

Abraham's Faith is Tested

(Genesis 21 - 22)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Suppose God gave you something you really wanted, something you had even prayed for many times. Then God said He wanted you to give it away. How would you feel toward God? Would you be angry with God or would you have faith to obey Him? Will the man in our story today have faith to obey God in his hard test?

Opening Prayer

Father, sometimes we don't understand Your ways. Sometimes it's hard to follow You and be a Christian in this pagan world. But Lord, we know Your way is the right way. Help us Lord, to have the faith we need to trust and obey You, even when it doesn't seem to make sense to us. Help us to be like Abraham. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

When troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. (James 1:2-3)

Lesson

Last week we began a new series of lessons on the life of Abraham, the father of the children of Israel, the first Jew.

To review, let me ask you some questions:

1. What did God ask Abraham to do? (To leave his country and go to a place he did not know.)
2. What did God promise Abraham? (That He would make his descendants into a great nation.)

3. What happened to Abraham's nephew, Lot? (He chose to live in Sodom and Gomorrah and lost everything he possessed.)
4. What should we do to be sure we don't miss out on God's great plan for our lives? (Trust and obey God.)

Last week we learned that when Abraham was seventy-five years old, God made a promise to him that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth, if you could possibly count it. But there was one small problem. Sarah and Abraham hadn't been able to have any children.

This morning we'll be picking up the story about 30 years later and they still hadn't had any children! This makes God's promise that Abraham's descendants would be a great nation seem impossible, doesn't it? But, we know nothing is impossible for God.

Open your Bibles and read with me from Genesis 21...

Genesis 21:1-3

The LORD kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. And Abraham named their son Isaac.

Sarah was amused to have a baby at the age of 99. So, she named him Isaac, which means "laughter." Can you imagine how happy she was to finally have a baby after so many years of waiting?

Genesis 21:5-7

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. And Sarah declared, "God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!"

God said they would have a whole nation full of descendants and they knew they had to have at least one to start with. Weren't they patient? It's hard to wait for a long time to get something you really want that's been promised to you, isn't it? They waited 30 years for God to fulfill His promise to them. But they never gave up hope because they knew that God always keeps His promises.

But some time later God tested Abraham by asking him to do what must have been the hardest thing in the world for him to do.

Genesis 22:1-2

Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."

Isaac was a young man by this time. How could God possibly fulfill His promise to Abraham's descendants if Isaac was killed now? God was truly testing Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice the promised son for whom he had waited so long. God wanted Abraham to show that he put Him first. God never intended to allow him to kill his son.

Abraham didn't understand God's purposes, but he obeyed and began the journey the next morning...

Genesis 22:3

The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about.

Surely Abraham could not understand why God was asking him to kill his only son. Can you imagine how hard this was for Abraham?

Abraham knew God loved him and that he could trust Him even in this hard test. Abraham was showing how much faith he had in God by obeying Him and not questioning.

Did you know that God tests you and me? He uses these tests to strengthen our faith.

James 1:2-3 says, *"When troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow."*

Tests strengthen and confirm our faith in God and they make us better able to help others who are also going through hard times.

God wants you to have faith to obey Him even when it's hard. He wants us to remember that He is in control of all things and has a special plan that He is carrying out in each of our lives.

Are there times when it is hard to trust God? Maybe during a thunderstorm? Hard times cause us to put more faith in God. Can you think of a time when you felt helpless and sad? Have your parents argued or have they been separated or divorced? Has someone in your family died? Has someone made a promise to you that they didn't or couldn't keep? These are all hard things that could make you get angry with God or feel discouraged. But, if you realize God is in control and you put your faith in His promises, you'll obey even though you don't understand, just like Abraham did. When you live by faith in God that means you truly believe God's promises and obey Him no matter what. Sometimes that isn't easy, but God will provide strength and courage. Remember that God doesn't cause the bad things to happen, but He promises that all things will work together for good for those that love God and are called according to His purpose.

What are some of the promises of God? He will:

- Never leave you.
- Always comfort you.
- Strengthen you.
- Supply all your needs.
- Be your helper.
- Direct your paths.

God had asked Abraham to do a very difficult thing, but Abraham was so confident in the Lord that he immediately obeyed.

Genesis 22:4-6

On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. "Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back." So, Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together,

Notice that Abraham said, "we will come back to you." He knew that God had some plan to fulfill the promise even if he didn't know what it was. He knew that God could even bring Isaac back to life again if He wanted to (Hebrews 11:19). Abraham had faith that both he, and his son, would return.

Can you imagine what Isaac was thinking about all this? Let's read...

Genesis 22:7-8

Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

Abraham's answer showed that he had faith in God's greater purpose in all things.

Genesis 22:9

When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

So Abraham built an altar and tied his only son to it! Notice that Isaac did not try to resist his father. He also had faith in God and was obedient. They both knew that God never makes mistakes. They trusted God completely and knew they must obey Him.

Genesis 22:10-12

And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!" "Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son."

As Abraham raised the knife to kill Isaac, the Lord stopped him. Now God knew that Abraham loved Him more than even his only son. Abraham had shown his faith by obeying God without questioning.

God wants you to have faith to obey Him even when it's hard. Do you have that kind of faith in God? Did you know that your actions show how much you really trust Him? If you are really God's child and your faith is in Him, others will know it because of the way you act--you will obey the Lord even when it's hard.

When Abraham lifted the knife to kill Isaac, God knew that he would hold nothing back, Abraham was willing to give everything to God, even his only son.

Genesis 22:13

Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son

God provided a substitute; Abraham offered the ram instead of Isaac.

This story is a wonderful picture of what God did for us. He provided a way for your sins and mine to be forgiven. He sent the Lord Jesus, His only son, to die on the cross in our place. He was our Substitute. Jesus didn't deserve to die, for He was innocent, without sin. But He was willing to die for your sins and mine. We should have died for our own sins, but God provided the perfect sacrifice to take our place. Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. Acts 16:31 says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

Abraham had faith to obey God even when it was difficult. To obey God is not always easy, but it always pays in the end. God was testing Abraham. God did not want to physically harm Isaac; He just wanted Abraham to be willing to give up his son, just as God the Father gave His Son.

Closing Prayer

Lord, help us to show our faith in You by obeying You even when it's hard. Help us to put our faith in You even though we don't understand why things happen the way they do. Help others to know by our actions this week that we are trusting in You, Lord. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

Review Questions:

1. Why did God's promise that Abraham's descendants would be a great nation seem impossible? (He was 75 when he got the promise and when he was 100 he still hadn't had any children!)
2. What does the name "Isaac" mean and why did Sarah call him that? (Isaac means "laughter." Sarah thought it was funny that she had a child at the age of 99.)
3. How long did Abraham and Sarah have to wait for God to fulfill His promise? (30 years)
4. How did God test Abraham's faith? (God asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering.)
5. What was it that God wanted to prove? (That Abraham loved God above all others, including his only son. He wanted Abraham to be willing to give up his son, just as God, the Father, gave His Son.)
6. Do you think Abraham understood God's purposes? (No!) Why did he obey? (Because he trusted God and believed God had a good reason to ask him to do such a thing. He had faith in God.)
7. Why does God test our faith? (To strengthen our faith. When our faith is confirmed we are better able to help others who are going through hard times.)
8. What helps us to have the faith to obey God even when it's hard? (Remembering He is in control of all things and has a special plan that He is carrying out in each of our lives.)
9. When you live by faith in God that means you truly believe God's promises. What are some of the promises of God? (He will never leave you, always comfort you, strengthen you, supply all your needs, be your helper, direct your paths...)
10. What did Isaac do? (He didn't try to run away. He, too, showed that he had faith in God's greater purpose in all things.)
11. What did God do when Abraham raised the knife to kill Isaac? (God provided a sheep, a substitute.)
12. What is the lesson for us in this story? What is this story a wonderful picture of? (God provided a substitute for us. Because of our sins, we deserve to die; but God the Father gave His only Son, Jesus, to die in our place. And, now we get everlasting life in Heaven!)