

**Abraham's obedience to God was not forced obedience but voluntary obedience.**

**Abraham's obedience to God was not forced obedience but voluntary obedience.** Sometimes in the Christian life there can be forced obedience. Paul says that he '*suffered the loss of all things*' <sup>☐1</sup>. He lost everything, but it was not that he lost it voluntarily. He **suffered** the loss of all things; it was imposed upon him. Similarly the loss of Job (in Job chapters 1 and 2) was not a matter of his surrendering his family, his wealth, his home and eventually his health. These things were **forcibly** taken from him.

<sup>☐1</sup> Philippians 3:8

It is a different matter when we do the sacrificing ourselves. Paul in Philippians 3 as well as a past tense ('*I suffered the loss...*') could also use a present tense: '*I am counting all things to be rubbish ... in order that I may gain Christ*' <sup>☐1</sup>. In Philippians 2:7 we read that Jesus humbled Himself. It was not simply that the Father humbled Him. He humbled Himself.

<sup>☐1</sup> Philippians 3:8

In the Christian life we are sometimes willing that God should take something from us. 'Lord, if this is not your will take it from me...', we might pray. But the event in Genesis 22 was not simply a matter of Abraham's accepting what God might do to him ('*The Lord has taken away ... Blessed be the name of the Lord*'). He was willing himself to do the 'taking away'! God led him into this. In a sense he might say 'I had no choice', yet he did have a choice. This obedience of Abraham was voluntary obedience, not forced obedience. He had to walk the journey to Moriah, he had to climb the hill, he had to tie his own son upon the altar, he had to take up the knife himself. Jesus said '*If any person is willing to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross...*'. Jesus wants **willing** obedience. He can force things upon us – and sometimes He does that. But when we willingly deny ourselves and when we **ourselves** take up something that is a painful sacrifice for us, we have reached a higher level of obedience. Of course I am referring to something that God Himself leads us into. We must not make foolish and dramatic sacrifices simply to prove how obedient we are. We have to be led into these things by God Himself, and we have to be sure of His will.

• *Jesus wants willing obedience – a higher level of obedience than forced obedience*

**Abraham's being tested by God came when he was ready**

**Abraham's being tested by God came when he was ready.** I wonder whether Abraham could have passed this test at an earlier stage in his relationship to God. I doubt it. At least thirty-five years have gone by since Abraham left Haran. There was a twenty-four year time-gap between Genesis 12:4 and 17:1, and then another year before Isaac was born. Now Isaac is perhaps about ten years old or more. Abraham has been believing God's promises for at least 35 years.

We may say 'If God asked something like sacrificing my own son, I could not do it'. Maybe in his earlier years Abraham would have said the same thing. God did not test Abraham in this way until he knew that Abraham was ready for it. We may be able to think of things which we could not 'give up' for God, but we do not have to be theoretical about this. God's tests will come when we are ready. In the event His help will be there, and we may find that when the time comes God's grace is greater than anything we imagined. We may discover that we can pass God's tests after all.

• *God's grace is greater than anything we can imagine*

**When Abraham reached this level of obedience he was rewarded by God's covenant-oath.**

• Abraham passes a supreme test

• The climax of the covenant-relationship is reached

• From this point on it was certain that Jesus would be the seed of Abraham.

When Abraham reached this level of obedience he was rewarded by God's covenant-oath. The high point of the covenant was reached. Something went forward in Abraham's relationship with God at this point. God said 'Now I know...', 'At this time I know...'. The language is human language. God knows everything! But it is a way of expressing the fact that a forward step has been taken in the relationship between God and Abraham. He has reached a high point of obedience; he has passed a supreme test.

At this point God takes an oath. What does it mean for God to take an oath? The phrase 'After these things' in Genesis 22:1 lets us know that a very distinct event is happening in the life of Abraham. It is what James called being 'justified by works'. 'Was not Abraham justified by works when he offered up Isaac?' <sup>□1</sup>. And when was that? Thirty-five years after he had been 'justified by faith'! This is not Abraham's becoming 'saved'; it is his reaching a high point in his relationship with God where God Himself lets Abraham know that He is pleased with him. 'At this time I know...', says God <sup>□2</sup>. There was a specific occasion when something new happened in Abraham's life that had never happened before. It was his experience of the oath of God.

The best way to understand the oath of God is to ask the questions 'Can God change His mind? Can He withdraw a promise? Can He withdraw a threat?' The answer is that God is often represented as 'changing His mind'. Maybe it is only a way of talking, but if so it is a 'way of talking' that we are allowed to use. In Genesis 22:16 Abraham definitively receives the promise. At this point the climax of the covenant-relationship is reached. The promise is received in a way that cannot be lost. Before this point Abraham could have forfeited the promise (as Saul forfeited kingship). After God's oath the promise cannot be lost (just as the promise to David could not be abolished after 2 Samuel 7). Abraham 'entered into rest'. The promise had been 'obtained' <sup>□1</sup>. From this point on it was certain that Jesus would be the seed of Abraham.

□1 James 2:21

□2 22:12

□1 Hebrews 6:12

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