

# Because Abraham Obeyed?

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## Introduction

- A. I have said that, while we are making our way (slowly, of course) through Luke’s gospel, I will not hesitate to step out of the series from time to time as I sense God’s leading—whether because there is a particular issue I feel should be addressed for us as a church, or perhaps something profound opened up to me in the Scriptures and I simply want to share it with you.
  - 1. For this morning, it was quite similar to a message I gave a while back entitled Blessings from the Bridegroom from [Gen 12](#), where, if you recall, as I was reading through the Scriptures for my devotions, I felt a message just unfolded before my eyes. Well, now I’ve come to [Gen 26](#) in my devotions and the same thing occurred and I wanted to bring it to you for (what I hope will be) your encouragement.
- B. So with that let’s read the text: [Gen 26:1-5](#). Abraham has recently died and his miracle son Isaac now has taken up the mantle as patriarch for the budding people of God.

## The Text

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” (Gen 26:1–5)

- A. I plan to organize my reflections for us this morning under three headings: (1) Pressing Questions; (2) Surprising Connections; and (3) Practical Implications.

## (1) Pressing Questions

- A. As I was reading this text one morning a couple of weeks ago there was one piece here in particular that captured my attention, and, if I’m honest, at first troubled me.
  - 1. It comes at us most clearly there in [v. 5](#) but it’s this idea that Isaac is receiving God’s blessing because of Abraham’s obedience. Look at this again there beginning in [v. 3](#): “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen 26:3-5).

- B. Have you ever come to texts in Scripture and found yourself confused as to how you should interpret them? Well, when I came to this I started wonder: How does this fit within the Christian understanding of blessing and, even, salvation from God? I thought we get right with God on the basis of Christ's obedience. So what's all this about Abraham?
1. Am I somehow saved by Abraham's works?
  2. Do I, as seems to be implied of Abraham here, need to somehow garner God's blessing by way of my own works?
  3. Or perhaps, like Isaac, I too can be saved by the faith and obedience of one of my ancestors, not just Abraham, but Grandma Sally—like because Grandma Sally was a God-fearing lady, I'm now on God's good side too?
    - a. How are we to make sense of these things? And how, if it all, do they fit within the Christian understanding of salvation?
- C. Of course, running underneath this constellation of questions really are two of the most important questions of all.
1. The first is simply: How do I receive blessing from God? How do I get into His good favor? Or to put it most pointedly: How do I get saved?
  2. And the second question is whether the Scriptures really have only one unified answer to this question or if there are, in fact, all sorts of responses given along the way. Do the Scriptures really come to a mind on the matter? Or is it a bit of a mess that we try to make cleaner in our systematic presentations?
- D. Well, for this, let me begin to show you what I'm calling here Surprising Connections, and these connections will really take us on a journey through the Scriptures towards Christ.

## (2) Surprising Connections

### From Gen 22 to Gen 26

- A. We begin our journey first by making the connection from our text in [Gen 26](#) back to [Gen 22](#). In our text God references an oath that He swore to Abraham in light of Abraham's obedience. This is a clear reference to that oath which He swore back in [Gen 22:16-18](#).
1. But I wonder if you remember the context? What was the obedience of Abraham here that moved God to make such an oath?
    - a. Well, God references it in the very oath itself: “<sup>16</sup> By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,<sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,<sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” ([Gen 22:16–18](#)).

- B. As you may now have guessed, the context for God's oath here is that well-known, often misunderstood, biblical story where Abraham is asked to offer up his son Isaac to God in faith.
1. Now, certainly, we could take this story on its own terms and be inspired by Abraham's life of trust and abandon to God.
  2. Perhaps we also might be a bit surprised or scandalized by a God who would ask his child to ever do such a thing. Have you struggled with this? I thought God hates child sacrifice. He condemns the idea of sacrificing children to Molech and things. And here He is calling for Abraham to do something similar? Would God ask me to do such a thing? Is that ever appropriate to expect from Him let alone to obey?
- C. And here is the start of our trouble when it comes to biblical interpretation. When we read a text only in view of its isolated part without view to the whole we are prone to misunderstand and misapply. You see there is more that God is getting at here, more that He is doing.
1. When we isolate it and put it under the microscope, and see it only in that light, we get confused and freak out a bit.
  2. But when we let the camera pan out and we see the whole of the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation, something else comes into view, and we see this individual instance in different, a brighter, light. We come to realize that what God is doing here with Abraham is, in fact, picturing and preparing us for what He will do with His own Son Jesus for our sake.
- D. Now, before we get into [Gen 22](#), for those of you new to the Bible, let me give a brief sense of the background.
1. In the midst of a fallen and depraved world, God had set His affections on a man named Abraham and had promised to give a child to him, though at the time Abraham was old and his wife was barren.
  2. And God said that through Abraham's family all the families of the earth would be blessed.
  3. Well, through some ups and downs, God ultimately makes good on His promise and Isaac is born. And Isaac quickly, as we can understand, becomes the apple of his father's eye.
  4. But then, when we get to [Gen 22](#), we read of God's testing Abraham by asking him to offer up his son.
- E. Now let me bring out some details in this story that, I think, prepare us to see in this the story of Christ and the cross. Rather than read the whole of [Gen 22](#) up front, I'll just make my comments verse by verse as we go.
1. For one thing, the story begins with a view to the unrestrained surrender of Abraham to the will of the Father. ["After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am'" \(Gen 22:1\).](#)
    - a. When I read this, my mind immediately flitted to that scene near the end of Jesus' life as He was contemplating the cross He would soon have to bear: [" <sup>27</sup> Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. <sup>28a</sup> Father, glorify your name" \(John 12:27–28a\).](#) There's an unrestrained surrender to the will of God.

2. Then in [Gen 22:2](#), I think we are not allowed to miss the connections: “He said, ‘Take 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.’”
  - a. Here immediately we recall what God Himself would declare over Jesus at His baptism: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” ([Luke 3:22](#)). And as John would tell us in one of the most well-known verses in all the Bible: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” ([John 3:16](#)). Jesus is a beloved only son offered up for the sins of the world.
3. Then in [Gen 22:3](#), we read that Abraham “saddled his donkey” and journeyed towards the destination appointed by the Lord.
  - a. Well, this destination as I shall soon show you corresponds with what later becomes Mount Zion, and so we might not be far off here in seeing an allusion to that prophecy in [Zech 9:9](#), where speaking of Jesus, the text reads: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey . . .”
4. Then in [Gen 22:4](#), we read that “On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.”
  - a. Commentators suggest that it is perhaps this third day mentioned here that sets us up to see the third day as especially significant going forward. The most significant third day of all, of course, is the third day upon which our Lord rose from the dead ([Matt 16:21](#); [1 Cor 15:4](#)).
5. Then in [Gen 22:5](#), quite intriguingly, Abraham says to the young men who have journeyed with him and Isaac to this point: “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”
  - a. Did you catch that? “I and the boy will go . . . and I and the boy will come again to you.” Was Abraham just trying to cover up the fact that he was going to be killing his son? Was he lying through his teeth because he knew these guys would try to stop him if he told them what he was really up to?
    - i. Well, the author of Hebrews tells us that something else is going on here. It seems Abraham believed that, even if God should have him go through with the offering of his only beloved son, he should receive him back by way of the resurrection from the dead. God would make good on his promise. His son would not die but live. “<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,<sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”<sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” ([Heb 11:17–19](#)). We’re talking about death and resurrection now, of an

only beloved son. The foreshadows of Jesus here are palpable and undeniable. But still we go on.

6. Then in [Gen 22:6](#), we read: “[And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together](#)” ([Gen 22:6](#)).
    - a. If this is not a moving visual of God the Father and God the Son traveling towards Calvary together I don’t know what is. Immediately we think of [John 19:17](#), where we read that Jesus “[went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called . . . Golgotha](#)” (cf. [John 16:32](#)).
  7. And then in [Gen 22:7](#), Isaac speaks up for the first time in the narrative: “[My father! . . . Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?](#)” To which Abraham responds in v. 8: “[“God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ So they went both of them together.”](#)
    - a. With this we are led to think of God’s provision of a lamb, and perhaps our mind immediately flits to that stirring pronouncement from John the Baptist concerning Jesus: “[Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!](#)” ([John 1:29](#)). God indeed would provide—did provide—this lamb, only not in Abraham’s only beloved son, but in His own.
  8. In [Gen 22:9-13](#), we reach the climax of this whole scene. Abraham has now readied the altar and tied his son firmly to it. The knife, we are told, is raised above Isaac in preparation for his slaughter, when suddenly from the heavens a voice cuts through the tension: “<sup>11b</sup> [“Abraham, Abraham!” . . . <sup>12</sup> Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”](#)<sup>13</sup> [And \[at that very moment\] Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son”](#) ([Gen 22:11b–13](#)).
    - a. It is here, as we read of a ram being offered up “[instead of his son](#)” (v. 13), that commentators see the principle of substitutionary atonement as being first clearly introduced in the Scriptures. This one will die in place of another.
  9. Then, finally, in [Gen 22:14](#), we read: “[So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The Lord will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.’”](#)
    - a. And it is actually with this that we are led to a whole new set of surprising connections of which I can now only briefly show you. Abraham’s naming of this place here influences future generations in Israel as it seems they come to see this mount in some way as the place where God will provide in some fuller way the sacrifice necessary for atonement of sin.
- F. But what else, if anything do we know about this mount? Where, in fact, are we? Do the Scriptures tell us?

1. I wonder if you noticed. Back in [Gen 22:2](#) the place is named: “He said, ‘Take 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.’” A mountain in Moriah. God has a specific place, a particular location, in mind.

## From Gen 22 to 2 Chron 3

A. Well, the land of Moriah is only mentioned in one other place in all the Bible: [2 Chron 3:1](#), and what we come to find out is that it is upon a mountain in this very region that the temple itself would later be built: “Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.”

1. The temple, the place where God would provide substitutionary sacrifices day after day for the forgiveness and atonement of the sins of His people, is, according to the Scriptures, it seems, the very same place God provided a substitute for Isaac about a thousand years earlier.

## From 2 Chron 3 to 1 Chron 21

A. But there is more. There is another detail given there in [2 Chron 3:1](#) that is worth a quick mention. If you noticed, the Chronicler doesn’t point to this place in connection to Abraham, though he doesn’t deny it. Instead, he points to it in connection to David: “Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.” What’s that?

1. Well, this is now a reference back to [1 Chron 21](#). I don’t have time to read it, but there are actually striking parallels to the story of Abraham and Isaac. The short of it is this:
  - a. David, as king of Israel, has decided against better judgment to take a census of his people, in pride, so he can see just how big his military might really is.
  - b. It’s an act of defiance of independence from YHWH. And YHWH brings judgment upon the people of Israel because of it.
  - c. The vision that God gives David in the midst of this judgment is that of an angel of the Lord holding a sword out over the people there in Jerusalem.
  - d. We are told that “God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, the LORD saw, and he relented from the calamity. And he said to the angel who was working destruction, ‘It is enough; now stay your hand.’ And the angel of the LORD was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite” ([1 Chron 21:15](#)).
  - e. And God says to David: “There, build an altar and offer burnt offerings.” And as David does so, the angel of the Lord puts his sword back into its sheath.
- B. Just as with Abraham and Isaac—a blade is held up over another, but in mercy it is called off at the last moment, the victim is spared, a substitute is provided. And it’s happening in the exact same location—on mount Moriah.

1. And God says where a substitute was provided in mercy for Abraham and Isaac, and later David and Israel, well, that's where let's build the temple, where I'll keep providing year after year . . . until the One to whom all of this has been pointing arrives.

## From 1 Chron 21 to Christ and the Cross!

- A. This is why Jesus would roll on the scene, walk by the temple, and say things like: [“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” \(John 2:19\)](#). John tells us what He means by this: [“He was speaking about the temple of his body” \(v. 21\)](#).
  1. In other words: “I am the One to whom this whole string of connections has been pointing. I am the Lamb of God’s provision. I am the One who will assuage the angel of God’s wrath and convince him to once and for all sheath his sword. I am the temple of God and all that it stood for.”
    - a. The blade that, in mercy, was called off of Isaac and called off Israel—and called off of you and I, brothers and sisters—will ultimately be thrust down in judgment upon Him . . . at the cross! [“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” \(Matt 27:46\)](#).
      - a. And now, by way of His perfect and vicarious obedience—in both His life and His death—we enjoy God’s rich and eternal blessing.
- B. So, returning to our initial considerations back in [Gen 26](#), one commentator puts it well: [“The obedience of Christ accomplished more than Abraham’s could ever have done; by his passion and triumph he has won the right and power to beat back the hostile cosmic forces and ensure for his people participation in his victory” \(TNTC\)](#).
  1. The point back in [Gen 26](#), therefore, is not ultimately concerning Abraham’s obedience but Christ’s! The blessing that Isaac receives there because of Abraham’s obedience points to the deeper and unfolding biblical reality that you and I can now be blessed freely by way not of Abraham’s obedience, not of our grandma’s obedience, not even of our own obedience, but of Christ’s obedience alone!
    - a. As Paul states emphatically in [Rom 5:19](#): [“\[B\]y the one man’s \[Jesus’\] obedience the many \[you and I\] will be made righteous.”](#) Right standing, salvation, blessing, comes to us because of Him!

## (3) Practical Implications

- A. Now, having spent so much time developing these things biblically. Let me close by asking: So what does all of this mean for us? I’ll give two practical implications, though implications abound!

### Implication #1: We Can Trust Our Bibles

- A. One of my opening questions had to do with whether Scripture could be trusted to speak coherently, whether it really has one underlying answer to the question: How do we get saved? And I hope you can see plainly at the end of all this, the answer is a resounding: Yes!

1. When you open your Bible, you are not getting a bunch of disparate strands of thought, or moral teaching, or whatever. You are getting one unified story that is presenting us with one unified answer to the human dilemma . . . and His name is Jesus Christ!
- B. God has not stuttered. He is not stumbling around trying one thing and then the next. He is not speaking out both sides of His mouth and hoping that we don't notice. His answer has always been the same.
1. Before Christ, He is preparing for and foreshadowing it;
  2. with the arrival of Christ, He is unveiling and accomplishing it;
  3. and after the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of His Spirit, He is now He is busy applying it and expanding His kingdom of grace.
    - a. Different stages, yes. But one solution. And it has always been so!
- C. When one comes to see the unity of the Scriptures in this way, it really proves to be a strong apologetic for its inspiration.
1. When trying to make a case for the Bible as the Word of God, often we point to things like manuscript evidence; extrabiblical support from ancient historians, archeological corroborations, fulfilled prophecies; and things like this.
  2. But one of the things that has most strengthened my faith that the Bible really is the very word of God as it claims is the profound unity of it all. The fact that somewhere around 40 different authors, from all manner of different backgrounds—different vocations, different ethnicities, different socioeconomic statuses, different religious upbringings—writing in three different languages, on three different continents, using many different literary styles, responding to many different historical circumstances, through the course of over 1400 years, could write something that, when taken on the whole, could comprise such a profound unity . . . it's astounding!
    - a. Think of it. We can't even get two politicians in one country at one point in time to agree on one issue. So then what are we to make of the Bible?
      - a. It gives indication, I tell you, that, though these words have come us from many hearts and minds, as it were, they have ultimately come to us from one Heart and one Mind above them all: namely, God's.
- D. From Genesis to Revelation . . . Christ, the cross, the gospel of grace holds all the Scriptures together. As Jesus Himself has said: ["You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me"](#) (John 5:39).

## Implication #2: We Can Rest in Jesus

- A. This refers back now to my other opening question regarding how we get God's blessing, how we get salvation in the first place. I know we already touched on this, but let's let it settle in now.

1. It is not by Abraham's works, by your grandma's works, or even by your own works, it's by Christ's. And His works are finished, they are complete, they are perfect for you. My sin He took to the cross, paid in full. His perfect righteousness credited to my account.
  - a. I am telling you, if we really get what this means for us, then whatever guilt or shame or anxiety or depression may have been weighing us down when we walked in here this morning, it would, right about now, be starting to just lift.
  
- B. In the early years of Christian life I really struggled with assurance. I would just be plagued for months at a time that one wrong move and God would forsake me. On my good days I felt like God was smiling. On my bad days I felt like it was all over. Everything was up and down and fraught with fear and condemnation.
  1. At the time someone directed me to a book by the guy who's best known for writing Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan. He wrote a book entitled *Grace Abounding* where he records his own struggle with issue of assurance—just feeling like he was moving in and out of salvation, like he couldn't get stable, like he couldn't get peace with God.
  
- C. But then somewhere in the middle of the book, I'll never forget, light just breaks in for him, and it's beautiful. Here's what he writes: "[O]ne day as I was passing into the field, with some dashes on my conscience, fearing yet that all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, 'Your righteousness is in heaven.' I thought I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand. There was my righteousness. Wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me that I lacked His righteousness, for that was ever before Him. Moreover, I saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, 'the same yesterday, and today, and forever' (Heb 13:8). Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away . . . [and] I went home rejoicing for the grace and love of God" (p. 112).
  1. And he later grounded this revelation to him from God in [1 Cor 1:30](#) in particular, where Paul writes: "[And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.](#)"
  
- D. So I'll leave you with a call to come and, by faith, receive all that Christ is for you. Trust God's unified revelation concerning this glorious salvation.