

THE TESTING OF ABRAHAM Gen 22, 1-19

Prayer

“In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; ² in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, ³ who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word. When he had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say: "You are my son; this day I have begotten you"? Or again: "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me"?" /Heb 1, 1-6)

Introduction

Reflecting on human life, we realize many difficult moments and one can wish having skipped or avoided them! Still, every experience, even what seems useless or senseless, makes us grow and mature. What a difference it is to meet someone who is an adult, mature and stable, compared to someone who is not. Personal maturity is a result of trials, through which everyone must undergo.

Abraham was called to endure one of the most difficult trials imaginable. Being torn between love for his son and dedication to God, he underwent the test of obedience. Abraham's example provides numerous impulses for us and the way we face hard moments. Each trial we experience enables us to grow in one way or another.

Text

Some time after these events, God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, "Abraham!" "Ready!" he replied. ² Then God said: "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you." ³ Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey, took with him his son Isaac, and two of his servants as well, and with the wood that he had cut for the holocaust, set out for the place of which God had told him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham got sight of the place from afar. ⁵ Then he said to his servants: "Both of you stay here with the donkey, while the boy and I go on over yonder. We will worship and then come back to you." ⁶ Thereupon Abraham took the wood for the holocaust and laid it on his son Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. ⁷ As the two walked on together, Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. "Father!" he said. "Yes, son," he replied. Isaac continued, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust?" ⁸ "Son," Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust." Then the two continued going forward. ⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Next he tied up his son Isaac, and put him on top of the wood on the altar. ¹⁰ Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the LORD'S messenger called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹² "Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger. "Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son." ¹³ As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son. ¹⁴ Abraham named the site Yahweh-yireh; hence people now say, "On the mountain the LORD will see." ¹⁵ Again the LORD'S messenger called to Abraham from heaven ¹⁶ and said: "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, ¹⁷ I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, ¹⁸ and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing-- all this because you obeyed my command." ¹⁹ Abraham then returned to his servants, and they set out together for Beer-sheba, where Abraham made his home.

Structure

This text is part of the Abraham-cycle and is well integrated in the overall story. There are several hints in the previous episodes (promises, descendants, inheritance and blessings to the nations). The immediate precedent is the episode where Abraham expels his son Ishmael.

There is another moment which hints on God's command in **12, 1** "Go by yourself forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you". This command is repeated in Gen 22, 2 "go *by yourself* to the land of Moriah". Also, the echoes of 12, 2–3 "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you" (promises) are clear in 22,15–18 (promises repeated).

Analyzing the text, we can find the following structure:

Introduction (1a)	Narrative
1. God's command "Sacrifice your son" (1b–2)	Monologue
2. Departure next morning (3)	Narrative
3. The third day at foot of the mountain (4–6b)	Dialogue
4. Journey up the mountain (6c–8)	Dialogue
5. Preparation for sacrifice (9–10)	Narrative
6. Angel speaks to stop sacrifice (11–18)	Monologue
Epilogue: Return to Beer-sheba (19)	Narrative

This is a nice example of a concentric structure, where the corresponding units match in style, vocabulary, content etc. Scenes 1 and 6 are Divine monologues, where Abraham answers "here I am". Scenes 2 and 5 are narratives without dialogue which describe Abraham's preparation for the sacrifice. Scenes 3 and 4 are both located on the road to the mountain and both discuss the upcoming sacrifice.

Lectio

1. Some time after these events, God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, "Abraham!" "Ready!" he replied.

The time passed since the last recorded events (expulsion of Ishmael) suggests that Isaac might have been a teenager (the age of Ishmael's expulsion) and a potential heir, ready to take over the family's leadership.

From the very beginning, the reader is aware of the fact that Abraham is being tested (information given by the narrator to his audience), although Abraham doesn't know. The whole following text has to be understood as a test. The main focus is not on the sacrifice of Isaac, but rather it is on Abraham and his attitude/willingness to endure such a trial. Testing reveals the true character of an individual and involves both elements of discomfort and hardness (difficulty). The purpose of testing and trial is to bring about something positive in the end – blessing and prosperity: "that he might afflict you and test you, but also make you prosperous in the end" (**Deut 8, 16**).

There are several similar instances in Scripture where we see God testing His people: "Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid, for God has come to you only to test you and put his fear upon you, lest you should sin."" (**Ex 20, 20**); "Remember how for forty years now the LORD, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments." (**Deut 8, 2**); "pay no attention to the words of that

prophet or that dreamer; for the LORD, your God, is testing you to learn whether you really love him with all your heart and with all your soul” (**Deut 13, 4**). Nowhere else in Scripture do we see God testing an individual.

Although God calls Abraham several times before, this is the very first time we see the vocative being used: “Abraham”. He answers (**12, 1**) like the young Samuel, “The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, ‘Here I am.’” (**1 Sam 3, 4**) This kind of reply attributes Abraham’s prophetic quality. Abraham replies 3 times (vv. 1.7.11) with the same words: “here I am”. This gradation indicates a development in the narrative.

The fact that God waits for Abraham’s answer, before giving his command, might indicate a moment of hesitation, which allows the obedience of Abraham to be displayed.

2. Then God said: "Take (please) your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you."

Once again, the reader knows that God is testing Abraham’s obedience towards Him, although Abraham is unaware of this. The way the command is put (“take, please...” – quite rare in God’s commands) indicates the value of what is being asked.

The son to be sacrificed is described very specifically and concretely (4x) and his value is underscored: he is the promised and delayed heir, finally given as fulfillment. On him rests all of Abraham’s hopes. In this context, it is significant that Ishmael had been sent away, as reported earlier: “Early the next morning Abraham got some bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. Then, placing the child on her back, he sent her away” (**Gen 21, 14**).

God ordered Abraham to go to the “land of Moriah”. This area has been identified with the site on which Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem in **2 Chron 3, 1**: “Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, which had been pointed out to his father David...”. Isaac’s sacrifice signs this place and makes it suitable for sacrifices. At the same time, the name of the place contains a hint on the future events through the verbal root - “provide, see” v. 8 “God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust”. The name of the place hints on salvation already; salvation is promised in the moment of seeming destruction.

A holocaust or burnt offering consists of burning the entire animal on the altar. The idea behind it is that the one who brings the offering gives himself totally to God and the offering atones for his sins. The most commonly offered victims were birds, sheep, or bulls. Human sacrifices, though forbidden, were still practiced – mainly in times of crisis: “They immolated their sons and daughters by fire, practiced fortune-telling and divination, and sold themselves into evil doing in the LORD’S sight, provoking him” (**2 Kings 17, 17**). Still the position of the Law is clear: the life of firstborn belongs to God, but they have to be redeemed through an animal sacrifice: “The firstling of an ass you shall redeem with one of the flock; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. The first-born among your sons you shall redeem” (**Ex 34, 20**). Another case are the Levites, who belonged to the Lord through personal consecration, instead of the firstborn of each family (**Num 4, 45-49**). Considering this background, it is possible that God was asking this kind of dedication of Isaac. Here consists the gravity of Abraham’s test. This is not a simple question of human sacrifice, but a test whether Abraham will give up the promised son/heir, and with him, the hopes and the entire future of his family.

The sacrifice is expected to be brought on a height (mountain). A mountain was a place where one went to meet God (the temple of Jerusalem has been built on Mount Zion (**Ps 48, 2-3**). We see that God revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai (**Ex 19, 24**).

3. Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey, took with him his son Isaac, and two of his servants as well, and with the wood that he had cut for the holocaust, set out for the place of which God had told him

As the narration goes, we don't learn anything about Abraham's thoughts or feelings. Rather, what is stressed is the aspect of his obedience through his actions early the next morning. The exact translation implies a perfect sequence of the actions: "*saddled his donkey, took with him his son Isaac, and two of his servants as well cut the wood(!) for the holocaust, set out for the place*". This lack of logic either hints on Abraham's state of mind and confusion, or indicates his desire to postpone the disclosing of his intention.

Abraham's setting out "for the place of which God had told him" implies another revelation. Leaving out this marginal information the author is stressing Abraham's obedience and promptness to respond.

4. On the third day Abraham got sight of the place from afar.

Mentioning three days is more of a dramatical narrative, than a time-information. It is a sign of preparation for something important: "On the third day Joseph said to them: "Do this, and you shall live; for I am a God-fearing man" (**Gen 42, 18**). This point could be compared to that of the Israelites, who wanted to leave Egypt in order that they might serve their God on a mount in the desert- a journey which lasted 3 days. "Permit us, then, to go a three days' journey in the desert, that we may offer sacrifice to the LORD, our God" (**Ex 3, 18**). The question about Abraham's feeling might be relevant, but is not explicitly reflected in the biblical text.

5. Then he said to his servants: "Both of you stay here with the donkey, while the boy and I go on over yonder. We will worship and then come back to you."

Why does Abraham want the servants to stay? (A few suggestions would be: the way was too rough for the donkey; they might have interfered; the donkey was an unclean animal; God might have simply told him, et al...). There is a certain similarity with God's revelation on Mount Sinai, where Moses is the only one who climbs the mountain, while everyone else remains in the camp (**Ex 19, 20.24; 24, 1-2**).

Abraham speaks of worship (prostration, bowing down) and their return back. He doesn't mention sacrifice here. It could be a white lie to cover the true nature of the sacrifice (v. 8 "'Son," Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust"). It could be a hint on his intention to spare his son. It might be understood as an affirmation of faith – God will somehow fulfill his promise to name Abraham's descendant through Isaac. Conform to the third solution, we have a similar statement in the gospels "I do believe, help my unbelief!" (**Mk 9, 24**).

Cesareus from Arles, commenting on this passage says: "the servants represent the Jewish people who couldn't reach the place of sacrifice and believe in Jesus; the donkey represents the synagogue; the lamb represents Christ, captured and pierced with nails; and Isaac carries the wood as Jesus carried his cross."

6. Thereupon Abraham took the wood for the holocaust and laid it on his son Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife.

This is physically and emotionally the most challenging part of their journey. Isaac carrying wood and Abraham the fire and the knife are an allusion on the offering itself (Abraham is like a priest here). Because the carrying of wood for a sacrifice was the task of a priest, it could be said that Isaac also had priestly function.

Genesis Rabbah, (the Jewish midrash) commented on this saying that the image of Isaac with the wood on his back is likened to that of a condemned man, carrying his own cross. This interpretation was favored in Christian circles as well, seeing in Isaac an image of Christ carrying His Cross.

7-8. As the two walked on together, Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. "Father!" he said. "Yes, son," he replied. Isaac continued, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust?"⁸ "Son," Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust." Then the two continued going forward.

The opening and closing of this scene are almost identical: "the two walked on together" and "the two continued going forward". The statements expressed not only shared destiny, but also a distance between them. In this scene, Abraham and his son have entered into dialogue as they are climbing the mountain. These replicas reveal only a few of their feelings/emotions and yet leave a very strong impression on the reader.

What is to be said of Isaac's question and the silence following? Is it his total trust, believing the words of his father, Abraham (God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust), or did he come to an understanding of the truth and thus, shows total obedience to Abraham? Isaac proves to have the qualities needed for a sacrificial victim (cf. **Lev 1, 3** "it must be a male without blemish").

What is then the meaning of Abraham's reply (God himself will provide...)? It could mean "may God provide..." (imperfect as jussive) as an expression of faith, prophecy, or hope. God will provide/see – He will take care. That's also why the name of the place is "the mountain the LORD will see" (v. 14).

9. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Next he tied up his son Isaac, and put him on top of the wood on the altar.

Once again, Abraham demonstrates his obedience to God by not acting according to his will, but to Gods. As a result, the tension of the sacrifice of Isaac is intensified. Another factor to enhance this tension is the detailed description of the preparation for the sacrifice (building of altar, arranging wood, tying of Isaac and putting him on the altar). It seems as though Isaac offered his consent with what was going on. He offered himself completely to his father's will, as long as his father was acting in submission to God's Will.

10. Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son

Reaching out the hand generally indicates that the action to be performed has special importance: "I will stretch out my hand, therefore, and smite Egypt by doing all kinds of wondrous deeds there" (**Ex 3, 20**). Slaughtering is a sacrificial term used to describe liturgical actions: "He shall then slaughter the bull before the LORD" (**Lev 1,5**).

11. But the LORD'S messenger called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Yes, Lord," he answered".

Abrahams being called from heaven indicates the importance of the moment. In other important moments as well, God's messenger calls from heaven: "God heard the boy's cry, and God's messenger called to Hagar from heaven: "What is the matter, Hagar?" (**21, 17**): God is constantly present in Abraham's life.

12. Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger. "Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son.

Abraham's obedience has been constant. Only now the statement comes from the Lord, "I know now how devoted you are to God". It serves not as information about God who just learned something new, but rather confirms His knowledge- similar as in the case of Sodom, where God said: "I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out" (**Gen 18, 21**).

God knows how devoted Abraham is to Him (= how fearful). Fear, a typical attitude of people towards God in the OT is translated to mean- to honor him in worship and in an upright life. A good parallel is the person of Job: "a blameless and upright man named Job, who feared God and avoided evil" (**Job 1, 1**). Job also had to face a similar moment of external crisis which was more of an internal one; namely, his faith in God.

13. As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.

Abraham shows himself to be a man of action, rather than a man of words. Instead of speaking about the release of Isaac, he makes a substitutive offering. (An offering of thanksgiving for granted blessings which expresses devotion and assures God's benevolence for the future generations). A similar example is the sacrifice offered by Noah after leaving the arch: both thanksgiving and God's benevolence are found there as well (**Gen 8, 18-9, 17**).

14. Abraham named the site Yahweh-yireh; hence people now say, "On the mountain the LORD will see."

Afterwards, God saw/provided for Ishmael and his mother exclaimed: "you are the God of Vision" (**Gen 16, 13**). This is the second time that God saw/provided for Isaac, Abraham's son on the mount Moriah. This name, given to the site by Abraham, might be understood as hope, prayer, or prophecy.

15. Again the LORD'S messenger called to Abraham from heaven

With this verse we enter the next unit of the story, which serves as a necessary explanation and conclusion of what has happened thus far. It shows the meaning and consequences of the trial – promised blessing, descendants and possession. Several of the biblical stories have the same pattern- where human action is followed by God's answer. Noah receives assurance about the greatness of his descendants after his offering (**Gen 6-9**), Hagar is promised that her son would be father of a great multitude (**Gen 21, 18** "arise, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand; for I will make of him a great nation."), and Job receives double of everything as a recompense (**Job 42**).

16. and said: "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son,

While the Bible contains many instances of God swearing by himself, this is the only time it occurs in the patriarchal stories. It must be, therefore a very particular occasion. God confirms twice to be dependable and predictable. The merits of Abraham are based on his obedience.

17. I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies.

We are already used to the fact that Abraham's name and fate are associated with blessing. Here the reality of blessing is stressed through the infinitive absolute. His descendants have been compared to the stars of the sky several times (f. e. in Gen 15), but never to “the sands of the seashore”.

Taking possession of the gates is equal with having control over their cities: controlling those who enter and leave, as well as control over financial and social transaction that used to be performed in the gates. Similar words are used for the children of Rebekah: “invoking a blessing on Rebekah, they said: "Sister, may you grow into thousands of myriads; And may your descendants gain possession of the gates of their enemies!” (Gen 24, 60)

18. and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing-- all this because you obeyed my command.

The original promise “all the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you” (Gen 12, 3) is updated and it becomes “in your descendants”. We might conclude that while the world has already been blessed through Abraham, many more blessings are expected through his descendants. Blessings used to be granted because of the Will and purpose of the Lord. Now they are granted both because of His Will and the obedience of Abraham.

Human intercession is a powerful way to ensure God's blessing. The case of Moses- who interceded for his people (Ex 32) and Noah and his sacrifice, bring God to spare the world in the future and never again strike it with a flood. These are arguments for this claim.

19. Abraham then returned to his servants and they set out together for Beer-sheba, where Abraham made his home.

The conclusion and perhaps even the whole story may leave the reader disappointed. Although much has been said, it cannot be forgotten that much remains unsaid. Isaac remains in background and Sarah goes unmentioned, in a sense unnoticed. Every consideration about these and similar aspects ought to enhance our understanding of the biblical text. At the same time, we must be careful and make sure to stay with what we have in the text and not with what we would like to have there. The main focus of the story is Abraham's obedience and the great blessing flowing from it.

Meditation

The story of Abraham's sacrifice is one of the richest and inspiring tests we find in the Bible. In the following section, I will offer some reflections about the reception of this story in later Jewish and Christian thinking. Many of these developments can become inspirations for us as well.

1. The setting of our episode within the context of Abraham's story is characterized by many contradictions. The previous chapters speak about the birth of the expected heir and blessing is visualized in Abraham's prosperity within surrounding nations. Based on the provided information, the reader knows that Abraham's faith and obedience is going to be tested – his deepest feelings and conviction will be made manifest. Is he willing to love God with all his mind, soul and strength? Is profit (descendants, possession) the main reason to believe and trust? How much is self-interest involved and how much does it involve human trust and faith in God?

Do we believe only because we get something out of it, thus making it convenient? The answer to this question must be very personal and honest. It is usually in times of crisis where we see others reflecting on this. From this point of view, even a trial can be helpful for personal growth.

A similar example in the Bible is the case of Job and his suffering: “**Job 1:9-11** But Satan answered the LORD and said, "Is it for nothing that Job is God-fearing? ¹⁰ Have you not surrounded him and his family and all that he has with your protection? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his livestock are spread over the land. ¹¹ But now put forth your hand and touch anything that he has, and surely he will blaspheme you to your face.”

2. This episode illustrates (with brutal force) the difference between being on the scene and behind the scene. Abraham, unlike the reader, is unaware of the fact that he is being. Life is lived only once and always on the scene. We do not know when we are being tested, or better yet, every moment of our life is a test. Every moment is unique and should be taken seriously. Therefore, we can and should always prove to be trustworthy and faithful servants of God.

3. The experiences one has with God can be multiple and are always different. Abraham first experienced a gentle God, who was calling him to leave his country, “take, please your son...; go by yourself” and shortly afterwards, he is asked to offer his son as a sacrifice. Abraham found himself confronted with this apparent contradiction: faith in the divine promises contra the command that promised to nullify them. He is torn between affection for his son and heir and his love for God. To face such a contradiction requires much honesty, inner strength, clear vision about priorities and hope for the future.

Along with life comes many confrontations and situations requiring decision: what is my priority and what do I give preference to? If they seem irresolvable, try to keep in mind one thing and that is, Abraham was heading to mount Moriah, where God will provide and see / appear. Without this target, he would hardly have passed the test. The hardest challenges can be faced only when we keep in mind and sight that God will provide what we as people lack and He will appear when we are done with our solutions.

4. Prudence in speech is a very precious gift- to speak what is necessary and only when necessary. Abraham doesn't share all the information and knowledge he has. Going to the place “that God had told him” and “seeing *the* place in the distance” he certainly knows more than the reader. We are not informed whether Sarah was aware of what was going on; he is trying to hide the purpose of their journey from his servants and even to Isaac he answers in an obscure way. It is his personal test and trial and he is not trying to shake off this burden from himself. At the same time, he is carefully choosing the words to each of the characters. His answer to Isaac (God will provide...) is a turning point in the narration. If he was tempted to disobey, he has now put such thoughts behind him. What he says is a testimonial of faith, wish or prophecy. Where human words and consolation by others would fail, the statement of faith is a break-through and the best message. Useless argumentation and speaking can be substituted by profession of our faith and trust, which in final account is much more convincing.

We may remember the words of Qohelet: “There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens... a time to be silent, and a time to speak.” (Ecc 3, 17).

5. Parents and children are often similar. This is very true for Abraham and Isaac as far as obedience is concerned. Isaac walking up the mountain, being tied and laid on the altar is

qualified as a perfect, blameless, sacrificial victim, sharing his father's obedience and submission to God's command. It is much easier to expect/require something from others when a personal example is set. Every education, instruction and formation starts with an example.

6. Ancient cultures have a high esteem for wisdom. It is not identical with education and obtained degrees, but is a combination of age, experience and reflection. Abraham is already 99 years old, has experiences from his life and now proves his ability to reflect. He has passed the test and the angel confirms: "I know now how devoted/fearful you are to God". He has put God above every other consideration and 'this' is the beginning of wisdom: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD" (**Pro 9, 10**). Like Job, he has shown himself to be a man who was "blameless and upright, feared God and avoided evil" (**Job 1, 1**). Also, to Abraham God said: "I am God the Almighty. Walk in my presence and be blameless" (**Gen 17, 1**). This is true life-wisdom: correct attitude towards God, avoiding evil and being blameless with people. Such perfection is difficult to reach within a short period of time. We must be people of big plans!

7. God spoke to Abraham several times in the past repeating and confirming his promises. His response was not always the expected one, sometimes showing faith and sometimes not. Now he has reached old age having only one son and the right to use one well in Canaan only. (**Gen 21, 25-34**). God won't talk to Abraham anymore but the period of fulfillment starts now. This will happen "because you did not withhold from me your beloved son". Because of Abraham's obedience, all of the promises are guaranteed without reservation. Through the test of faith – being torn between love for his son and dedication to God, Abraham emerged victoriously with his son intact and his obedience was rewarded.

"In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets" (**Heb 1, 1**). In Jesus we have our final revelation – God won't talk to us any more in that way. In him we have all we need for our salvation. The period of work starts now – period where his promises of assistance are being fulfilled. Every test we pass successfully draws us closer to God and every failure helps us reflect. Being torn between love for 'other' things and devotion towards God is another challenge and another test.

8. Abraham's story is not only a historical description of events but is also a foreshadowing of the events to come. Among the many Old-Testament stories related to this narration, we can mention several motives:

- Abraham's offspring become numerous as the sand conquers the land (**Ex 1, 7-10**);
- Israelites want to go out to the desert on a three-day journey to worship God on a mountain;
- God appears on the mountain promising them blessing if they keep his law;
- Redemption of the firstborn is repeated in the Passover night;
- Testing of Israel in the desert (Ex 16,4);
- Sacrifice of a lamb anticipates the burnt offering of a lamb twice a day in the temple (cf. also the identification of Moriah with the temple mount in Jerusalem 2 Chron 3,1)
- Abraham is a model of a national hero and leader as he ascends the mountain to worship God like Moses did;
- Archetype of a wise man who fears the Lord: "they will be blessed who fear the LORD" (Ps 128,4);
- Example of righteous suffering like Job: "who feared God and avoided evil" (1,1);
- The suffering servant from Is 53 bears certain traits of Abraham;

New-testament authors find different implications deriving from Abraham's story:

- Abraham and Isaac are types of God the Father and Jesus (his atoning sacrifice);
- John the Baptist says: "this is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world";
- The heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration says: "this is my beloved son";
- Abraham's obedience is referred to by James (2, 21-23), Hebrews (11,17-19). They not only describe atonement brought to us but are trying to display the kind of behavior to be imitated by the pious.

Besides these, there would be much more references from the later writings of both Jewish and Christian tradition, world of art, culture, and literature. What is most important, however, is our personal answer of faith in the moments of tests and tribulations.

Prayer

Jesus Christ, you were conceived by power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, a man like us in all but sin. In fulfillment of your Father's Will, you gave yourself up to death; by rising from the dead, you destroyed death and restored life. And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for your and our Father, send us your Holy Spirit to sustain us on the way of following you. Make us docile students ready to learn and courageous disciples able to imitate your example. Stand with us in all our obstacles and struggles, give us grace to see the meaning and strength to decide for you in all the moments of our life.