

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-17: "Child Abuse"(Part 6—5th context: Genesis 22)

We have been examining the rich context of God's command for Abraham to sacrifice his son. Having looked at this general background information, we can now zero in on Genesis 22. This text contains several clues to help us better understand what is going on in the powerful, perplexing narrative. Let's recall that Abraham was absolutely certain that God was faithful. Abraham's faith that God would provide reached apodictic certainty. There was not a shadow of doubt that God would somehow fulfill His promise to him, *however* this would be worked out.

We can not separate God's *promises* in Genesis 12 and 17 from God's command in Genesis 22. Abraham had confidence that even *if* the son of promise died, God would somehow raise him from the dead on the spot. In other words, even if it got to the point of Abraham killing Isaac, Isaac would not stay dead. That is why Abraham told his servants before he headed to Mount Moriah with Isaac, "We will worship and then *we* will come back to you (Gen. 22:5, emphasis added). Hebrews confirms this fact by noting that is was

by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type (Heb. 11:17-19).

Abraham knew that God would fulfill His promises. Abraham was not being irrational. His faith is the essence of rationally believing in the promises of God. He knew that God's faithful character meant that God would not break His promises. He knew that it was logically impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). Abraham understood that God was righteous and could not be otherwise, "Shall not the Judge of the earth deal justly" (Gen. 18:25). It is the height of irrationality not believe in the faithfulness of God because of some human viewpoint limitation. God promised to make Abraham into a great nation and to bring his descendants into the Promised Land. That was that! It is settled! The believer who lives with doubt is the one who is irrational. For a believer to say he believes in God and yet doubts Him is nothing short of being pathologically irrational.

There are at least four truths that emerge in Genesis 22. Let's note the first two. First, this is a "test" (verse 1): God does not intend for Isaac to be sacrificed. God is only testing to see if Abraham is going to really believe in the promises of God. "Test" is the piel (intensive) of נִסָּה (*nisah*) which means to test the quality of someone's character through adversity or hardship. All believers are tested to see what they really believe. It is easy to play games with God. It is in the testing that believers often find out what is really important to them. It is unfortunate that American Christianity is in such lousy shape today as reflected in lack of commitment to the

Lord and Bible doctrine. This pathology is ubiquitous in contemporary Christianity. Instead of believers being concerned with the Lord and their spiritual lives, their heart is in their sin natures and kosmos diabolicus as they continue to build their earthly kingdoms all the while fearing death. They are truly upside down Christians. Instead of living for eternity and its realities (as they enjoy their grace given creature comforts), they live for the here-and-now and have little to no desire to leave this earth and little to no anticipation of being with the Lord. For a Christian to live in fear of death when he will go to his Maker is to be nothing short of being pathological. Christians have been freed from being subject to the slavery of fear of death (Heb. 2:15). Perhaps the real reason believers fear death is because they do not want to lose their temporal *skubalon* (cf., Philip. 3:8 where *skubalon/dung* refers to temporal things of life when compared to riches of Christ and spiritual growth). For a Christian to prefer a pile *skubalon* over Christ certainly sounds pathological to me. Furthermore, pastors who give into believers who just want God as a talisman are not doing the believers any favors and are under greater condemnation, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment,” James 3:1.

The second truth to note in Genesis 22 is God’s compassionate understanding. Even the hard command to Abraham to sacrifice his son is cushioned by God’s tenderness: “Take, *please/I beg of you* (נָא *na’*) your only son” (verse 2). A divine command that is accompanied by a plea (*na’*) is rare. In this particle (*na’*) we can see the Lord’s appreciation of what He is asking. God understands the magnitude of this difficult task. This idea in this Hebrew particle of interjection is that God is in effect not so much as commanding Abraham, but pleading with him to pass this test. This is not some blind test. It is almost as if God would not have counted it against Abraham if he did not agree to sacrifice his son *because* he could not see God’s broader purposes. In other words, if Abraham did not understand the issue and hence refused to sacrifice his son, he would not have been blamed for declining God’s *plea*. For Abraham to be willing to sacrifice his son in cold blood simply because God said to do it—apart from understanding the righteousness and grace of God—would have made Abraham a monster instead of a hero. God wants us to understand Him and respond to His love and grace. To obey God *only* because He is God is far different from obeying Him because you understand and love Him. God is not looking for more ignorant jihadists.

Eternally in the grace and omniscience of God,

Pastor Don

Titus 1:2 in the expectation of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,