



BEGINNINGS

A Study of the Book of Genesis

Sanctuary Bible Studies – Woodbury Lutheran Church

Session 18, Ramming a Lesson Home (Genesis 22)

Genesis 21 gave us the birth of Isaac, the long-awaited child of promise. The chapter ended with Abraham sinking his roots deep into the fulfilled promises of God. He cuts a treaty with Abimelech, a neighboring king, and plants a tamarisk tree at Beersheba. Yet every time Abraham was ordered to follow a command, there was a promise attached to it, something in it for him. In Chapter 22, God presents an ultimate test of obedience that puts the covenant promise itself at stake – a command to sacrifice the child of promise – with no assurance of gain or reward.

1. TIME FOR A TEST (Vss. 1-5)

- Vs. 1, “tested”: God does not tempt (James 1:13) but tests us (Exodus 20:20; Deut. 8:2; Judges 3:4). When God tests, He stretches to the limit some attribute, value, or quality. In a strange way, tests such as this one are not just for us but for God – they measure the place He has in our lives. Look at vs. 12 for the purpose of this test: “Now I know that you fear God.” God may have known cognitively (in His omniscience) that Abraham revered Him, but now He knows it in experience. Knowledge is always both.

In addition to God’s own stated purpose for the test, these are often suggested:

- To strengthen or complete Abraham’s faith (James 2:20-22) and the faith of others (Hebrews 11:17-19)
- To distinguish the true God from other pagan gods who, it was believed, required human sacrifice
- To offer a picture of a father’s pain in offering up his Son, as God eventually did with Jesus
- The poignancy of the test is heightened by God’s words, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac...”
- Vs. 1, “Moriah”: 2 Chronicles 3:1 identifies Moriah as the temple mount (Mount Zion) in Jerusalem.
- Vs. 3, Early the next morning”: Once again Abraham’s obedient response is quick.
- Vs. 4, “on the third day”: The three days heighten the test as Abraham has time to consider God’s command.
- Vs. 5, “We will worship, and then we will come back to you”: These words are a testimony to Abraham’s continuing faith in the promises of God and in God.

2. A SECOND STATEMENT OF FAITH (Vss. 6-8)

In vs. 8, Abraham further shows his confidence in God as he tells Isaac, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” The words find fulfillment in vs. 13 but ultimately in Jesus, the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29, 36).

3. **RAMMING A LESSON HOME (Vss. 9-14)**

- Christians cannot read vs. 9 without thinking of Jesus Christ stretched out on a cross. John 3:16 and Romans 8:32 may have this verse in mind.
- Vs. 10 leaves no doubt that Abraham would have sacrificed Isaac, probably slitting his throat. The act is somewhat less horrific when one considers that human sacrifice was a ritual practiced in Canaanite religion at the time. Still, this was his beloved son, and all the promises of God were at stake.
- Vss. 11-12: The angel of the LORD (with urgency, "Abraham! Abraham!") stops Abraham from killing Isaac and gives assurance that Abraham has passed the test: "I know that you fear God." This is the only time in Scripture where the person tested does not have to complete the act to "pass" the test. James writes that "Abraham's faith and his actions were working together...his faith was made complete by what he did." (James 2:20-22)
- Vss. 13-14. God provides the ram for the sacrifice. In all of Israel's future sacrifices, God would provide the rams, lambs, and bulls. Here for the first time God provides a substitute. Vicarious or substitutionary atonement begins here and prefigures Jesus Christ who is sacrificed in our place. Abraham calls this "mountain of the LORD" (a phrase later used for the temple mount) "the LORD Will Provide" or, more literally, "The LORD Will See To It." God is concerned not just with big, eternal issues but with everyday details.

"All thy vexations were but my trials of thy love, and thou hast strangely stood the test." Prospero to his son, Ferdinand, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

4. **THE COVENANT RENEWED (Vss. 15-19)**

Emphasized here is the immeasurable number of Abraham's descendents and how they will take possession of their enemies' cities, literally, "gates." The promise extends to "all nations," no doubt in Jesus' mind in Matthew 28:19.

5. **NEWS FROM A DISTANT LAND (Vss. 20-24)**

News from Haran informed Abraham that his brother Nahor had been blessed with 12 sons, ancestors of the 12 Aramean tribes. Significant in the list of names is Bethuel, the father of Rebekah, destined to be Isaac's wife. God would keep His promises "in the family."

BEGINNINGS

1. **God completes our faith by asking us to bear the unbearable, do the unreasonable, and expect the impossible.**
2. **The true test of obedience comes when no clear gain or reward is in sight.**
3. **God will provide – sometimes at the last minute.**
4. **God can be found not only in life's grand designs but also in its everyday details.**
5. **From the beginning, God has provided the necessary sacrifice.**
6. **God wants faith and action working in tandem.**
7. **Jesus is God's "Isaac without the ram."**