

Why Misunderstanding This Scripture Led This Young Jew to Become an Agnostic

As a small child, I sat in my synagogue's Hebrew school as our teachers would share stories from the Tanakh (the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament). I remember listening with excitement as they would share about the heroes of our faith.

The greatest of those heroes was Abraham, the father of our faith. We would hear about how G-D spoke to Abraham:

"Then ADONAI said to Abram, 'Get going out from your land, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you'" (Gen. 12:1, TLV).

I remember thinking how much faith a person must have in order to get up and leave everything they knew and be willing to travel somewhere without knowing where they will be going and when they will end up there. I remember thinking how hard it was for me to get into my car with my parents without knowing where we were going, while I could see my parents. Yet Abraham simply packed up and left his home and his family behind.

As we read further into the life of Abraham, just 10 chapters later in Genesis, we find what in Judaism is called "The Akidah," or the "Binding of Isaac," which begins with:

"Now it was after these things that God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham.' 'Hineni,' he said. Then He said, 'Take your son, your only son whom you love—Isaac—and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains about which I will tell you'" (Gen. 22:1-2).

I can still recall my reaction to first hearing these words. "What? How could a loving G-D ask such a thing of someone who

has been so faithful to Him for all this time?" It was beyond my comprehension that after making Abraham wait so long to give him the "son of promise," Isaac, G-D was asking Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering.

Yet there it was—right there in the Torah. I said to my teacher, "This isn't fair! It isn't right! How could G-D ask Abraham, who had already given up everything to follow G-D, to give up the son that he had promised?" My teacher tried to answer my questions to satisfy my anger and bewilderment, but she could not.

This portion of Scripture was one of the reasons I later became agnostic. I desperately wanted there to be a G-D, but I could not reconcile certain passages like this one with a G-D demonstrating love toward those like Abraham who had walked away from everything to follow and serve. It is interesting that this same section of the Torah was so instrumental in my decision to believe that Yeshua (Jesus) is the Messiah.

I hope that this explanation will help you with your struggles if and when it ever appears as if G-D is unjustly asking you to give up something that you love for Him. The answer is that it was precisely because Abraham had been so faithful that G-D asked him to offer Isaac as an offering. You see, G-D had already promised Abraham that Isaac would be the "son of promise":

"But God said, 'On the contrary, Sarah your wife will bear you a son and you must name him Isaac. So I will confirm My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his seed after him'" (Gen. 17:19).

What was the covenant that would be confirmed through Isaac?

"My heart's desire is to make you into a great nation, to bless you, to make your name great so that you may be a blessing. My desire is to bless those who bless you, but whoever curses you I will curse, and in you all the families

of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3).

When we understand that G-D had promised Abraham that through Isaac He would fulfill His covenant and make him into a great nation, we can better understand what the writer of Hebrews stated.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. Yes, he who had received the promises was offering up his one and only son—the one about whom it was said, 'Through Isaac offspring shall be named for you.' He reasoned that God was able to raise him up even from the dead—and in a sense, he did receive him back from there" (Heb. 11:17-19).

Abraham knew that though he was asked to offer his son as an offering, G-D had already promised that Isaac would live. Abraham never saw this as G-D asking him to give up anything; he was only asked to give something. That may be confusing, so let me say it another way.

G-D asked us to be faithful in giving of our financial increase. He asked us to give and, if we are faithful like Abraham, we give. But, we are never asked to give up because He has already promised us in verses such as Luke 6:38 and Malachi 3:10:

"Give, and it will be given to you—a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, overflowing, will be given into your lap. For whatever measure you measure out will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

"'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. Then there will be food in My House. Now test Me in this'—says ADONAI-Tzva'ot—'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out blessing for you, until no one is without enough'" (Mal. 3:10).

So you see, G-D may ask us to *give* of His promises, but He doesn't ask us to *give up* His promises. Abraham knew that as

long as he was faithful to G-D, G-D would keep His promises. So, even though G-D asked Abraham to offer Isaac, and even though Abraham was completely willing to give of his promise from G-D, he knew that no matter what happened at the end, Isaac would be alive. Abraham knew G-D's promises were sure. In the same way, if it ever seems as if G-D is asking you to give up one of your promises, always remember He may ask you to give it, but He will never ask you to give it up. {eoa}

Eric Tokajer *is author of* With Me in Paradise, Transient Singularity, OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry, #ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer, Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians *and* Galatians in Context.