

CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY FOUR

When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22

God has His way in life's storms and shocking moments. We may be stunned in disbelief, but God is not surprised or at a loss to know what to do. His plan is unfolding perfectly.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever faced a trial that was so surprising, unprecedented, and intense that it took your breath away? You never saw it coming, and you had no idea how God would get you through it—but He did.

Such severe hardships are rare, thankfully. But they are among life's most valuable experiences because they reveal God's saving power in ways we otherwise would not have seen.

One such unexpected test rattled Abraham's world, and *it came from God's own hand!* After decades of trusting God for an heir, Abraham finally realized his dream when Isaac was born. But then, God issued a shocking command to Abraham: "Go and sacrifice [Isaac] as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you" (Genesis 22:2).

God's command set the scene for an epochal, mountaintop event that takes our breath away to this day. Abraham's obedience and God's saving grace inspire us to cling to hope in our most hopeless moments when our faith is put to the ultimate test.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and invite the Lord to minister to you through His Word. You may wish to pray as Pastor Chuck prays before he studies the Word: “I often pray, ‘Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it.’”

Write your prayer here if you wish.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Genesis 22:1–14* slowly. Print the passage from the online Bible and underline what details or statements seem important. Or, use your cursor to highlight the stand-out phrases on the screen. Note below any questions you may have.



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Observation: God's Command, Abraham's Response, God's Provision

Now that you've overviewed the passage, take a closer look at the characters in action.

God's Command—Genesis 22:1–2

Notice how the author revealed God's perspective at the beginning of this story in [Genesis 22:1](#). As you read, remember that you know more reviewing the story than the characters understood in real time. Why do you think the author told us God's intention to test Abraham?

How is Isaac described in [22:2](#)? What did the author emphasize?

God tested Abraham's faith. It wasn't a test between the love of a father and a son. It was a test of faith between a man and his God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Abraham's Response—Genesis 22:3–10

According to [Genesis 22:3](#), how did Abraham respond to God's call? What details indicate Abraham obeyed immediately?

The following six verses illustrate the depth of Abraham's faith that could only be described as *total abandonment* to God. What does the dialogue in [22:4–8](#) tell us about Abraham's confidence that God would intervene in some way (see especially [22:5, 8](#))?

Abraham's obedience was immediate, thorough, and complete as he prepared for the sacrifice. Isaac, however, couldn't hold his tongue any longer; he asked his father, "Where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" ([22:7](#)). Remember, Isaac didn't know what Abraham knew until Abraham placed him on the altar ([22:8–10](#)). In [22:9](#), it appears that Isaac let Abraham bind him with no resistance. What does Isaac's obedience reveal about his relationship with his father?



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When “Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice” (Genesis 22:10), even the angels must have held their breath. Just then, God summoned the “the angel of the Lord” (22:11) to intervene in one of Scripture’s most dramatic moments of divine provision.

How could Abraham do it? Faith. He believed that God was great enough to bring his son back to life and that he and Isaac would walk back down the trail to the servants. “We will worship, and we will return,” Abraham believed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Heaven’s Provision—Genesis 22:11–14

How many times did the angel call Abraham’s name in [Genesis 22:11](#)? How many commands did the angel give to Abraham in [22:12](#)? Do you see other repeated words or phrases in [22:13–14](#)?

What was the outcome of God’s test, according to [22:12](#)? Also, notice the writer used the same description of Isaac in both [22:2](#) and [22:12](#)—“your only son.”

Look at what the author told us at the end of [22:13](#) and Abraham’s response in [22:14](#). By comparing these points to Abraham’s statement in [22:8](#), we cross the bridge from observation to interpretation.



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Interpretation: What Does This Account Mean?

Let's begin by looking up *burnt offering* (Genesis 22:2) in a Bible dictionary. If you're using the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, you'll find a helpful overview by looking under the entry for *sacrifice* and *sacrifice, human*. We also recommend exploring *Constable's Notes* on this passage at netbible.org. How does a better understanding of *burnt offering* illuminate the meaning of God's command to Abraham to let go?

Now let's look up the term *Moriah* (22:2). Did any other significant biblical events happen at Moriah (see *2 Chronicles 3:1*)? Next, look up *Yahweh Yireh* (or *Jehovah Jireh*). Some dictionaries place these terms under the heading, "Names of God." *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* contains the entry for *Jehovah Jireh* under *Lord Will Provide*. Note anything significant you find.

As we interpret the Bible, we look for what is important both historically and theologically. We understand the eternal nature of God in His actions with timebound people through biblical history. We see Abraham's obedience in his response to God's command. What attribute of God does Abraham's dialogue communicate in *Genesis 22:5 and 22:8*?



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In Genesis 22:12, the angel told Abraham, “For now I know that you truly fear God.” In your own words, summarize what it means to fear God as illustrated by Abraham.

The word fear is not a word for fright. It’s a word of respect. God meant more to Abraham than anything on the planet. Abraham passed the test with flying colors.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Let’s Compare the Scriptures

Did you know the New Testament references this event? It’s found in *Hebrews 11:17–19*. Take a moment to read this passage and make a few notes on how it contributes to our understanding of Genesis 22:1–14.

Abraham released his precious son into the hands of God knowing that somehow God would provide for both of them. That’s faith! How about you? Are you as confident as Abraham that God will provide for you?



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Application: What Should I Let Go Of?

Every parent who has choked back tears on a child's first day of school understands releasing. Every retiree who tapes the last box, removes the last picture, and says the last goodbye understands releasing. Any who have felt money slip through their fingers, any who have waved at a disappearing moving van, any who have taken a heart-wrenching walk past a coffin understand releasing too.

Maybe you identify with some of these situations. In the space provided, describe a time when you had to release something or someone you dearly loved. Or perhaps you're still holding on and can't bring yourself to release your "Isaac" into the hands of God. What are the circumstances?

Two principles sum up our passage:

- *God never puts us through a test without a purpose.* Usually, the purpose is designed to make us release what we're clutching.
- *When we trust God, even when we can't understand the reason, He provides solutions that quickly loosen our grip.* The rewards of holding everything loosely will surpass anything we could have ever imagined.

As painful as it is to let go of God's good gifts, the process of releasing opens our hands to receive the greatest reward—the Giver Himself. If you're ready to entrust your "Isaac" to God, use the following space to express your heart to the Lord.



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As we internalize this biblical account, let's anchor ourselves in the faithfulness of God who is our provider. Centuries after Abraham released his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, our heavenly Father released His Son, Jesus Christ, on Mount Calvary. Just as Isaac submitted himself to his father, so Jesus surrendered Himself to the altar of the cross. Only no lamb took Jesus' place, for Jesus was the Lamb! His sacrifice atoned for our sins, ushered us into an eternal relationship with our heavenly Father, and became the most epochal of all events history has every recorded.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for preserving this wonderful account of Your servant's faith and Your faithfulness. At this moment, I confess my temptation to cling too tightly to people and things because I believe the lie that life is better when I'm in control. Please increase my faith in You so I may let go of what needs to be released. Most of all, I thank You, Yahweh Yireh, for providing Your Son Jesus Christ as my sacrificial substitute so I may have You as my portion forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.

