

# Genesis – Lesson 18

## Abraham's Test of Faith

### Read Genesis 22.

- (a) From 22:1-5, list several things that Abraham did which *demonstrate* that he fully trusted God. What *didn't* he do?

Abraham did a number of things that demonstrate that he fully trusted God: 1) he answered God when he called to him, 2) he cut wood for the burnt offering that he was instructed to make, 3) he traveled to the place that God had instructed him to go, and 4) he took Isaac up the mountain to be sacrificed. All of these things indicate that Abraham trusted God when told to sacrifice the child that was given to him as the child of *promise*. In all of this, Abraham never *questioned God*; after all, if Isaac was the child through which the promises of God would be fulfilled, then killing this child would *end* the possibility of those promises being fulfilled. But, Abraham trusted in God and did not question God's intentions through it all.

- (b) Considering Abraham's life until now, what do you think was God's *purpose* in testing him?

Abraham's life, until now, has been a series of *failures of faith*: when he first arrived, he fled to Egypt during the famine, he questioned God in regard to who would be his heir and he had a child with Hagar to solve the dilemma, and he struggled to trust in God when faced with Abimelech. So, it would appear that God, once again, puts his faith to the test, to see if Abraham would trust God in the most *difficult* request that God could make of him, namely, sacrificing the child given to him in his old age.

- (c) How does Ephesians 4:1-4 parallel in our lives the kind of *call* that God made of Abraham?

The call of God upon those that he sets aside for himself is a *call to obedience*. The Christian life is characterized by a continual state of obedience to the One who has rescued us. As followers of Jesus, we are called, like Abraham, to *sacrifice* our personal desires and dreams to the higher calling of humility, gentleness, patience, and a bond of unity with other believers. Even if God should call us to sacrifice *everything that we have*, our response must be one of eager willingness to do all that is required of us. This must be true in *contradistinction* to the world around us, which would have us to believe that our lives are *ours* to run.

- (a) What kind of *attitude* did Isaac have during this event? How does his attitude *compare* with Jesus when he was about to be executed?

In the story there is *no hint* that Isaac ever questioned his father, but seems to *willingly* submit himself to what is happening. Even when Abraham ties him to the altar and raises the knife, there does not seem to be a hint that Isaac is unwilling to go through what is happening. This is not to say that Isaac is unconcerned; certainly he would have been deeply troubled by what was about to happen, but he seems to trust his father and gives himself over to what Abraham is about to do. In many ways, this is similar to the *willingness* of Jesus to give himself over to the unjust treatment of crucifixion. Just like Isaac, Jesus *gives himself* to whatever his Father desires of him, even to the point of being executed on a cross.

- (b) What *proof* do you have in chapter 22 that the "angel of the Lord" was actually God himself?

Again, like before, the "angel" speaks in ways that only *God himself* could speak: he uses *personal pronouns* to tell Abraham that it was *his test* and that *he himself* is now assured that Abraham is a man of faith. Additionally, the "angel" swears *by himself* (v. 16) that he will keep his promises, and this is *clearly* language that only God himself could speak.

3. (a) Read Hebrews 11:17-19. What did Abraham *believe* when he went up the mountain about how God would keep his promises? Why does the writer of Hebrews *include* this detail?

Abraham knew that this child was the one through which the promises of God regarding a *future people* would come. Killing the child would, humanly speaking, end the possibility of those promises being fulfilled. Yet, God had instructed Abraham to sacrifice this child. The only solution to this contradiction, in Abraham's mind, was for God to *raise the child from the dead* after he had been sacrificed. After all, if killing the child ended the promises, but God's word *must stand*, Abraham deduced that God would have to raise the child from the dead in order for him to be the father of a nation. The writer of Hebrews includes this detail because it is the *single greatest assumption of faith* in the life of the great patriarch: if faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things *not seen* (11:1), then Abraham's belief in the *resurrecting power* of God sets him apart as a man of great faith. But, it is also included because it is a *foreshadowing* of the thinking of Christ himself as he went to the cross. Jesus trusted in God so fully that he believed that God would raise him up again, even though he had been executed. In other words, Abraham's belief in the *resurrection of Isaac* foreshadows the belief of Jesus that he, too, would be raised, and the *actual* resurrection of Jesus would be the *clearest sign* that God's promises are being fulfilled in him.

- (b) Read Romans 8:31-39. List as many *parallels* as you can between the sacrifice of Isaac and the sacrifice of Jesus, God's son.

The following parallels exist between the two stories: 1) both were born of *promise* through miraculous conception, 2) both were offered up by their *fathers*, 3) both were *raised* from the dead (Isaac figuratively, see 3a above), 4) both were the eventual fathers of an *elect* people, and 5) both either provided or were provided a *substitution* (see 3c below). In both cases, the sacrifice that was offered was designed to point to the fulfillment of God's *purposes* in justifying a people that belong to God, a people that can *never* be separated from God's love as their protective Father.

- (c) From Genesis 22:14, what is the *significance* of the name Abraham gives to the mountain?

Abraham called the mountain "the Lord will provide," reflecting the fact that God had provided an *alternative* or *substitute* for Isaac. This is, of course, the *heart* of the work of Jesus: just as we deserve to die for our sinfulness and rebellion against God, God, in his mercy, provides a substitute. For Isaac, that substitute was a ram; for us, that substitute is the Lamb of God slain on the cross.

4. How would you *connect* Romans 12:1-2 with the events of this chapter?

Just as Abraham was called to *sacrifice* that which was important to him (a child from his own body), so we are called to give our *bodies* as living sacrifices to God. The Christian is to live a life of sacrifice, of life *given* to God for his purpose. Those who have been paid for by Jesus and drawn to him by faith are now obligated to turn over the *entirety* of their earthly life to him to be used by him for whatever purpose he desires. This is an act of *worship*; the giving of one's life over to Christ by faith is the *ultimate* (and acceptable) form of worship.

### Read Genesis 23.

5. (a) From 22:20-24, list other *relatives* of Abraham. Why does Moses *include* this list?

Abraham's brother, Nahor, also had children, through his wife Milcah: Uz, Buz, Kemuel, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel, and through his concubine Reuman: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah. Moses probably includes this list: 1) because it explains the lineage of Isaac's wife Rebekah (see v. 22b), and 2) it separates the life of Abraham into the years of focus on him versus the years that will be focused on Isaac, as Isaac now becomes the primary character of the storyline.

(b) How *old* was Sarah when she died? About how *old* was Isaac (see 17:17)? Is there any *significance* to Isaac's age at his mother's death?

**Sarah was 127 years old when she died, and Isaac was probably about 36 (given that she was 90 when God promised she would bear a child a year later). While there is no *direct* significance to this fact, it is important to notice that Isaac had more than 35 years with his mother, and probably had a close relationship with her, given that he was her *only* child.**

(c) Why did Abraham *insist* on buying the field to bury his wife (see also 25:8-10)? What *message* does this send to the Israelite readers of this book?

**Abraham did not want to be buried on *borrowed land*; he insisted on paying for the field so that he and his heirs would have this land forever. After all, God had told him that this land was his to begin with, so it seemed only fair to Abraham to give some sort of remuneration to those who owned it. This would insure that the "family plot" would always remain in the family, and the future Israelites would be able to see this land as their own. Since the great patriarch and his family were buried there, the Israelites would have good reason to settle there; this would be their *ancestral* land.**