? The answer rests in examining a similar phrase, “the fear of the LORD.” The phrase “fear of the LORD” occurs 27 times in the Bible. “The fear of the LORD” is something that we need to learn (Psalm 34:11). The fear of the LORD “is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). Wisdom is the ability to solve problems and this characteristic begins with the fear of the LORD. This is true because the fear of the LORD motivates us to pay close attention to His word (Proverbs 1:7, 29; 2:5). Understanding who God is closely linked to the fear of the LORD (Proverbs 9:10). When we approach God it should be in reverence. The Bible states that “the fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13; 16:6). The fear of the LORD leads to longer life (Proverbs 10:27). It leads not only to longer life, but “satisfaction” (Proverbs 19:23). The fear of the LORD leads to “strong confidence” (Proverbs 14:26) and a “fountain of life” (Proverbs 14:27). The fear of the LORD keeps a person out of trouble (Proverbs 15:16). The fear of the LORD keeps us humble (Proverbs 15:33; 22:4). The fear of the LORD is something we should be zealous and excited about (Proverbs 23:17). The fear of the LORD is mentioned only once in the New Testament. The early church walked “in the fear of the LORD and the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31). All of this is a product of faith in the LORD. If you believe in God and take to heart what He has revealed about Himself, the only appropriate and reasonable response is holy awe and reverence of God; the fear of the LORD.

This entire process at Moriah was used by God to reveal the faith of Abrahams and Isaac. It proved the supremacy of their love and trust in God above all other love and trust. This proof was not for God’s sake, but for the sake of Abraham and Isaac. They needed to go through this testing to show that while their love for one another was strong, it should not and could not become a priority over their love and trust of God. That is a great lesson of faith. In fact, true faith always puts God and our love and trust in Him *first, always*.

Then Abraham lifted his eyes and saw a ram God provided to sacrifice and worship with (22:13). Then it says, “And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said *to* this day, “In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.” (22:14). Yahweh-Jireh, “the God who provides.” That name takes on incredible significance when it is realized that Mount Moriah is the place where one day the Temple of the Lord will be erected. .

On the side of the mount was where the rocks were quarried that were used to build the Temple. After years of use the quarry came to be known as “The place of the skull”

because the removal of rocks had left a skull-like impression in the mountain. “The place of the skull,” Golgotha, was the eventual place designated by the Romans to be used for capital executions by way of crucifixion. Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham was instructed by God to bring his son, his only son to sacrifice; this was the place of the skull, Golgotha, Calvary, the place where God actually *did* sacrifice His Son, His only Son Jesus (John 19:17-18). This is the place where the gospel of Jesus Christ was first pictured in the typology of the Abraham’s offering Isaac.

Once Abraham’s and Isaac’s faith had been proven, the Angel of the LORD confirms the covenant of God with Abraham and his descendants (22:15-18). Notice that the LORD mentions the “seed” of Abraham meaning it was not all of the future generations that would all the nations of the earth would be blessed, but through the particular “seed” of Messiah Jesus.

No mention is made of Isaac returning with Abraham (22:19). Abraham had not lost touch with his family during this time as the concluding parenthetical statement comments (22:20-24).

We have seen how lapses of faith are produced by fear when we take our eyes off of the Lord. We have also seen how this leads to shame. We have seen that God is faithful and true to His word. His timing may cause us to wait, but His timing is always perfect to fulfill His plans. And God tests our faith to prove that He must be the priority object of our affections above all. Are you working in the flesh? Do you trust in God and His word? Are you willing to trust God even unto death? Those are thought provoking questions that will stretch our faith. But the end result is blessing.