

Genesis 22

THE MOTHER OF ALL TESTS

Setting the Table

- * From the very first ...
 - ◆ God had promised to make Abram a great nation (Gen 12:1-3)
 - ◆ Over the ensuing years the promise was repeated and enlarged ... more than the stars of the heavens (Gen 15:5)
 - ◆ God also promised a “specific” descendant that would come from Abram & Sarai
 - ◆ Yet over the ensuing years, if anything, his family shrunk
 - Lot abandoned him, Ishmael was sent away ... and no child!

Setting the Table

- ◆ Abraham lived with this promise for almost 30 years ... even undergoing what must have seemed to him a fanciful name change
 - Abram - “the father of many,” became Abraham - “the father of a great multitude”
- ◆ But at long last Isaac is born ... try to imagine the joy and rejoicing this must have caused!
- * NOW ... As we start Chapter 22, at least another 15 years had passed and likely as many as 35** or more assuming Chapters 23-24 follow-on consecutively or shortly after Chapter 22
 - ◆ **Derived from Sarah’s age at her death (127 years) given in Gen 23:1

Setting the Table

- * Life was GOOOOD!
 - ◆ Abraham and Sarah had clearly grown to love and dearly cherish Isaac ... maybe even becoming the “idol of their hearts”
- * Life finally seems to be proceeding as God had promised and reinforced
- * BUT NOW ... Abraham’s peaceful world is shattered
- * What in the world is going on?

Setting the Table

- * First and foremost, Gen 22 is the climax of Abraham's faith journey .. and probably the climax of the Abraham narrative
 - ◆ Hereafter Gen 23-25:18 is "wind-down" and transition to the life of Isaac
- * God sets out to affirm Abraham's loyalties ... and does so in dramatic fashion
- * Abraham faces the supreme test and what must be some very perplexing questions
- * Yet he will yield to God's will, resulting in a supreme victory and covenant reaffirmation

Setting the Table

- * In this chapter we will see two men (Abraham and Isaac) "TRUSTING" their respective "father's/Father's" — "in faith"
- * And — as an interesting side note — this chapter may say more about Isaac than the ensuing narrative of his life in Gen 25-27

Narrative Structure

- * The Test — vv. 1-2
- * The Tension — vv. 3-7
- * The Trust — vv. 8-14
- * The Treaty — vv. 15-19
- * The Transition — vv. 20-24

The Test

- * Thankfully — we are informed at the outset that what follows is a TEST ...
 - ◆ Though, as in other places, Abraham is in the dark!
- * This is the first time we see the word “test” in the Bible
 - ◆ We should be reminded that there is a difference between “testing” and “temptation”
 - ◆ God introduces “tests” .. into the circumstances of our life .. to refine our faith or to discipline our sin
 - ◆ But God never “tempts” us to sin .. because that is inconsistent with His character

The Test

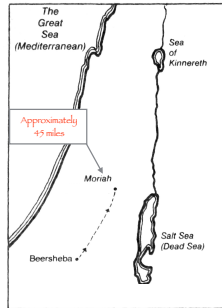
- * God speaks to Abraham and gives him three commands — **What are they?**
 - ◆ Take, Go, Offer
- * **What is the sacrifice God calls for?**
 - ◆ A burnt offering
- * **What is to be sacrificed?**
 - ◆ his son - his **only** son - whom he **loved** - ISAAC

The Test

- * It almost seems like God is being cruel in the manner he identifies the sacrifice
- * **What do you think He is doing?**
 - ◆ Heightening the stakes of the choice He requires of Abraham
- * **What is the choice?**
 - ◆ The focus and priority of Abraham's affections
- * That God would test Abraham is not surprising ... it has been the pattern of Gen 12-21 ... but the magnitude of this test is striking

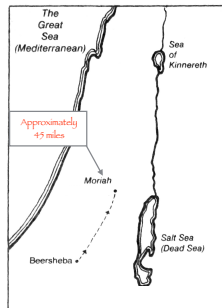
The Test

- * The site for the testing
 - ◆ The land of Moriah
- * The author uses this name proleptically
 - ◆ Means identifying a place, person, or thing before it actually exists
- * It will become a very significant site - **Anyone know where it is?**



The Test

- * The location is Jerusalem
 - ◆ 2 Chron 3:1
- * And likely where David made his offering to end the plague for his unlawful census
 - ◆ 2 Sam 24:16-25 ...
 - ◆ David won't make a cheap sacrifice and Abraham is being called to make a very costly one also



The Tension

- * In vv. 3-7 we see Abraham's response marked by a growing tension ... for me at least
- * What is notable about Abraham's response in v. 3?
 - ◆ His silence .. He doesn't ask any questions or raise any objections
- * In Gen 18 he interceded for a bunch of people he didn't even know yet here no rebuttal for the sacrifice of his son .. his only son .. whom he loves!!

The Tension

- * So what do you think is going on here?
 - ◆ At a minimum we see Abraham's settled faith that God knows what He is doing and asking ...
 - ◆ Thus his only responsibility is obedience
- * But I think it is something more at this point — what comes to mind?
 - ◆ I think his silence indicates that he is trying to reconcile God's request with what God has previously told him
 - ◆ Today we might call it ... discernment

The Tension

- * Let's see if we can reason our way through Abraham's unspoken thoughts
- * What is the tension that God's demand poses?
 - ◆ How can God promise one thing and then command me to do something that contradicts the promise?
 - ◆ In other words, there is a conflict between God's promise ... an heir and descendants ... and God's command to sacrifice the source of the promise!

The Tension

- * Now, presented with this conflict, what are the possible solutions?
 - ◆ Assume that God is confused or has contradicted Himself ... You think Abraham lands on this?
 - ◆ Or, assume that God will somehow reconcile the apparent conflict and ... "Nike"
- * Which is what Abraham does — v. 3 says that he set out early the next day to fulfill God's command

The Tension

- * Yet, I don't think he stopped trying to reconcile God's intentions just yet ...
- * What other thoughts might have come to his mind?
 - ◆ Maybe first he reviewed some history ...
 - ▶ God has told me to do things and made promises to me b4
 - ▶ They've all worked out and He fulfilled a miraculous one with Isaac's birth
 - ▶ God made it clear that Isaac is my seed (Gen 21:12ff)
 - ▶ And that my descendants will come through Isaac

The Tension

- ◆ Then maybe he thought about what he has learned about God ...
 - ▶ Through Hagar's encounter with Him
 - ▶ Through his own encounters with Him
 - ▶ Through God's provision and protection
- ◆ Finally he moves on to some conclusions ...
 - ▶ Starting with — God is trustworthy and does not lie
 - ▶ So he must be planning some kind of miracle ... just like when he revived Sarah's dead womb
 - ▶ And then it dawns on him ...

The Tension

- * The “pepsi ah-ha moment”
 - ◆ If God could resurrect a dead womb and bring a child to life, then maybe he can bring a dead person to life!!
 - ◆ Yeah that’s it ... He’s going to resurrect Isaac after I sacrifice him
 - Keep in mind that everything in the narrative indicates that Abraham intends to go through with the sacrifice
- * Now ... I am speculating, but it’s at least “sanctified speculation” with some textual support ... *Where?*
 - ◆ Turn to Heb 11:17-19 (N.B. — “type” is not a helpful translation!)
- * So whether this is right or wrong, we can conclude that Abraham had confidence in God

The Tension

- * So back to our story line ...
 - ◆ Abraham assembles the the resources and helpers for the trip — he himself cutting the wood ... maybe to buy time and give himself time to think
 - ◆ On the 3rd day Abraham sees the destination in the distance and sets out with Isaac alone on the final leg
- * *What is interesting about v. 5?*
 - ◆ “We shall go ... and we shall return to you!”
 - ◆ This is *emphatic in the Hebrew*, marked by “2” cohortative verb forms ... which indicate strong exhortations or commands

The Tension

- * Who does the “we” refer to?
 - ◆ Abraham and Isaac - Abraham is convinced they'll be back
 - ◆ “Near” textual evidence for my “sanctified speculation”
- * Abraham and Isaac take the materials and set out for the mountain
- * And then Abraham gets the question I'm sure he has been dreading since the trip began ... What is it?
 - ◆ Hey Pop — Where is the lamb? (quoting from the SSV)

The Trust

- * Which leads us to the next part of the narrative in v. 8-14 and Abraham's amazing trust
- * Does Abraham dodge the question with his answer in v. 8?
 - ◆ NO ... He fully “trusted” that God would provide the suitable sacrifice
 - ◆ Though he was not completely forthcoming w/r/t what he was previously told
- * But as it will turn out, Abraham was unknowingly prophetic regarding God's intended solution

The Trust

- * What is notable about Isaac's response?
 - ◆ There isn't one!
- * Indicating what?
 - ◆ Complete trust in his father Abraham
- * Which continues by allowing his father to bind him
- * By this time Isaac knows he is the sacrifice

The Trust

- * What is so amazing about Isaac's character?
 - ◆ He willingly submits to his father's will
 - ◆ He could surely have overpowered his father
 - ◆ Yet seems to have a faith that rivals that of Abraham
- * All is made ready and Abraham proceeds to make the sacrifice in v. 10

The Trust

- * At which point the angel of the LORD stops him and reveals God's true intentions to Abraham
- * What is it that satisfied God?
 - ◆ Abraham has shown that nothing will get in the way of his affection for and obedience to God
 - ◆ Abraham "fears" God ... means awe and reverence
- * Do you think God didn't really know?
 - ◆ Of course not ... but maybe Abraham needed to know and Isaac needed to see it for his spiritual growth

The Trust

- * As Abraham had "predicted" v. 13 shows us that God did indeed provide the sacrifice
- * What else is interesting about v. 13?
 - ◆ Look at the last prepositional phrase ... "in the place of his son"
- * What doctrine does this introduce for the first time?
 - ◆ Substitution ... God provided a substitute for Isaac
- * Abraham memorializes the site naming it יהוה יראָה meaning ... The LORD will provide

The Treaty

- * God speaks again to Abraham in the aftermath of the sacrifice in vv. 15-19
- * What is interesting about v. 16?
 - ◆ God adds a unilateral oath to confirm that Abraham will receive the covenant blessings
 - ◆ In no way was the covenant itself conditioned by obedience, but rather the “degree” of covenant blessings were!
- * How do we see this in the text? (hint ... look at v. 17)

The Treaty

- ◆ Note the two-fold repetition of the word “greatly”
- ◆ Verse 17 is a very specific Hebrew grammatical construction used to indicate exceedingly abundant
 - The verbs are repeated — literally translated v. 17 reads ... “To bless I will bless you and to multiply I will multiply you”
- ◆ A new metaphor to describe the number of Abraham’s descendants ... “sands on the seashore”
- ◆ And his descendants will possess the gates of their enemies ... likely adding the idea of “ruling” in the land

The Treaty

- * But, there is actually something much more significant about the blessing ... **What is it?**
 - ◆ It has Messianic implications ... put v. 17b & v. 18a together
 - Not full-on prophecy, but a foreshadowing
 - ◆ I didn't see this at first, but it is REALLY there in the Hebrew ... I'll explain
- * First we come across this word זרע again
 - ◆ Remember it is a "collective" ... meaning it only has a singular form, but can be translated singular or plural

The Treaty

- * Context of the passage is our guide for deciding between Sg. or Pl.
- * In the first part of v. 17, I think that context suggest a plural translation ... so "seeds or descendants"
 - ◆ The point of emphasis is the "extent" or number of descendants
- * Then in the second part of v. 17 we encounter the word again and have to make a decision
 - ◆ N.B. The punctuation of the EV's suggest a new thought (; or .)
 - ◆ I think this is correct ... so we are moving to a new idea

The Treaty

- * You could carry over the plural from 17a and render the last part of the verse
 - ◆ ... and your **descendants** (seeds) shall possess the gate of **their** enemies — KJ, NKJ, NIV
 - ◆ Or ... and your **descendant** (seed) shall possess the gate of **their** enemies — NASB
- * These translations have a mixed witness
 - ◆ The KJ, NKJ, NIV are plural
 - ◆ The NASB is singular (but hedges in a marginal note)

The Treaty

- * Then, in the ESV ... and your **offspring** (picks up singular idea) shall possess the gate of **his** enemies
 - ◆ The second pronoun is what caught my eye ... **small** change — **BIG** difference; which led me to consult the Hebrew
- * The pronoun translated “theirs” in most English versions and “his” in the ESV is the **3rd masculine singular** in the Hebrew ... so “**his**” is right
- * Pronouns **MUST** agree with their antecedent in gender and number
 - ◆ Enemies is plural ... so we keep looking back for a masc./sing. noun and it is the word for “seed”
 - ◆ The two pronouns (your, his) are masculine singular ... therefor their referent must be masculine singular
 - ◆ So for grammatical accord, we need to choose the singular form for “seed”

The Treaty

- * Which yields ... “and your seed (singular) shall possess the gate of his enemies” as the final clause of v. 17
 - ◆ For the record, the pronoun “your” would have been enough ... but with “his” we have additional confirmation — plus one more thing
- * Finally the form of the verb for “to possess” is 3rd Masc. Sg. (HE)
- * If this is the proper translation ... and I think it is, **Then who and what is this referring to?**
 - ◆ Who = Christ
 - ◆ What = An allusion to His defeating the serpent's seed prophesied in Gen 3:15!

The Treaty

- * I'm further convinced because v. 18a takes us back to Gen 12:3 ... with a more specific attribution
 - ◆ Again, we are faced with the word **אֶתְּ** in v. 18a ...
 - ◆ And again the pronoun “your” is masculine singular
 - ◆ Leading us to translate “seed” singular ...
- * So, we have a reference to Abraham's “singular” seed who will bless the nations of the earth
- * **Who is this individual?**
 - ◆ Right — Christ again

The Treaty

- * PRETTY NIFTY ... EH! (I switched from Hebrew to Canadian 😊)
- * So both the Abraham narrative and this final test converge on this Messianic reference ...
- * Which when you think about it makes perfect sense, given all the events of Christ's sacrifice that chapter 22 foreshadows ...
- * NOTE I said [foreshadows](#), not [typifies](#)

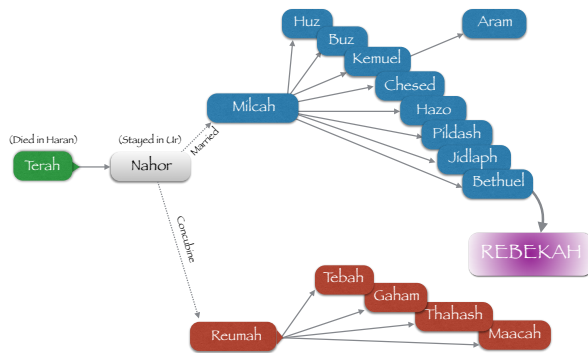
The Treaty

- * While Gen 22 foreshadows many aspects of Christ's sacrifice, there is not a full correspondence so as to justify a type — [for example ...](#)
 - ◆ Substitutionary death = YES; actual death and resurrection = NO
 - ◆ In Isaac's sacrifice, Abraham's love for God is being tested
 - ◆ In Christ's sacrifice, God's love for us is demonstrated
 - ◆ God interceded in Isaac's sacrifice
 - ◆ God poured out His wrath in Christ's sacrifice

The Transition

- * What is the purpose of vv. 20-24?
 - ◆ To introduce us to Rebekah
 - ◆ Who will figure prominently in Gen 24:15ff
- * And to show us how God was going to provide a suitable wife for Isaac ... with an emphasis on her lineage

Nahor's Genealogy



Implications

- 📖 We are most useful to God when our “hands are empty” ... because we have nothing to let go of to fully embrace Him
- 📖 While obedience may result in material blessing, the real blessing is a deeper and closer relationship with God
- 📖 Seeing that Abraham was willing to give up his dearest possession to God reminds us that God gave up his dearest possession FOR us

Implications

- 📖 Our faith is refined in testing — the harder the test the greater the refining
- 📖 God may call you to demonstrate your faith with something costly —
- 📖 Our closest sacrificial parallel is to “DIE TO SELF”
