

asked Abraham to bring involved the question of obedience in which his faith was disturbed by his intellect. His love for God was tested by his willingness to sacrifice his only son. Abraham exemplified a total commitment to God through his obedience, love and faith.

In the Mosaic revelation this divine-human relationship was verbalized in the first great commandment in which God expected exclusive devotion excluding all other gods. Moses summarized this when he admonished the Israelites to love God wholeheartedly and exclusively. This was reaffirmed by Jesus who agreed with the religious leaders that the greatest or first of all commandments is to love God exclusively and wholeheartedly. Jesus also reaffirmed that any one who loved father, mother, son or daughter 'more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10: 37; Luke 14:26) -- the same basic principle that Abraham recognized in his obedience to bring his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God.

Although Isaac was involved in the burnt sacrifice made by Abraham on Mount Moriah the Genesis account is silent concerning any sacrifice he may have made in fostering his relationship with God. He does build an altar at Beersheba (Gen 26:25). Isaac may have offered many sacrifices and built other altars but no mention is made beyond the above references.

For years Isaac prospered in the area of Gerar where Abimelech was king of the Philistines. In time of famine God confirmed the covenant promises to Isaac warning him not to migrate to Egypt as his father had done a century earlier. After repeated occasions of tension between Isaac and the Philistines he moved to Beersheba.

In this new location Isaac was assured through divine revelation that "I am with you. I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham" (Gen 26:24). This was the occasion for Isaac to build an altar there and "call on the name of the Lord." Subsequently his servants dug wells indicating that they would remain in that area for some time.

As the Sethites had done, (Gen 4:26) many generations earlier Isaac here called on the name of the Lord. Abraham had also called on the name of the Lord at Bethel where he built an altar (21:8) and (13:4) and later at Beersheba where he planted a tamarisk tree (21:33). Now as Isaac took residence in Beersheba he built an altar and publicly proclaimed that he acknowledged God. As heir to the knowledge of God Isaac thus gave witness through an altar as the place of worship that he was identified with the God of Abraham who had confirmed the covenant to him. In this manner Isaac maintained his vital relationship with God.

Having bought the birthright from Esau and subsequently having stolen the blessing. Jacob experienced his first divine encounter en route to Haran (Gen 28:1-22). In a revelatory dream the patriarchal promise given to Abraham and Isaac was confirmed to him with the assurance of God's providence and care. Jacob responded with a vow to serve God if he returned safely to the land of promise.

After several decades of providential blessings in Mesopotamia Jacob together with his family and possessions suddenly left to return to the land of Canaan. In Gilead he was overtaken by Laban who wanted to reclaim the stolen gods Rachel had taken with her. Not finding them Laban and