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## Genesis

### Chapter 22 - God's Test of Devotion

#### Nothing Withhold (vs. 11-14)

**Genesis 22:11-14:** But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “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.” Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.”

In the Book of Genesis, Abraham was introduced to us at the end of Genesis 11. It is in Genesis 12 that we see the calling of Abraham. And from Genesis 12 to Chapter 21, we have taken a journey with Abraham. A kind of eye-opening journey for himself as well as for us. But now, we come to Chapter 22 and he is tested. The reason I bring this up is that from Chapter 12 to 21, those 10 chapters that we read about him, it gives some detail or perhaps even pictures of things that he did and decisions that he made. However, you don't have the details of his life. You don't have what he did, everyday experiences. And what's most interesting is you come to the end of Chapter 21, then going into Chapter 22, between those two chapters, you have the same amount of time that was spent from Chapter 12 to 21, to now in between 21 and 22 is about 25 years. My point being is that that's a lot of silence. Not to mention that the first 25 years you just had pictures of particular incidences that took place, but now you have literally 25 years of nothing said about anything that is done. And what is interesting to me about that is that God is seemingly conveying to us that these moments of decisions are very crucial in our life. We perceive the daily

grind of life, and I've thought about this often, that though there's much to be said about the daily grind and responsible, consistent behavior that people need to have and present during those times. It is interesting when you look at the difference between perhaps a godly man and an ungodly man or a righteous man and an unrighteous man, very little difference is seen in that daily grind. I mean, obviously there are times where people are not consistent in what they're supposed to be doing, but on the whole, I have found that most people are pretty faithful doing what they're doing. It's difficult to actually tell the difference between what is devotion in their life in the daily grind and what is just necessity. People do things out of necessity. I mean, quite frankly, you go to work, you do your chores, you provide food, you provide shelter, you go home, you go back to work. I mean, this is what people do. And when you look at the godly and the ungodly, they hardly seem to be different at all in this relationship. The true test of devotion is seldom revealed on the straightaway of life, that is to say when we're talking about a straight, uninterrupted section of life, which seems to be what we're prone to live, that daily

grind, but on the crossroads of life, when we come to a place in which we have to make a decision in order to move on and the place where you must make this decision and the vital choice to literally move forward. This is where people are defined. I call it a “titanic moment.” It's that picture of who's going to get in the boat. Who's going to get in the lifeboat? Are you going to give your seat to somebody else, or are you going to get in it? And that particular moment defines somebody. What we have seen in particular with Abraham is there have been these moments all the way through that he has been defined.

The first 25 years, he has been given certain decisions to make, and in those decisions, he will sometimes make the right decision, other times make the wrong decision. You can see him wrestling through the things that he does. But through the process, he'll have to sacrifice certain things. And God is honing him. He's bringing him to the point of this chapter 22 in which he will ultimately sacrifice that which he loves most. However, it is quite a journey. And there are moments in our life that will begin

to define us. It is strange to me that though oftentimes we won't always make the right decisions on certain issues, there is that one issue that seems to define us more than all others. And so, as we walk through the first 25 years of Abraham or those 25 years in which Scripture picks him up, you begin to see that he has to make certain sacrifices. Some sacrifices he has to make is the sacrifice of pragmatism, which just makes sense if in fact you have a famine in the land, just go to a place where there's water. That just makes a lot of sense. But he'll have to sacrifice that. He'll have to say, "Well, God knows best, and I'm not going to go my way. I'm going to go His." He'll learn from this. And he'll have to surrender strategy. And there is a thought that, "I've got to save. I've got to be the savior." He's got to surrender that. He's got to surrender his paternal desire to rescue. He's got to somehow surrender his concern for what his spouse thinks. And all these things will have to be surrendered as he goes through the process.

There's an interesting passage in Psalms.

It reads this way,

(Psalm 4:5) "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, And trust in the LORD."

What is he talking about "sacrifice"? And here again, what we see is that there are certain things that we're prone to do. There are certain things that we are prone to love. And there are times in our life where God is going to ask us, "Do you love Me more than these?" It is in those times that really who we are and what we believe is defined in our life. Once again, you can do the right thing, oftentimes just merely out of habit in the daily grind of life. But those crossroads are what's going to define us. It is the crossroad in this passage that we see.

And I was thinking about the different individuals throughout Scripture. You look at Job. What does he have to sacrifice? Well, Job has to come to the point of sacrificing his righteousness. That his perception was is that he was righteous enough to impress God. But he'll stand before God, and it will be through the difficulties that he'll have to sacrifice that mentality and that heart's desire, because that seemed to be the love of Job's life, was the sense of doing right. In fact, as he comes before

God, he gives the argument, "Look at all the things that I've done." And he literally goes through the list of the things, "I took care of the widow. I took care of the orphan. If I ever saw anybody in need, I took care of them." And he goes through this long list in trying to convince God that he is really righteous. And by virtue of that, he shouldn't be suffering at all. But at the end, he'll have to give that up in order to find salvation in his life, to put his trust in God, to realize as he stands before God, "I've got to close my mouth. I've been talking about things I didn't understand. God was clearly more righteous than me." And you'll see this all the way through Scripture, whether it's Samson, who has to give up his strength, because that was that which was most valuable to him. Or Solomon, what does Solomon have to give up? Well, if you read Ecclesiastes, it would be his pleasures. That's what God would call upon him to give up. And it seems like at the end of Ecclesiastes, he finally does, but it took him quite a while in order to do that. Nebuchadnezzar will have to give up his kingdom. Jeremiah will have to give up his affirmation and his desire for those that he loves to affirm him in the priesthood. The very ones that he cares

the most about will be the very ones that will abuse him and hang him on the door. Ezekiel will have to give up his wife.

The question is, what is it you love the most? And when you begin to deal with that particular issue, that becomes the defining moment of what you really believe if in fact you really will put your trust in God. Everybody can say that they trust in God when things are going just normal and you're not having to make a decision. But when you have to make the decision of the greatest love of your life, we're not talking about things that are quasi-valuable. Because once again, Abraham deals with those issues. Sometimes he's good, sometimes he's bad. But ultimately, God's going to bring you to that point of that which you value most. You remember in the New Testament it was a rich young ruler that comes to Christ, and he goes, "What do I need to do to make sure I'm in heaven?" Ultimately Christ will say, "Why don't you just sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and come follow Me?" What does Scripture say? He walked away sad. He couldn't do it. Why? Because it actually goes on to

say it was because he had much. And the point of the matter is that was what he loved most.

God's going to bring you to a crossroad. Sometime in your life, somewhere in your life, you're going to have to make a decision of that which you value so much. And God's going to say, "Do you love Me more than these?" I don't know when the crossroad is in your life, but I know this, that Hebrews says, when you hear His voice, don't harden your heart, because God will ask you to do that. We all have our ways of doing things, and we all have our thoughts about how things should be done. God will bring us to that point.

We come to this passage in Genesis 22 in which Abraham passes the test, is unhesitant about placing his son on the altar. And it is a touching moment in which a father gives that which... I mean, this was his greatest aspiration to have a child all the way through the first 25 years. This is what he longed for than anything else. And now, it's one thing to give up what you never had. It's another thing to give up what now God has given you and you've grown extremely attached to. Abraham will do that. The initial

thought, I think, and I remember thinking this as a young person, "If I surrender my life, and just give God everything, then God's going to take advantage of my good nature." I actually remember thinking that. And of course, the more you understand who God is, the more you understand that you almost come to the conclusion, "Did I really sacrifice anything?" Because God gives so many great and wonderful things to us.

We read verses like Psalm 37, which reminds us that even the desires of our heart is a concern of His. But we have to put Him first above anything else. And if we will delight ourselves in the Lord, then He will give us the desires of our heart. If you don't, then you're going to have things in your life that just won't bring joy and gladness. And you'll end up having blessings, and you'll have sorrow with it. But God has great blessings and no sorrow with it if in fact you will put Him first. So, as we see this process going, we understand that God is calling upon us to surrender all. We sing the song. I remember one individual said, it doesn't say, "I surrender 99.9 tenths." It says, "I surrender all."

And so, we come to this passage in Genesis 22 in which we have God in a magnificent text in verse 11, the angel of the Lord crying out. I mean, I can't imagine God crying out. The wording that is used in this is a very intense phrase in which it gives this sense of God going, "No! Don't! Abraham, Abraham, don't! Don't touch him!"

He literally says, if you read with me in verse 11,

(Genesis 22:11) "But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

(Genesis 22:12) He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him..."

It was the graciousness of God. Was it a surprise to Abraham? I can't say that it was a surprise to him because once again, he believed that God was going to fulfill that promise that He had given him and would even be able to raise him from the dead. But what a magnificent picture of God's concern that He actually cares about the things that concern us, as the psalmist will say; that He would be so concerned with our concerns that He would even yell out, "Don't perish!" And why it's so hard for man to

understand that God is here to save us, not destroy us. I mean, He's the One that had the guy build the boat in the middle of the destruction of those people that were destroying themselves. And God goes, "Let's build a boat. Let's save humanity." And all the way through, we see God's desire to save. God is not willing, Scripture says, that any should perish. Think about that. He has not desirous of this. He's come to save, but there's just something in us. The god of this world has somehow tricked us into thinking that God desires to make us miserable and makes our life miserable by having us do things that we don't want to do. This passage begins to reveal just the love of God, and God just visually is saying, "Trust Me, I want life for you."

(Genesis 22:11) "But the angel of the LORD called to him..."

Every time the angel of the Lord is mentioned in Genesis up to this point, He has shown up in saving positions. If you remember Hagar, and there she is cast out by Sarah. And now, she's in the wilderness. It was the angel of the Lord who came and encouraged her. And it was the angel

of the Lord that was concerned for Ishmael. And the angel of the Lord comes to save. It's an interesting picture of what we believe in many respects to be Christ being revealed by the Christophanies.

But it reads this way in verse 11,

“But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

(Genesis 22:12) He said, “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.””

I remember when I first read that, I thought, “So, God now knows something.” And of course, we know that He's not only omnipresent, but He's omniscient. He knows everything. I oftentimes tell people, “God never learns anything new. So, everything that He has known, and that He knows today, He knew in the past, and that everything that He's known in the past, He will know in the future. Nothing changes with Him. We refer to the fact that He's immutable in that respect. So, when Scripture makes reference to God saying, “Now, I know,” it is not an

epiphany to God what's going on. What is being used here in the Hebrew word “*yāda*’,” in the perfect tense, is making reference to experiencing. In other words, what God longs to see is us playing out what we say. And God desires to experience. We say that we love God and God goes, “I'd like to experience that. I'd like to see what that looks like.” This is the Book of James. James will actually mention that Abraham, by faith, sacrificed and didn't withhold his son. Now, that particular passage is making reference to faith without works is dead. In other words, James says, “Let's see it. You say you have faith, let's see your works that reveal this.” So, the passage is making reference to God saying, “Now I have experienced what you have told Me.” And that exercise is always important. And that's part of the crossroad experience, if I can put it that way, because it is at that point of decision that you begin to demonstrate in a very tangible way what you've been saying all along. Remember, Scripture says, many a man proclaims his loyalty, but a faithful man who can find? In other words, put your money where your mouth is. You say you're doing something, do it. And God is pleased with the things that we do. And God will test us in

this, not once again because He doesn't know these things, but because He wants to experience these things. The passage makes reference to the fact that he had not withheld, and I like that word being used because it just literally is saying, "You have not kept back anything from Me." This is the heart of God. This is the relationship that God is calling us to have with Him. He's not withholding anything from us. You read the Book of Genesis, and you begin by seeing God's gifts. I mean, He gives all this stuff. By the time you get finished reading creation, you go, "Wow, is there anything more that You could give me?" And ultimately, God will say, "Yes, it'll be My Son. But I'm not going to withhold anything from you."

There's a famous passage, and if you don't know where it is, I'm going to have you turn to it.

(Psalm 84:8) "O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob!"

(Psalm 84:9) Behold our shield, O God, And look upon the face of Your anointed.

(Psalm 84:10) For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside.

I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

(Psalm 84:11) For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory...”

I hope everyone has this underlined in their Bible,

“... No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

(Psalm 84:12) O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!”

And literally, in that last verse, he is defining what uprightly looks like. “Uprightly” is you trusting in the Lord. Not one good thing will He withhold.

The psalmist, actually the king, will write a psalm in Chapter 21. Turn there with me. It's interesting the way that it starts off.

David declares as a king in Psalm 21,

(Psalm 21:1) “O LORD, in Your strength the king will be glad And in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!”

(Psalm 21:2) You have given him his heart's desire And You have not withheld the request of his lips."

It's an amazing thing, isn't it? "Oh, God just wants to take advantage of me." He doesn't want to take advantage of you. God has so many things. And I mean, how many times have I quoted that wonderful passage in Romans 8? I mean, if He spared not His own Son, how would He not with Him freely give us all things? Is God desirous of withholding anything? No. And He expects the same from you. It will be at that crossroad decision, and you'll have things in your life that you value. But God says, "Do you love Me more than these?" It'll happen. And that'll be the defining moment; not only the defining moment of who you are, but that which will define the course of your life.

The one thing that I wanted to point out in all of this is that we can lie to ourselves. And that's why it is necessary to have this defining moment. Because there are certain things that we might give up, maybe with some sort of reticence, and say to ourselves, "Well, I'd rather not give that up, but I think I can." So, we give it up, and we go, "Yay, I must be a believer." And God goes, "We haven't

gone to that which is most important to you yet.” And that's why the most important has to come.

There's an example of this, and I wanted to have you read it with me. It's found in 2 Chronicles 14. A guy by the name of Asa, he's the king of Judah at this particular juncture, and he starts off going pretty well. In fact, for the first 15 years of him being a king, things are going pretty well. And will probably continue to go well all the way up to 35 years of him reigning. That's very interesting, isn't it?

In fact, the way that it starts off in Chapter 14, it says, (2 Chronicles 14:2) “Asa did good and right in the sight of the LORD his God,

(2 Chronicles 14:3) for he removed the foreign altars and high places, tore down the sacred pillars...”

He commands his kingdom. He says, “You've got to follow God.” I mean, this guy's right on, isn't he?

Now, in the midst of this... And I don't know if you can see in many respects the little nuances that Scripture gives. So, it starts off, and it says, “Man, this guy was really on

fire for God.” And then it turns, and it goes, “But over here he's doing this.” It doesn't say it's bad. It just says, “Just take note of this.” So, what is he doing kind of on the side? Well, he builds fortified cities.

If you look in verse 6,

(2 Chronicles 14:6) “He built fortified cities in Judah, since the land was undisturbed...”

The land was undisturbed. He actually mentions that twice. So, why is the land undisturbed? Well, because he was pleasing God. “But just in case,” can you feel this with me? “Just in case, we're going to build fortified cities. We're doing the right thing.”

So, he goes on and says in verse 7,

(2 Chronicles 14:7) “For he said to Judah, “Let us build these cities and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars...”

“We'll be protected, and we'll prosper.” And so, they built them, and he prospered. And he had a pretty big army, about 580,000 troops. From what I understand, our army of active-duty soldiers is 450,000. So, a lot of men. So, he

has all these 580,000 men and soldiers and they wield bows, I guess he's been training them. They're valiant warriors; it says in verse 8, if you look at the passage. So, up to this point, things have been pretty calm, but then all of a sudden, the Ethiopians start showing their heads and they start attacking. They come up against them.

Unfortunately, the Ethiopians have about a million soldiers and about 300 chariots. So, the odds are sort of somewhat against Asa.

Asa does the right thing in verse 11. Read it with me.

(2 Chronicles 14:11) “Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, “LORD, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength...”

Basically, “The odds are against us.” I mean, even though he built a lot of cities and walls and he still feels like, “Okay, I think we're vulnerable here.” So, he turns to God, he cries to God. And in this, I just want you to note, God doesn't even use their walls to protect them.

It just says in verse 12,

(2 Chronicles 14:12) “So the LORD routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.”

I don't know exactly how it happened, but it seems like they didn't have to shoot their arrows; they didn't have to use their bows; they didn't have to do any of that stuff. God just made them run. So, they ran. And the victory was theirs. It's pretty wild, isn't it? And even the dread of the Lord fell upon the enemy.

So, we pick up in Chapter 15,

(2 Chronicles 15:1) “Now the Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded,

(2 Chronicles 15:2) and he went out to meet Asa and said to him...”

“Look, I have something to say to you. The Lord sent me to tell you...” This is like your pastor visiting you. So, he comes up to Asa, and he says, “Here's what God wants me to tell you...”

“... the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.”

Very simple message.

(2 Chronicles 15:3) “For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law.

(2 Chronicles 15:4) But in their distress they turned to the LORD God of Israel...”

He talks about Israel, which is that other kingdom besides Judah. And he's given the example that God left them when they left Him and He was with them when they were with Him.

He says this in verse 7,

(2 Chronicles 15:7) “But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work.”

So, Asa is kind of stimulated by this, and he goes in; he removes more idols, and it goes on and says in verse 8, he took courage, removed the abominable idols in the land. I don't want to emphasize this, but he even dethroned his mother because she was worshipping other idols, which would be a hard thing to do, I think. But it says that he assembled Jerusalem, and he says, “We're going to worship God.” So, he offers 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep. I

mean, this was an amazing thing. And they entered into a covenant with God. In fact, anybody that didn't say that they would swear by God and follow this covenant, he says, "We're going to kill you." So, he was really into this stuff. So, things were going pretty well and they all swore an oath and He removes his mother, like I said there in verse 16, and it says, basically, everything is going fine. It says, if you read with me,

(2 Chronicles 15:19) "And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign."

35 years. The guy's been doing right for 35 years. Now, he did build some stuff, but it was just in case, but he didn't use it. He put his trust in God, right? So, a lot of time has gone under the bridge, especially since this last war.

Now, we come into Chapter 16,

(2 Chronicles 16:1) "In the thirty-sixth year..."

What happens? Well, what happens is Baasha, the king of Israel, came up against him. Now, what he needs to do is just do what he did with Ethiopia. But for some reason, the timing in this, God knew. God knew what was in his

heart all along. And what this guy does is make a deal. He tries to make a deal with the Syrians. And he says, “Look, Israel's coming up against me. You come on my side; I know that we can make it through this together.” And he starts giving Syria a lot of money. In fact, he pulls money out of the temple to actually fund everything. It seems to work. Seems good.

(2 Chronicles 16:7) “At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, “Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand.”

(2 Chronicles 16:8) Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? ...”

“What happened to them? God took care of them for you.”

(2 Chronicles 16:9) “For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His...”

How would God know that? Oh, God knows. Certain things, you might toe the line, you're walking the road for 20 years, for 35 years, you're walking the line. You're doing the right thing. The timing, God knows that moment, that moment that will reveal your true heart. And so, it shows.

The seer says,

“... You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

(2 Chronicles 16:10) Then Asa was angry with the seer...”

Yeah, they always shoot the messenger, don't they?

“... and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him for this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.”

When people get angry, they don't just get angry at one person; they're just angry. I've had people come up to me, “This person was so angry at me.” I said, “It may not even be at you. It just may be at the circumstance.” And Asa was angry.

(2 Chronicles 16:11) “Now, the acts of Asa from first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.

(2 Chronicles 16:12) In the thirty-ninth year...”

That'd be 3 years later, right? That's the graciousness of God, right? “I'm going to give you time to get this right.”

3 years later,

“... Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians.

(2 Chronicles 16:13) So Asa slept with his fathers, having died in the forty-first year of his reign.”

Why is Scripture telling us this? The reason why Scripture is telling us this is to reveal that we can look like we're devoted; we can seemingly be devoted for a period of time until that defining moment comes into our life. It is the graciousness of God to reveal where we really stand. Because we lie to ourselves; we deceive ourselves in many ways. Like Peter, “I'll stay with You no matter what.” And God goes, “We'll see.” The defining moment

comes in our life. It is God's grace that does that. We finally come to that point, the true self is shown.

And the wonderful thing about this passage in Genesis 22 is 25 years with his son, that relationship with his son, and he did not hesitate, trusted God, believed that not one good thing would God withhold from him. It is that trusting in Him.

Scripture says in Genesis 22:13,

“Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket...”

“Thicket” kind of has a connotation of branches woven together. It's kind of in the Septuagint going into the Greek thought and into the realm of the soldiers began to weave a crown for Christ.

“Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns...”

It is a picture of his power being subdued and sacrificed.

We oftentimes think of Philippians 2, though He was in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a

thing to be grasped, but He emptied Himself of all that power and He became obedient.

“... and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

(Genesis 22:14) Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide...”

Once again, using the word “*rā'â*,” which makes reference to “see”. And God says, “This is the place where you will see that I will see to it that something is taken care of.” It is the hills of Moriah, which are the hills of Jerusalem, “And it is in this place that I'll provide. And you'll see, you'll see.”

“... as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.””

Proof of God's love and devotion will show itself right here. We're afraid to dedicate our lives. We're afraid to give our all to Him. When He asks the question, “Do you love Me more than these?” We go, “He's just going to take stuff from us.” He goes, “No, you're not listening to Me. Not one good thing will I withhold from you. I'm

devoted to you.” And He keeps calling us back to these hills of Moriah, and He says, “Look at that one hill where I designated that I would provide, that you would see where I love you enough to give that which I love most. If I didn't spare Him, would I not with Him freely give you all things?” And so, what a wonderful picture Scripture has given us and really reminding us that when those moments of decision come in your life, and they will come, with confidence, you can remind yourself, “I'm not really sacrificing anything. He is.”

### **Closing Prayer:**

Father, we come before You today and we give You our trust because You are trustworthy. You are the One that loves us. You are the One that sacrificed for us. You are the giver. For You so loved us that You gave. We gave nothing to You except heartache and pain and sorrow, but You kept giving to us. We cry out, “How could we sacrifice?” And You answer back, “How could you not? I would not withhold anything from you.”

The simplicity of this message is God is asking you to not withhold anything from Him. It is a sign of love. It is proof that you believe and that you trust Him. When Scripture calls upon you to sacrifice your life, or as Romans 12 would say, “present your body's living sacrifice,” this is not to your harm. This is to your good as One who would provide His best for you, more than you could even ask or think. Is it a sacrifice?