# Genesis - Commentaries by R. Beacon

Bible Treasury: Volume N5, Genesis 22:1-14, Brief Words on

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The well-known saying of the famous Bishop of Hippo, that in the O. T. the New is latent, while in the N. T. the Old is patent, has no more striking justification than in this familiar chapter, which has an interest far beyond what attaches to the personal exercises of Abraham. Not but what the trial of the patriarch's faith is both most important in its place and most valuable for our instruction. But, as every believer knows, we have here a divinely drawn picture of the Atonement. What does it matter that the incident took place some two thousand years before Christ, but that it enhances the overwhelming proof that the writer was inspired by the Spirit of God?

But before attempting to look at the story in its typical aspect, let us try to note a few points in the narrative itself. God tried Abraham, as He ever does those who are truly sons (Heb. 12:8). And mark that God graciously tested His servant in such a way as to make prominent the very characteristic with which he was best equipped. He was very strong in faith; and God puts him to a supreme test. So I suppose that if any be marked by love, or grace, or wisdom, etc., the Lord will sometimes give such the opportunity of sealing, so to speak, their possession of such “fruit of the Spirit” by some special exhibition of them in circumstances naturally calculated to make manifest our human limitations. At any rate here we see Abraham strengthened to surrender even his well-beloved son at the call of God.

Next note how responsive Abraham is. God calls, and at once comes the reply, “Here am I.” Then consider how all that would make the demand still more terrible to nature is emphasized, not minimized: “Thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest.” Such minute traces have we of the Divine knowledge, and the Divine interest. Nor is anything left to Abraham's choice in the matter of locality. The sacrifice was to be on one of the mountains that God would tell him of. So must it ever be. In the service of the Lord all must be ordered by Himself, and in accordance with His will. Accordingly Abraham goes to the place of which God had told him. He did not, like Jonah, go west when told to go east, though the task laid upon him, being so personal, must have been far harder. Nor was it a brief trial—a matter of moments or even minutes. It was not till the third day that Abraham saw the place afar off. Imagine the deep exercise of the father's spirit during those solemn days. Yet we note the serene confidence with which he answers Isaac, who naturally wondered where the lamb for the sacrifice was to come from, and won the response, “My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering” —prophetic words indeed, and that doubly so, with far off pathetic promise of Calvary. How much Abraham saw of hidden meaning in his own words we know not—perhaps nothing—but it is surely there, even if he thought only of an immediate succor.

And now Isaac's eyes must have been opened to the imminence of the offering, when, the last initiatory rites having been performed, he lay bound upon the altar. We know how in the dread moment God appeared, and arrested that obedient hand. We know too how the father's faith was crowned, and the living Isaac unbound. Thus was Abraham bidden to spare his son by Him who spared not His own Son. No ram was found in the thicket in the stead of the blessed Lord. No Barabbas might take the place of the true Son of the Father.

And now let us briefly note one or two more details that clearly point to the great mystery (I use the word in the scriptural sense of revelation) of redemption. We read that “they went both of them together,” and this statement, twice recorded, most significantly suggests that wondrous understanding between the Father and the Son in the blessed Trinity, between both of whom was the counsel of peace, as we read in Zechariah (vi. 13). Again in the words “I and the lad,” as we read in an earlier verse, it is not fanciful to see another indication of the perfect accord between the Father and the Son. It is a picture truly; but when the light of the N. T. is thrown upon it, how luminous it stands out in every detail as pointing to the work of our Lord, even, as we have seen, emphasizing the common purpose that actuated the three Persons of the Godhead. Our great poet Milton recognized this in the words he puts into the mouth of God the Father in reply to the pleadings of the Son, (“All Thy request was My decree"); and, though it is possible to read into these words an Arian twist, at least if we are aware of the poet's doctrinal proclivities, yet it shows us how all thoughtful believers must recognize the immense share that God the Father takes in the salvation of mankind. It was the Father who sent the Son, (what must it have cost Him to deliver Him up for us all?) and if Abraham felt so keenly in the case of his son, who yet, he had confidence would be restored to him, what, we may reverently say, must it have been to God not to spare His only Son? We cannot make too much of the Savior; His indeed was the humiliation and the suffering, if we do need to be reminded of the love of God the Father. Truly we do not honor the Father least when we honor the Son; but the Father seeketh worshippers, and sometimes He only gets our prayers.

Thus briefly and inadequately has it been attempted to say a few words on this peculiarly interesting chapter.

The chapter was brought more immediately to the mind by recently reading that it is among those portions of the Bible that a Canon of the Church of England, who is starting an unhallowed Index Expurgatorius, would exclude from the “lessons”! How true it is that, when we pronounce a judgment, we virtually are judged. Could blindness and daring go farther? And what would this blind leader say of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which Abraham's wonderful faith is singled out for emphatic eulogy? May such unholy handling of God's word give pause to some who are ready to go a certain way with the destructive critics. Happily there are many thousands in his communion to whom the Canon's words will have given deep pain. R. B.