

Faithfulness ... During Times of Uncertainty

“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Matthew 6:30)

Tuesday, August 9, 2022 5:00 p.m.

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-14

Time of Action: about 2050 B.C.

Place of Action: Beersheba and Moriah

I. INTRODUCTION. Tests! Most people don’t like them, whether they are tests in school or tests of our faith. However, both are necessary. School tests reveal how well we have learned the classroom material. A test of our faith reveals the authenticity of our spiritual progress. Abraham waited for years for God to fulfill His promise to give him a son who would be his heir. But after God gave him the promised son, Isaac, He suddenly instructed Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering. Abraham found himself faced with his greatest test of faith.

II. LESSON BACKGROUND. Abram was seventy-five when he set out from Haran toward the land of Canaan (see Genesis 12:4). **God promised that he would become a “great nation”** (see Genesis 12:2) **and that he would have a son** (see Genesis 15:4). Abram continued to believe that God would make this happen, although he didn’t understand how, considering how old he and Sarai were. At the suggestion of Sarai (see Genesis 16:1-2), Abram took her handmaid Hagar, and fathered Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born (see Genesis 16:3-4). Of course, this was not what God intended, and the decision had long-term consequences.

When Abram was ninety-nine, the Lord appeared to him again, renewing His covenant (see Genesis 17:1-19). Now God promised Abram that he would be “a father of many nations” (see Genesis 17:4), and He changed Abram’s name to Abraham to reflect this (see Genesis 17:5). God also gave Sarai a new name, “Sarah” (see Genesis 17:15). Before long, the Lord appeared to Abraham and Sarah and told them that they would have a child themselves within a year (see Genesis 18:10). Hearing this, Sarah laughed (see Genesis 18:12), something that Abraham himself had done before (see Genesis 17:17). Just as God promised, Abraham and Sarah had a son in their old age (see Genesis 21:1-5) and named him “Isaac” which means “laughter” or “he laughs.” But when Ishmael and Isaac, who was the younger of the two, started to grow up, strife began to develop between them (see Genesis 21:9). As a result, God told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, and promised to make him a nation as well (see Genesis 21:12-14). After a period of “many days” (see Genesis 21:34), during which Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines, he was called to face the greatest test of his life (see Genesis 22:1).

III. ABRAHAM'S TEST OF FAITH (Genesis 22:1-2)

A. God presents the test for Abraham (Genesis 22:1). Our first verse says, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.” The phrase “after these things” refers to all the other things Abraham had experienced, and all the tests, hardships, and difficulties he had gone through up to this point. First, he passed the “family test,” when he had to leave his loved ones and step out by faith to go to a new land (see Genesis 11:27-12:5). This was followed by the “famine test,” which Abraham failed because he doubted God and went down to Egypt for help (see Genesis 12:10-13:4). When they returned to the land of Canaan, Abraham passed the “fellowship test” when he gave Lot the first choice of the pastureland (see Genesis 13:5-18). He also passed the “fight test” when he defeated the four kings who had taken Lot captive (see Genesis 14:1-16), and he also passed the “fortune test” when he said no to Sodom’s wealth (see Genesis 14:17-24). But he failed the “fatherhood test” when Sarah got impatient with God and suggested that Abraham have a child by Hagar (see Genesis 16:1-4). When the time came to send Ishmael away, Abraham passed the “farewell test,” even though it broke his heart (see Genesis 21:11-14).

When God called out to Abraham, He “said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.” Abraham quickly answered the Lord’s call.

B. God’s instructions for Abraham (Genesis 22:2). “And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Notice the tender way God spoke of “Isaac” as “thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.” This may remind us of God’s “only begotten Son” (see John 3:16), Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly God carefully chose these specific words to highlight the affection Abraham had for his son; an affection that was about to be put to a severe test. Although Abraham was also Ishmael’s father, Isaac is called his “only son” because he was the son of promise to Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael was Abraham’s son by an illegitimate relationship with Hagar and had been cast out. Now only Isaac was left. God told Abraham to journey to “the land of Moriah” which is later identified with the place in Jerusalem where Solomon built the temple (see II Chronicles 3:1). Once Abraham reached his destination, he was to take Isaac and do as God said, “offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Once Abraham arrived in “the land of Moriah,” God would tell him on which mountain to offer his son as a “burnt offering.” To obey this command would have been extremely hard for Abraham or anyone for that matter. He had waited many years for this son God had promised him. Now he was told to give up his beloved son.

IV. ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENCE TO GOD (Genesis 22:3-10)

A. The main journey (Genesis 22:3-4).

1. (vs. 3). *“And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.”* On the day of departure, “Abraham rose up early in the morning.” He had done the same thing when he sent Hagar and Ishmael away (see Genesis 21:14). This time it was Abraham’s turn to leave on an uncertain journey. Abraham “saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering.” Since Abraham was now well over a hundred years old, it seems remarkable that he put the saddle on his own donkey. In addition, Abraham himself apparently “clave” or split the “wood” that was needed for the “burnt offering” even though he “took two of his young men (or servants) with him” and “Isaac his son.” The four of them headed for “the place of which God had told him,” Or the land of Moriah. Abraham heard God’s word and immediately obeyed it by faith. He knew that God’s will never contradicts His promise, so Abraham held on to the promise that “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (see Genesis 21:12). No doubt, Abraham believed that even if God allowed him to slay his son, He could raise Isaac from the dead (see Hebrew 11:17-19). *Remember, faith does not demand explanations, faith rests on promises.*

2. (vs. 4). *“Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.”* On the “third day” of the journey, Abraham looked up and “afar off,” or at a distance, he “saw the place” where he was to offer the sacrifice.

B. The final stage of the journey (Genesis 22:5-6).

1. (vs. 5). *“And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”* Upon arriving at the place, Abraham told his two servants to “Abide ye here with the ass.” Their job was to watch the donkey. Remember that everyone has a part to play in God’s plan even though it may seem small. Still speaking to his two servants, Abraham went on to say, *“I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you.”* This statement emphasizes the fact that Abraham was confident that Isaac would return with him even though he was committed to following the Lord’s command completely. It’s evident that Abraham had faith in God’s promise to fulfill the covenant through Isaac. He was certain that God would either spare Isaac or raise him from the dead if necessary (see Hebrews 11:19).

2. (vs. 6). *“And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.”* The fact that Abraham laid the “wood of the burnt offering” on Isaac’s back indicates that Isaac was not a small child at this time, but probably a teenager. Whatever his age, Isaac was strong enough to carry the wood up the hill to the place of sacrifice. This whole story has many similarities to what happened to Jesus Christ, and this appears to be similar to Jesus carrying His cross to His

place of sacrifice (see Mark 15:20-22; John 19:16-18). After putting the wood on Isaac's back, Abraham carried "the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together." The "fire" here was probably a fire pot filled with burning coals. Having everything they needed for the sacrifice, (except the animal), "they went both of them together" toward their destination.

C. The conversation between father and son (Genesis 22:7-8).

1. (vs. 7). *"And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"* As they walked up the mountain, Isaac spoke to Abraham addressing him as "My father." This must have caused Abraham to feel a knife-like pain in his own heart. As they continued to walk, Isaac asked the obvious question: "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham must have dreaded Isaac's question which was inevitable since his son knew they had everything they needed for a sacrifice except one thing, "the lamb for a burnt offering." We should not think that Isaac was suspicious of his father. Their relationship was based on their faith in Jehovah and their mutual trust and love for each other. It was Isaac's curiosity that prompted him to ask, "where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

2. (vs. 8). *"And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so, they went both of them together."* The good relationship between father and son made it easy for Abraham to give an answer that satisfied Isaac. He said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." Abraham was saying that God would have an animal ready when the time comes.

D. The ultimate demonstration of faith (Genesis 22:9-10).

1. (vs. 9). *"And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood."* Although the text doesn't say so, this verse indicates that the Lord must have given Abraham specific instructions concerning the exact place where the sacrifice was to be made. We are told that they arrived at the "place which God had told him of." First, Abraham "built an altar." This would have been a stone "altar" prepared specifically for sacrifices. Then Abraham "laid the wood in order" on the "altar." Finally, Abraham "bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood." It would be normal for a person to want to flee if he knew he was about to be killed. But Isaac believed like his father, that they would return home together because he submitted to being tied up without resisting. His submission reminds us of the passive way the Messiah responded to His captors: "He was afflicted, yet he

opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (see Isaiah 53:7).

2. (vs. 10). *“And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”* Although Isaac was the heir, and his father’s most priceless possession on earth, Abraham would not even let his heir get in the way of his faith in Jehovah. Therefore, “Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” I’m sure the question most people would have at this point is would Abraham have completed the deed? The text leaves no doubt that he would have, for he “took the knife” and prepared to “slay his son” as a sacrifice.

V. GOD PROVIDES FOR ABRAHAM (Genesis 22:11-14)

A. The interruption of the sacrifice (Genesis 22:11-12).

1. (vs. 11). *“And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.”* At this point, Abraham still didn’t know that God was ready to stop the descent of the knife. Although Abraham had not actually physically slain his son, he had done the equivalent of killing him in his mind and his will. So, just before Abraham struck the fatal blow, “the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham.” In the Old Testament, “the angel of the Lord” is often used synonymously with God Himself (see Exodus 3:2-4). In fact, many believe, as I do that “the angel of the Lord” was the preincarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ who appeared many times on earth prior to His arrival in human flesh when He was born to the Virgin Mary. Abraham quickly responded to “the Angel of the Lord” saying “Here am I,” indicating that Abraham was available to the Lord.

2. (vs. 12). *“And he said, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now, I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.”* Once the Angel of the Lord got Abraham’s attention, He said “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him.” God allowed Abraham to proceed right to the last moment. The knife was already in the air (see Genesis 22:10) before the Lord intervened. Imagine how Abraham must have felt when the Angel of the Lord told him not to kill his son. The Lord recognized Abraham’s faith saying, “for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” As we learned at the beginning of the text, this was a test of faith, but Abraham didn’t know that. He had no assurance that he wouldn’t have to literally sacrifice his son. Abraham had not held back from God that which was most dear to him, his “only son.” Abraham had passed the test of his devotion, trust, and obedience to the Lord. Notice that the Angel of the Lord said “thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” The fact that the Angel of the Lord said “from me” indicates that He was identifying Himself as God, and therefore He was God.

B. The sacrificial substitution (Genesis 22:13-14).

1. (vs. 13). *“And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.”* Immediately after being prevented from sacrificing his son, “Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.” Earlier in the journey, Abraham had told Isaac that God would provide a lamb (see Genesis 22:8). Now he found his own promise to Isaac fulfilled by “a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.” The term “thicket” refers to a bush. Abraham captured the “ram” and used it as “a burnt offering in the stead of his son.” *Abraham used the “ram” as a substitute for his son, much like God giving His Son as a substitute for sinners.* However, in that case, the heavenly Father did not stop the sacrifice. If He had, no salvation would have been possible for the human race.

2. (vs. 14). *“And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.”* When Abraham completed the sacrifice, he “called the name of that place Jehovahjireh” or literally, “the Lord provides.” Abraham went on to explain the meaning of “Jehovahjireh” saying “as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” In other words, Abraham was saying that the name “Jehovahjireh” means “the Lord provides” or “the Lord sees.” Perhaps both ideas should be understood here. In Abraham’s case, God had seen the motives of his heart and knew that his love was genuine. The Lord also had provided an acceptable substitute for Isaac. Both Abraham and Isaac prove that faith is always rewarded, for God is the One who sees and provides for those who trust in Him.

VI. Conclusion. Abraham was presented with an awesome challenge to his faith. God asked him to give back the son He had given to him as a sacrifice. Abraham passed the test of his faith by doing exactly what God required. At the last moment, the Angel of the Lord stopped the sacrifice and provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac. God does not call us to sacrifice our children, but He does require faith proved by obedience.

Each day we should evaluate the *quality* of our faith (see James 2:20), not the *quantity* of our faith (see Matthew 17:20). Remember that we express our faith by obedience to God, but be ready, because sometimes obedience can cause us to suffer.

Questions:

1. What did God promise to Abram and Sarai?
2. What did Sarai do to try to help God with his promise?
3. Why did God change Abram name and what did he change it to?
4. Why did God say to Abraham in Genesis 22:2 that Isacc was his only son?
 - a. “And he said, Take now thy son, thine **only son** Isaac, whom thou lovest, ...
5. How did God tempt Abraham and how did he deliver him?