

The emphasis of this chapter is the testing of Abraham and the faith which Abraham displayed, a truth mentioned twice in the N.T. Testing should not be understood as tempting to sin, which God does not do (James 1:13-14). God allows temptation, but limits it to what is bearable and provides a way to stand and resist (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Temptations and trials are God's tools in our lives to build us up spiritually and to prove our faith. They work perseverance and ultimately spiritual maturity (Romans 5:3; James 1:3). They come so that our faith may be proven genuine (1 Peter 1:6-7). Therefore, the testing of Abraham by God is also part of God's good intentions.

I. *The nature of the test*

1. Remember that we understand more than Abraham did.
2. There is no good reason to think that Abraham understood this command of God as anything other than an order to sacrifice his son. No law yet forbade it. Human sacrifice was not unknown around him. He acted as if he intended to sacrifice Isaac. Hebrews 11:17-19 implies that Abraham expected Isaac to die.
3. We should understand that tested Abraham (1) because of his love for Isaac and (2) because of the promises made to Abraham concerning Isaac.

II. *The response of Abraham to the test*

1. Abraham's actions were those of complete obedience.
2. Abraham words communicated his faith.

Abraham apparently expressed his belief that both he and Isaac would return from offering the sacrifice (22:5). In Hebrews 11:19 this is apparently explained by Abraham's belief that God would resurrect Isaac. Abraham's belief that God would keep His promise that through Isaac offspring would be reckoned led him to conclude that God would also restore him to life.

In a second conversation Isaac asked his father, where was the sacrificial lamb. Abraham responded that God would provide for himself the lamb. The passage in Hebrews rules out the idea that Abraham expected a lamb to be given as a substitute. Abraham was probably expressing his belief that this was God's matter entirely. God had determined that the sacrificial "lamb" was to be Isaac. Abraham believed that God was directing and doing what God himself wanted.

III. *God's intervention and response*

1. God stopped Abraham and confirmed the prohibition given later against human sacrifice.
2. God accepted a ram as a substitute sacrifice though the ram is not explicitly described as a provision by God for that sacrifice. Abraham made the logical conclusion that God wanted a sacrifice – but a ram instead of Isaac – and that God was worthy of worship, having just rescued Isaac. Abraham commemorated the event by calling the place "the LORD will provide" ("sees" or "will see to it"). The Lord at least providentially provided the ram. The LORD saw Abraham's heart and saw to it that His promises would be fulfilled through Isaac.
3. God approved of Abraham's heart attitude, saying that He now knew that he feared God. God "knows" everything already, but now He had experienced Abraham's fear of God. (Biblically to know something or someone often implies a relationship or an experience.) This was for Abraham's benefit and for ours. According to James 2:22-23 it was the fulfilment of the earlier Scripture about Abraham's faith and was the completion of that faith.
4. God confirmed once again His promises to Abraham (22:15-18). A new point is added, taking possession of the cities of their enemies, which perhaps promises victory over the enemies in the promised land. "I swear by myself" made clear that God's purpose would not change. God had nothing higher to swear by than Himself (*cf.* Hebrews 6:13ff).

It could sound as if these promises to Abraham were conditional upon his readiness to offer up Isaac (*cf.* 22:16-17). God blessed because of Abraham's faith and not his works (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4). True faith will demonstrate itself in action when called upon to do so. Abraham did not earn God's blessing, but rather he demonstrated the faith which he had been demonstrating since he left Ur for Canaan.

God wants to bless and do good for His children, a truth guaranteed in the gift of His Son. God tests to prove our faith genuine and to cause us to grow spiritually.

Addendum (22:20-24)

The brief genealogy of Abraham's brother gives attention to Rebekah, who will become Isaac's wife. As shall be seen this has connection in Abraham's thinking with the promises of God.

Conclusion

Perhaps the overarching lesson is God's desire for us to have the same total devotion as Abraham modeled. True faith is more than saying we believe, it is obeying God when we face difficult choices. Commitment to obeying the clear commands of God should be greater than holding on to the things that are precious to us.

Such devotion is only possible through the provision which God made in Jesus Christ. Mt Moriah – "on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided" – became the location of the temple where sacrifices were a continual picture of God's provision for sin. Just across a valley is the hill we call Mt Calvary where the picture of those sacrifices found its ultimate fulfilment in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's provision for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus by his death and resurrection is the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham that in his offspring all the peoples of the world will be blessed. This things happened for our encouragement (Hebrews 6:18-20). We have cling to the hope which He has given in Jesus Christ.