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## A God Who Told Me to Kill My Son Would Not Be the God for Me

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how people can praise Abraham for being willing to kill Isaac when God told him to and whether that account of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 contradicts the idea that God won't tell you to do anything that goes against his commands in Scripture.

\* How can people praise Abraham for being willing to kill Isaac to prove his devotion? If God told me to kill my son, I'd think this wasn't the God for me.

\* Does the account of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 contradict the idea that God won't tell you to do anything that goes against his commands in Scripture?

### Transcript

I'm Amy Hall and you're listening to Stand to Reasons #STRSK podcast with Greg Cokel. Amy's chastising mirror a little with her voice because I was trying to make her laugh for the introduction. How you doing? I'm good, Greg.

Are you ready for this first question? Oh, sad. Okay. This question comes from Josh Carey.

A response to this would be helpful. Not to shade religious people, but it's kind of chilling how some folks praise Abraham for being willing to kill Isaac for God to prove his devotion. Like, I don't know about y'all, but if God told me to kill my son, I'd kind of be like, "Maybe this isn't the God for me." Okay.

I get the question and a lot of people have raised this objection as a challenge to the legitimacy of Christianity. There's more to the story though that we learn in the book of Romans. I think that's where we see it.

Is that right? If I know what you're thinking of, it's Hebrews. Okay. Well, somewhere in the New Testament it says that Abraham was willing to pursue this goal that God had given him, knowing that if he had to go the distance, God was going to resurrect Isaac

from the dead because he knew that there was a promise that God had given him through Isaac for the salvation of the world or the blessing of all the Gentiles.

We understand that now in the broad sense of the new covenant and salvation of the world through the Messiah that came through the line of Abraham. But Abraham just knew there's a big promise in the future that would come through the seed which seed would come forth from his own lines, Genesis 18, and that child of promise initiating the process was Isaac, Abraham Isaac. And therefore if God was going to take the life of Isaac, which it wasn't clear that Abraham understood that this was actually going to take place.

And in fact, there's an indication in the count that he didn't think God was going to press him on this. But he's simply following the instructions. Okay? It turned out that Isaac lost his life.

He was convinced God was going to raise him from the dead. This is very, very clear. And it's not clear though that he really was convinced God was going to take his life because when they're sending the mountain for the sacrifice, his son asked Abraham, what are we going to use for the sacrifice? So, I understand this is an bizarre circumstance, but you have to put yourself back in a certain sense, what, 3500 years, Abraham, that's 4000 years or so.

Yeah, I think that's right. So you have to put yourself back there in a very primitive circumstance. Now Abraham, I think was pretty aware that child sacrifice wasn't okay.

But he also had reason to trust in the Holy God. Remember that this was the same Abraham that bargained with God for Sodom and Gomorrah, saying, how can you destroy the just with the unjust and bargain him down if there's just 10 righteous people there in Sodom and Gomorrah, then we spare the city, which God said, yes. So Abraham had a very rich sense of the justice of God, the moral excellence of God.

And therefore, when he's given this command, he just follows the command of the good God, figuring one way or another, that good God would work it out either. He would not require the sacrifice that he told Abraham to make of his son. And that's hinted at in the text itself.

Or and we learned this in the New Testament, if God goes through with it, he's going to have to resurrect Isaac in virtue of the promise he made to Abraham in Genesis 15. Now does that totally sanitize it for modern ears? Probably not. But it does add, I think, an additional dimension to of them that changes the perspective completely in my mind, at least.

I'm not troubled by it. Okay. And it's clear that Abraham wasn't troubled by it either, even though he traded on God's moral perfection when he campaigned on behalf of

Sodom and Gomorrah.

So those all have to be taken into consideration. And again, I already made reference to this, but there is this sense that it is very, very tempting for us to judge behaviors of an entirely different set of circumstances. 4,000 years ago in a different culture based on current sensibilities.

I'm not suggesting that at any culture, at any time, child sacrifice is okay because God condemned it in the Mosaic Law. And it was one of the reasons that he drove the countries, the peoples out of the promised land as an act of cleansing. This was one of the things they did.

And this, by the way, was clear in Leviticus, either 18 or 20, I think it was 18, but in any event, don't do these other terrible things that they did because these included child sacrifice, obviously, and that's part of the prohibition of the law there in Leviticus 18, along with incest and adultery and homosexuality because these people did these abominable things and they were driven out of the land. And so the Jews weren't to do them either. And so I think we have every reason to believe that God wasn't going to carry this out and Abraham understood that.

But keep in mind also that what you have here is a typology in play that Abraham was asked to sacrifice his only son. And God, of course, sacrificed his only son on the cross for our sins. So there are lots of things going on here that I think are mitigating circumstances to the understandable, distaste, and even revulsion we would have to this particular command.

I think I might disagree with you just a little bit on the idea that he didn't think he was going to have to go through it, that only because I think he was referring to Isaac when he said God will provide the lamb, I think he was referring to Isaac. Wouldn't he say God has provided? Well, because he didn't want to scare Isaac. I think he didn't want to scare the lamb.

The only reason I say this is because the indication that we have is that the indication of his faith is that he was willing to do it and he was trusting that God could raise him from the dead. I actually have that verse that you are referring to, Greg. Romans or Hebrews? It's Hebrews.

Oh. He always gets it right when it comes to verses. Hebrews 11, 19, he considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead from which he also received him back as a type, which is what you were talking about, Greg, that this whole story is supposed to point to God not withholding his son because that's what... About raising him from the dead.

Yes. And that's what Genesis 22, when God commends Abraham, here's what he says.

"Do not stretch your hand against the lad." Sorry, I can't speak today.

"Do not stretch out your hand against the lad and do nothing to him. For now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son from me. And then if we look at a parallel here in Romans 8, 32, what then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own son, but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?" Yes.

So there's the typology there. And also remember, Abraham shows up in the book of James in kind of a confusing way in the passage, James chapter 2, the second half of the chapter, because there James is claiming that Abraham was justified by works when he sacrificed his son and the author. There the justification has two different meanings.

One it is the theological meaning of declare righteous, and we see that in Romans chapter 4, for him who does not work, but believes in a God who justifies, declares righteous, the unrighteous to him, it's reckoned as righteousness. Well that reckoning happened in Genesis 18 to Abraham. It's not until Genesis 22, which is like 20 years later, that you have this occasion where James says that Abraham is justified again.

That he's employing a second sense of justification because the second sense, when we normally use, when we say, well, justify yourself, what we mean is show yourself to be correct in the thing that you did. And straight, okay, and what we see in Genesis 22, where clearly Abraham wasn't getting saved again, justified in that sense, 20 years later, rather he was manifesting the fruit of the prior justification, which is why God says, now I know, got to get new information, he's omniscient. Now he's knowing in the sense of experiencing it, remember, knowledge in the Old Testament sets is sometimes given or applied knowing to an act of sex between a husband and wife.

He knew her, okay? He didn't find out something new in terms of information. There was a deeper intimacy and experience together, and the same thing there. God now is experiencing the outworking of Abraham's conviction, which is why God makes that common in Genesis 22, and this is what James is referring to as well.

Right. James is saying there that true faith will do the actions of faith. That's right.

And this brings me to another point about this question here from Josh, this quote he's given us at the end of it, it says, you know, I don't know about you, but if God told me to kill my son, I'd be like, maybe this isn't the God for me. Okay. So that is exactly the point.

He does not have the faith in God that Abraham had. This is the whole point. What Abraham did was take this beloved son who was a gift from God, unexpected, miraculous gift from God, and he was willing to give it back because he loved God even more than his son.

Now, if you don't love God more than your children, then obviously you'd be, you'd walk away from God. But that's the whole point. That's why Abraham is the example for us of trust and faith in God.

Also, Josh doesn't have the promise that Abraham had, you know, and that really makes an entire huge difference. This was an absolutely unique circumstance. There was no other circumstance in scripture like it.

It was a singular circumstance with a singular purpose and subsequent to that, there was no other, there would be no propriety of claiming that God has said, "I have to kill my son," because we see clearly in Leviticus 18, this is an abomination to God. He was trusting that God would be true to his word. Because God had promised that he would make him a father of nations through Isaac.

So the fact that he was trusting that showed that he had true faith in God. And of course, God was true to his word. He was doing the right thing.

Not only was he revealing Abraham's faith and making him that exemplar for all of us, but he was also prefiguring what would happen with Christ when he would give his own son for our sake. And he was doing a lot of things for this situation. He wasn't doing anything wrong.

So Abraham was trusting in God's character, as you mentioned, and he was trusting in his promise. You know, there's one other thing here by way of application, though God is never going to ask us to sacrifice our children in the sense that was described there in Genesis 22. But he does make it clear that there are going to be sacrifices with family.

And it's just interesting how this plays out in modern times. Because Jesus said, "I will send..." In Matthew 10, "I will send..." "I will set mother against daughter and father against son," etc., etc. But we have many occasions now where a father or a parent is clear on the biblical commands about, say, homosexuality.

And then one of their children comes out as gay and they change their theology. In other words, instead of obeying God with regards to their theology and, in a certain sense, sacrificing the relationship that they have with their children, not because the parent wants to sacrifice it because the children will put it on the altar of sacrifice since the parents don't affirm. Okay? Instead of suffering that sacrifice, they turn their backs on the truth and then affirm what God says is an abomination.

And there they are choosing their children against God. They are not willing to sacrifice that relationship in that sense. Now I don't think we need to sacrifice the relationship from our side.

We shouldn't. But when push comes to shove, and it often does in these circumstances, that is the price that the child is going to demand from the parent. Unless you affirm,

"I'm cutting you off," for all intents and purposes, and the parents end up affirming.

So there's a kind of parallel here. It's not a bloody parallel, but there certainly is a parallel in what's going on in our culture today. And when people do that, they are showing where their royalties lie.

And again, this comes down to your view of God. Do you see God is greater and more desirable than everything else that you have, or do you not? So if you're like this person, Josh is quoting, and you don't see God is great, then you're not going to give up anything for him, of course. But if you see him as he is, then you'll be willing to give up everything.

And this is why we need to be reading our Bibles, because we need to know him in a way that will enable us to put him above everything else we have. Because we're going to come across all sorts of ways when we'll have to decide between God and the other things that we love all the time. All right, Greg, here's another question.

It's actually related. And I think you might not have much to say since we've said so much about the topic already, but this is just from a slightly different perspective about the same event. All right, this comes from Paul.

I was actually at an event last weekend during the Q&A of the speakers. I had to come in late because I was being filmed. And I walked in and sat down and I said, I don't know what you're talking about, but I have an opinion about that.

Well, we're glad you do, Greg, or we wouldn't have a show. So thank you for that. All right, this question comes from Paul.

Those who teach the hearing, the voice of God principle are usually consistent in telling people God won't tell you through various nudges to do anything that would contradict Scripture. Is Genesis 22 a counter example to this principle? Or is Abraham's circumstance too unique to draw a more broad application? Scripture tells us not to kill an innocent person, but God clearly told Abraham to do so. The way I understand from another of your podcasts that Abraham knew that Isaac would survive the ordeal.

So there's a couple of things I can say about this quickly. First of all, the injunction regarding hearing the voice of God that we shouldn't do anything that God, that we think God is telling us to do this contrary to Scripture. Okay.

There's a prior step. And the prior step is the methodology that you're using can't be contrary to Scripture, or it can't, if you're going to use a methodology of hearing the voice of God, the way people do it, you have to demonstrate that this is a methodology that's a Scripture itself teaches to determine what God wants us to do in any given situation. It's not taught in Scripture.

In fact, the idea of learning to hear the voice of God is a kind of a contradictory notion. Let me put it this way. It's impossible to learn to hear the voice of God.

If God's not speaking, there's nothing to hear. Okay. You might hear your own internal voice, but if it's not God, then you're not hearing God.

Secondly, if he is speaking, you can't not hear him because God doesn't try. There is not a single instance in Scripture when God attempts a communication and he doesn't succeed. He makes, does it every time anyway.

And this is why in the book of Acts, virtually every single intervention is a supernatural invention because it can't be missed. So the principle, well, if you don't do anything God tells you not to do, I'm sorry, don't do anything God tell you think God is telling you to do that's against Scripture, presumes the legitimacy of the hearing the voice of God methodology that is now constrained by what God has already revealed. Of course, it's constrained by what God has already revealed, but it's also constrained.

The approach is constrained by the notion of whether or not the hearing the voice of God practice is something affirmed to taught or encouraged in Scripture, which none of those things is true. Okay. Hold on to their topic, but I just wanted to make that qualification.

In the case of Abraham, though, there was no law, there was no revelation, there was no Bible that he's working with. He comes out of a heathen culture that had all kinds of crazy things going on and he is told by God to leave his family behind and his belongings behind and leave his home and travel to a new place, which he kind of does. But I mean, it was a people, his Sarah Abraham, Latin, Tara came with.

I mean, Sarah and Latin Tara came with Abraham, you know, nevertheless, it isn't like he's got this body of revelation to assess the circumstances of or the nature of the command cities been given. Now, he does have a basic understanding of the character of God and that's we see that in Genesis 18. The Oak's a memory there and God is going to destroy Sodom and Gabor and there's that engagement that we talked about.

So I think that those points ought to qualify the concern that Paul has raised. Yeah, I don't and I do agree with him that this is too unique a situation to draw any sort of application about God's nudging or what he's going to tell you or anything like that. Even beyond the question of whether or not that's the way that we're taught to interact with God.

It wasn't a nudging, it was a direct communication like God, we have the conversation there. But this is sometimes, pardon me for interrupting, but this is somehow the way people read it in. They read all these conversations as feeling led and nudge and I'm not sure if God's telling me but no, these were conversations.

That's why we have the speaking, the detail of the conversation and even in the case of

Moses it explicitly says that God was speaking because when God talked and the Jews heard it, it scared them and they said, go away, go over there and talk to God because it bothers us when we hear him talking to you anyway. Yeah, it is a completely different situation when you're hearing the literal points of God in a very clear way, revelatory fashion versus trying to feel inclinations to do things. I'm not sure I would want to tell somebody, hey, sometimes God does tell you to do things that are against scripture if they're following the nudging rule because now they're completely unmoored from everything that God has said to us.

So I wouldn't use this as an argument against the hearing, the voice of God thing. But I do want to say one quick thing about the idea that this whole incident was against the word of God or against the character of God. And we've already addressed a lot of this in the previous question, but this idea that this was just about Abraham being told to kill an innocent person.

That's not what was going on here. It's not like God said, go kill a random innocent person. That's not what's happening.

What's happening here is he was being asked to return the gift God had given him to God. God who has, we've talked about this before, God who has the authority to take any life he wants, the God who gave this particular life for a particular purpose, it was again and that he wanted to prefigure Christ. All these things that we talked about are playing into this.

It wasn't just killing this innocent person and prove that you're willing to do that. It's not what that was. So I think we just need to look at this whole situation in light of everything the Bible says about it and what its purpose was and God's authority to take life.

I mean, we think about what he did in the flood killing the firstborn of all the Egyptians and then he tells Israelites in the Exodus, in the Exodus, in the flood he got all the first and second, third and fourth and fifth. So got them all. And then he says, I own all of your firstborn now and now you have to offer sacrifices for your firstborn to redeem them.

So God is in a special place where he is the owner of all life and in particular the firstborn and in particular the things that he gives us miraculously. So I think a lot of times when people critique Christianity, they are not looking at everything they need to look at. They're not looking at who God is.

They're reading things very narrowly and as if God were a sinful human being without the authority and role that he has. So that's all I got to say about that. Excellent.

All right. We're out of time. Thank you, Josh and Paul.



We appreciate hearing from you. If you have any questions for us, send it on Twitter with the hashtag #strask or you can go through our website. We're actually getting a lot of questions through our website.

So if you go to our podcast page, just look for the #strask podcast page and you'll find a link there. Send us your question and you may hear it on the show. Thanks for listening.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Hochl for Stand to Reason.

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