

• *The high point and pinnacle of Abraham's story*

• *Covenant making process still incomplete – no oath had been given*

• *God comes to Abraham and asks Abraham to sacrifice his own son*

1. Before we experience God's oath and 'enter into rest' we are likely to face a severe test of our obedience

• *Grace and mercy*

• *God wants to bring us to high levels of Godliness before He gives us life's greatest blessings*

• *We must not be surprised when we are severely tested*

In Genesis chapter 22 we come to the high-point and pinnacle of the entire story of Abraham. It is at this point that the covenant which began in Genesis 15 is at last fulfilled. The promises had been first given in Genesis 12:1–3, and had been twice renewed before there was any mention of a covenant ^{□1}. Then God started covenant-procedures at the heart of which were the same promises ^{□2} but it is clear that the final oath had not been given. The covenant had yet to be 'established' ^{□3}. The promise was still on offer ^{□4}. The sign of circumcision was added in Genesis 17:9–14, and the promises were confirmed ^{□5}. Abraham continued to receive encouraging and increasingly detailed predictions ^{□6}. Then at long last Isaac was born. However, even after Isaac's birth there was no oath confirming with total certainty that the covenant was going forward. Abraham was still living on the promises of God but no oath had been given. Now some time after the weaning of Isaac (22:1 lets us know that some years had gone by) there comes the greatest test of Abraham's life, and when it is finished Abraham receives the oath and the promise is finally secure. God comes to Abraham and asks Abraham to sacrifice his own son.

1. **Before we experience God's oath and 'enter into rest' we are likely to face a severe test of our obedience.** The time is a few years after the weaning ^{□1}; we may guess that Isaac is at least ten years old, old enough to ask intelligent questions ^{□2}. Then God 'tests' Abraham.

God saves us by sheer grace. Abraham believed God and by faith – and faith only – he was justified, totally covered with a righteousness that was not his own.

God continues to deal with us in sheer grace. He restores us (as Abraham experienced God's restorations after his mistakes). In sheer grace He takes our worst blunders (such as Abraham's going to Hagar) and overrules them for good.

Yet at the same time God asks us willingly and voluntarily to 'walk before Him' and get every area of our life right ^{□1}. He still deals with us in great mercy sometimes giving us our greatest blessings after our worst mistakes (as Genesis 21 follows 20:8–18).

However all along the way God is wanting us to get to a high level of obedience. If a person cleanses himself from every sin he gets to be a utensil that God will greatly use. He becomes '*sanctified, useful to the Master, fit for every good work*' ^{□1}. God does much for us even without our sanctification, but God likes us to get to high levels of godliness before He gives us life's greatest blessings. Then His 'oath of mercy' might come to us. Although we have got to where we are by the continuing grace of God, and even God's rewards are a matter of grace, yet it is also true that God likes to reward us. He likes to lead us into radical, extreme, daring, obedience.

So we must not be surprised if before we experience God's oath and 'enter into rest' we discover that we are being severely tested.

□1 12:7; 13:14–17
 □2 15:5, 7, 13–21
 □3 17:2
 □4 17:4–8
 □5 17:15–16
 □6 18:10, 14

□1 22:1 a
 □2 see 22:7

□1 see 17:1–2

□1 see 2 Timothy 2:21

2. God's test may make no sense to us

• *God wants to see what is in our hearts*

• *God's commands are appropriate to the age in which we are living*

3. God's test may well seem to involve the sacrifice of everything we have lived for

• *Obedience supremely tested – then comes the greatest blessing*

2. **God's test may make no sense to us.** It seemed weird and extreme for God to ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. If anyone came to us today and said 'God has told me to sacrifice my son', we would say 'That wasn't God; that was the devil', and we would be right! It is true that – in the end – God was not asking for human sacrifice. God stopped the procedure before it came to its end. There is no tolerance of human sacrifice anywhere in the Bible.

But God wants to see what we are really like, how obedient we are willing to be. God seeks to discover what is in our hearts and whether we really will keep His specific command to us or not (see something similar in Exodus 16:4, and another example under the Mosaic law in Deuteronomy 8:2). People who today think that God is asking them to do something criminal would rightly be taken as in need of psychiatric help. God's commands are appropriate to the age in which we live, and we no longer live in the days of Abraham when child-sacrifice was thought to be great devotion to God! Still, God's test might well be extremely painful and it might well make no sense to us.

3. **God's test may well seem to involve the sacrifice of everything we have lived for.** It was amazing that God should demand the sacrifice of young Isaac. For more than thirty years God had been promising 'a seed' to Abraham. It had been a stormy pathway. Sometimes Abraham was greatly daring, sometimes greatly doubting. Sometimes it was great faith, sometimes great failure. And yet Abraham had come through it all and at last Isaac had been born. But now God is asking Abraham to throw it all away! Everything for which he has lived for decades! Was the miraculous birth of Isaac to the elderly Sarah all for nothing? If Abraham loses Isaac it is not likely that Sarah will have another child! She was ninety-nine before; now she is one hundred and nine or more! How can God ask Abraham throw away what he has been waiting for all his life? Sometimes the supreme test of our faith will be a matter of putting obedience to God above something we have lived for all of our lives. Sometimes it will be to bring a phase of ministry to an end that we have been thoroughly enjoying for years and years. Sometimes it will involve doing something that might to everyone else seem foolish and ridiculous.

But before the greatest blessing of our life comes, there is likely to be a test of our obedience.

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
<p><i>These specially reformatted chapters "Slices of Bread" produced by Sovereign World Trust are available in three categories as set out below</i></p>		
<p>Slices for the Nations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For pastors, libraries and colleges in those parts of the world where resources are scarce and unaffordable In the fullness of time the whole series will be made available free of charge Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or available to download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<p>Slices for Sponsors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those in more prosperous circumstances who can afford to contribute to the development of this material and its distribution with a small monthly donation The same material as Slices for the Nations Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or by download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<p>Slices for Everyone / Slice of the Week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those who wish to sample the material or dip into it from time to time, a proportion of the PTTB series is available free of charge Slices for Everyone (as a download) or Slice of the Week (attached to a weekly email) The remainder of the PTTB material is available to Sponsors and those eligible to receive Slices for the Nations
<p>To subscribe please contact: slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk stating which category fits your situation. Further details are at www.slices.org.uk Details of the availability of <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> books and how they may be purchased can be found on www.ibtr.org.uk</p>		