

St Paul's June 2026

Gen 22:1-14. Matt 10:40-end

Abraham and Isaac

The story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac is one of the major passages in the Bible.

It was picked up by a Danish philosopher / theologian, **Kierkegaard**, who some see as the founder of modern philosophy. He had written about two stages of human, the aesthetic about enjoying natural pleasures, and then a second higher level, the ethical, where one tries to live a good life, doing what's good instead of evil.

Then in 'FEAR AND TREMBLING' he goes into the third and highest level, which is the religious. And the passage he looks at in that book is this story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son.

This is **not an ethical thing**. It is killing someone, which is not good but the the very worst of things, it is murder, and it was to be his son. He makes the point that the religious, or faith, in this passage seems to be at odds with the ethical. To follow God, he is willing to even do even this. He also makes the point in the book that this passage shows that faith may be **contrary to the rational**. God had promised Abraham that he would be the faith of many nations through Isaac, and here he is now being told to kill Isaac. There is a leap beyond the ethical and the rational into the realm of God.

I don't think this quite right though, that we need to suspend rationality for faith, and certainly not go beyond ethics. Jesus said not 1 jot or tittle would pass from the law till all was accomplished. And on rationality it says in Hebrews 11: *"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, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."* He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." He reasoned that somehow God would make a way. Faith is not irrational. We might not understand it all, but we don't suspend our thinking for our faith.

But I don't think Kierkegaard addresses a more important point in the passage. That is that we have here a man, Abraham, who is willing to give everything for God. He was **willing to sacrifice even his own son** in obedience to God. There is nothing bigger. Like every father, he would have loved his son, Isaac, more than anything else. But he was willing even to give him up for God. His **'YES' to God** was total. God was number 1 above everything.

God called him to follow him, to **leave his land** and to trust in him. He called him into **covenant with himself**. And when **God tested him**, he said YES to God all the way. So he is the Father of Faith.

This is really significant. There are the **2 parties, God and man**, here we have a man who says 'yes' to God all the way. For lasting true relationship, you must have both parties saying YES to each other, and here we have the YES of man to God.

Of course **God stops the killing**. When Isaac asked his dad where the sacrifice was, Abraham had said: *"God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."* Then it says, *"So they went both of them together."* I have always loved that line; both of them going on together, trusting in God.

And then the passage is a **prophecy** of what God was willing to give, and did give, for humanity, his Son. **God's resounding YES** to humanity was his giving his Son, Jesus. "God will provide the sacrifice", Abraham said, and God did provide the sacrifice that was necessary for us, his own son that he loved and loves above all.

We are in covenant with God; Abraham was willing to give all for God, and God did give all for man. Let us live in that relationship with God.

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