

Lesson 10 ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

READING: Genesis 22; Hebrews 11: 17-19

AIM: To show how God severely tested Abraham's faith and the results of that testing.

1. BACKGROUND

The fulfilment of the promises of God depended upon Abraham having a son. Because Sarah was childless, she gave her handmaid Hagar as wife to Abraham and she gave birth to a boy, **Ishmael**, whom Abraham wanted to be his heir. But God told Abraham, Ishmael was not the promised son, for the promised son was to come through Sarah (Gen. 17:18-19). God said the name of the promised son would be **Isaac**.

Meanwhile, Abraham's name was changed **from Abram to Abraham** (Gen. 17:5). Abram means "Lofty Father", but Abraham means "Father of a Great Multitude", and in keeping with this name. God had decreed that he was to be a Father of many nations".

Abraham believed that God would do what He had promised, although it seemed impossible that Abraham and his wife, both very old, could have a son. Nevertheless, fourteen years after the birth of Ishmael when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90, Isaac was born, the one through whom the "seed" would come to bruise the serpent on the head, and in whom "all nations shall be blessed".

From a human point of view it was impossible for Sarah to provide Abraham with a son. Not only was she "barren" but she was past the age of child-bearing. Abraham, too, was old, but with God nothing is impossible (Gen. 18: 11-14; Matt. 19:26). There is a deep lesson here for us (Rom. 4:17-22; Heb 11:11)

2. ABRAHAM FACES A SUPREME TEST Genesis 22:1-2

Fourteen years is a long time, yet Abraham was required to wait that long for Isaac. He showed **PATIENCE** in faith. Isaac was so named because he brought happiness (laughter) to his parents. Thus Abraham, in the "end" of his days, had ample evidence of the power and faithfulness of God.

Isaac, naturally, was very deeply loved by his parents as he grew to manhood. The time came however when God said to Abraham:

"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee unto the land of Moriah and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains". (Gen. 22:2)

By a burnt offering, God meant that Abraham was to slay Isaac, and burn his body as an offering to God. This was the great test for Abraham. Abraham loved Isaac, but obedience to God was the supreme thing in his life.

(The word used as "tempt" in Gen. 22:1 means "test" or "prove" as in the Revised Version. God tests people, but He does not "tempt" them).

3. ABRAHAM PREPARED TO OFFER UP ISAAC Gen. 22:3-14

Early next morning Abraham, who was now living near Beer-sheba, saddled his ass, prepared wood for the burnt offering and set off with two of his young men and Isaac to the place appointed. That place was Moriah (meaning "vision") where Solomon's temple was later built (II Chron. 3:1)

Three days later, having come near the place where Isaac was to be offered, Abraham said to his young men "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you".

Abraham seemed assured, despite the order to stay Isaac, that they **both** would "**come again**".

As they drew near the mountain, Isaac said to his father, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham replied "**God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering**", showing that although what God was asking him to do was a very hard thing, nevertheless he believed God would see that all was well.

They came to the place. Abraham built the altar, laid the wood in position, and bound a submissive Isaac on the wood. Abraham took the knife to slay his son. At the crucial moment an angel of God called upon him to stay his hand. God now had ample evidence of the faith of Abraham, knowing that he would even give up his son if God demanded it. There is no doubt too, that Abraham himself would have developed a much stronger faith in God as a result of this experience.

Looking behind him Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket. He used this as the sacrifice instead of Isaac. God had indeed provided the lamb, as Abraham told Isaac He would. And as Abraham thought upon all this, he named the place "Jehovah-jireh", which means. "**The Lord will provide**"(Gen. 22:14). What will the Lord provide? A suitable sacrifice whereby **man might attain unto salvation**.

4. **THE PROMISES REPEATED** (Gen. 22:15-18)

Following Abraham's obedience and great faith under supreme trial God again declared the promises to him. He promised to:

- (1) **Bless Abraham**
- (2) **Multiply his seed**
- (3) **Cause his son (THE Lord Jesus) to "Possess the gate of his enemies"**.
- (4) **Cause all nations to be blessed in his seed.**

What is meant by "possess the gate of his enemies"? In ancient times, when cities were walled, to "possess the gate" would be to control the city. None, friend or foe, could go in or out without permission (in a sense – judgement) of the one controlling the gate. Thus it is a figure meaning that Christ will triumph over his enemies and take over the reins of judgement and government of the whole world.

5. **ABRAHAM BELIEVED IN RESURRECTION** Heb. 11:17-19

The writer of Hebrews (chap. 11:17-19) declares that Abraham knew that the promises made to him could only come about through Isaac. Abraham was willing to offer up his son as a sacrifice; Isaac was obedient to his father. Possibly Abraham would have to explain to Isaac what God had commanded, for Isaac was a young man at this time and could easily have refused to submit to the will of his father. Abraham demonstrated his faith in the resurrection of the dead. He knew that it was impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:13-18). If therefore, Isaac, the seed of promise was slain, God would raise him from the dead and so fulfil His promise.

Isaac's life was spared. He was in likeness however, as one brought again from certain death. This was to Abraham a "**resurrection from the dead**"(Heb. 11:19). We can readily see how Isaac's life gave promise of "better things" in the life of Jesus Christ:

- (1) The scene of the sacrifice of Isaac was a mountain in “the land of Moriah”, 1,000 years later on this same hill, the Temple was built by Solomon. 1,000 years later again in this vicinity, Jesus the promised seed of Abraham came as the one the Lord would provide (Isa. 53:5-8; John 1:29)
- (2) Isaac was obedient to the will of his father, even to death. The Son of God submitted to his Father’s will and was obedient even to death on the cross – **“Not my will, but Thine be done”**.
- (3) Isaac was received from the dead “in a figure”. Christ was literally raised on the third day.

Thus God revealed to Abraham in the severe trial he placed him under, that before the promised eternal inheritance upon earth became a reality, the Son of promise would suffer death, and would be raised from the dead. Abraham “rejoiced to see my day” said Jesus, “and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56)

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Through the greater part of his life Abraham had no son. The fulfilment of the promises depended upon him having a seed. Thus Abraham’s faith was tested all the time. Notwithstanding he had to face the extreme test of offering up Isaac.

By such means God puts His servants to the proof. He tests them but does not tempt them or put stumbling blocks in their path (James 1:13). Under test Abraham believed God, showed his faith by his actions, and became known as the **“Friend of God”** (James 2:21-23)

Abraham’s example is one of faithful submission to the will of God, and God assured him a part in His future Kingdom. The same assurance of a part in the kingdom is for all who follow faithful Abraham’s example, for Christ is to return to reward his friends, to subdue his enemies, and to establish God’s kingdom over all the earth.

REFERENCE LIBRARY

- “The Visible Hand of God”, chapter 7**
- “The Ways of Providence”, chapters 3 and 4**
- “Elpis Israel”, part 2, chapter 2**
- “The Letter to the Hebrews” section 5 (d).**
- “Abraham”, chapters 11 to 14 and 18 to 20.**

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the events of God’s supreme test of Abraham’s faith when he was asked to sacrifice Isaac.
2. How do the events surrounding the command to Abraham to slay Isaac teach resurrection?
3. How was the work of Jesus foreshadowed in the offering up of Isaac?
4. Explain fully the significance to Abraham and to us of the test to Abraham’s faith when God asked him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.
5. What evidence do we have of Abraham’s faith in resurrection?