

## Take Your Son, Your Only Son, Whom You Love Genesis 22

A friend recently asked "As I prepare this lesson for Sunday I feel there may be more meaning into why God referred to Isaac as Abraham's only son three times within the "test" story, even though Abraham had another son, Ishmael." The bible does not specifically say why God uses the phrase "only son" even though Abraham had another son, Ishmael, so anything we come up with is speculation ultimately. But if pressed, I would say there are several possible reasons God uses the phrase.

One reason God says this may be because He is wanting to stress the "Only Son" aspect of the situation, which is going to be the case when God's only Son is crucified/sacrificed for the sins of the world 1800 years later. Ishmael has been sent away, and only Isaac is left. Abraham will never see Ishmael again. Abraham really is down to one son. (It's not like they had phones back then or anything - Ishmael is gone and is as good as dead.) God is testing Abraham's love for Him, whether he loves Isaac more. Abraham passes the test, God illustrates that He does not want human sacrifice, He forecasts the sacrificial death of His Son, He teaches us a lesson in God's provision when we are willing to step out in obedience and faith, He gives us a major lesson in idolatry, He illustrates how to be a Proverbs 3:5-6 kind of guy (trusting in God rather than our own understanding in all things), etc.

When asked by Isaac regarding the whereabouts of the lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham does say earlier in the story that "God will provide the sacrifice", so we are given a clue that perhaps Abraham has been thinking about this, doing the math so to speak, and has concluded that God is not going to let him go thru with it. Because God lets Abraham get to the point of raising the knife to actually kill Isaac, I tend to conclude that Abraham was actually counting on God to provide a sacrifice, and in his mind, he did not believe he was going to have to go thru with it until the very end. He had not really believed that he was going to kill Isaac, and God knew this. So God let's the drama play out all the way to the last moment to get Abraham to the point of the agony of the thought of really losing his only son, of letting go of his idol.

We have to remember how old Abraham and Sarah were, and the fact that their prospects for another son were nil. If he loses Isaac, that is pretty much it. Isaac is the only son he has, and the only son he will ever have at this point. All of Abraham's hopes and dreams are pinned on Isaac. This is another reason I think that God uses the phrase "only son", to stress the dire nature of the situation. Abraham is being asked to give up everything that matters to him. All his hopes and dreams are wrapped up in Isaac, and he is now being asked to give it up.

Another reason God says this phrase is perhaps to make sure the readers do not speculate that Abraham has other sons that we do not know about because, they have not been mentioned in the biblical narrative. He is making certain that we, the readers, are 100% clear that Isaac is it. Ishmael is gone, and there are no other children we have not been told about. Isaac is all that Abraham has, his only son.

Yet another possible reason that God uses this phrase is to show that the entire future salvation of mankind via the Jews and the Messiah Jesus Christ, are bound up in this one child, this only son. God had men on earth who knew about him, going all the way back to Adam. With Terah, Abraham's father, we learn that the last family on the earth that knows anything about God has gone over to idolatry. We have reached the end of the line regarding the knowledge of God among men. God pulls Abraham out of the idolatrous environment, and gives him this only son to stake the entire future of humanity on. We are down to one person, Abraham, and his only son, Isaac. Isaac is destined to carry the message of God forward. The fate of humanity is upon him, and God is wondering if Abraham and his son will turn back to idolatry or not. Is God first or not. Does Abraham love his "only son" more than God? It is quite the dilemma he is in. I cannot imagine what thoughts he must have had on the way there. That God has spoken and given the order is clear. It was a voice from heaven we are told. And child sacrifice was common back then - it would be similar to someone today being told to go have their child aborted, then God stops them right before the abortion procedure begins. God is not asking Abraham to do something that is socially unacceptable for the times he lives in. So his dilemma is, does he do what God says or not. The "only son" reference is there to illustrate to us that this is not just a man sacrificing one of many children, which was common practice, but he is being asked to sacrifice the only son he has, which was probably not that common. This is reiterated when God says your son "whom you love" - this phrase is included to counteract the possible conclusion that the reader might reach that Abraham doesn't really care about his son, is just practicing child sacrifice along with his culture, and this is no big deal to him.

Finally, we have the idea of the two sons contrasted - Ishmael, the son of "man trying to do things his way in his own power" rather than waiting on God, and Isaac, the child of promise, delivered by the power of God to Abraham. This actually is discussed in the New Testament (Galatians 4:21-31). This aspect of the story forecasts the second birth, being born again. We are all born as Ishmael, a child of the flesh. To know and walk with God, we must be born again and become a child of the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Being born again is represented by Isaac. When we are born again, we become a new creation, old things have passed away. As Ishmael fought with Isaac and had to be sent away, so we must let go of our sin nature and the old self, our Ishmael if you will, so that the new man Christ Jesus can be fully developed in us. If we are not willing to be "only sons" to God, but insist on hanging on to our "Ishmael" sin nature even after being born again, then the Ishmael sin nature will fight with the new life of God in us for the rest of our days, and our Christian walk will be compromised. We must send away Ishmael, so to speak, just as Abraham did, and be "only son" Christians, committed only to God.

The "only son" reference used in Genesis 22 stresses the sacrificial aspect - it is his only son, and he loves his son (I doubt that people who practiced child sacrifice would sacrifice an only son, particularly if they loved him, just as today a couple trying to get pregnant for many years unsuccessfully would never dream of getting an abortion if suddenly in old age the wife became pregnant). It reassures the reader that there are no other children we have not been told about. It forecasts the coming "only son" of God who will take away the sin of the world. It illuminates the agony that Abraham must be going thru to carry this out to the point that he

did. And it illustrates the need to let go of our Ishmael, to let go of whatever is fighting with the life of God in us, so that Isaac, the life of Christ, may be fully formed in us fully.

What is our only son? Has God asked us to sacrifice it? Are we willing to let go of it? Are we walking up the mountain or are we on our way to the mountain? Where are we in the process of letting go? Is God going to have to play it out to the end, or can we let go of it now? Or perhaps Ishmael is still in the house of our life, fighting with the life of God in us. Is there an Ishmael still around that we need to remove from our life so that the life of Jesus Christ may have free reign in our life? Or maybe you do not have the life of the only begotten son of God in our life yet, and we need to be born again. Ishmael is around, but Isaac has not yet been born. Maybe it is time for us to turn to Christ by faith and let the new life of the Son of God be born in us.

May God reveal to you your only son.