

ABRAHAM'S FAITH IS TESTED

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

One of the greatest lessons in faith was demonstrated by Abraham when he prepared to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of Moriah. It was a great test of his faith. This test was not a temptation to do evil, but a trial to mature his faith in the Lord (cf. Deut. 8:16). James declared that Abraham was an excellent example of faith (James 2:21-23). His faith was demonstrated by immediate obedience to the Lord (Gen 22:3), and by absolute confidence in the Lord. He believed that the Lord would keep His promise to provide a posterity through Isaac, whether He did it by providing a sacrifice in place of his son (22:8) or by resurrecting his son from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19). Such faith and obedience made him the "Friend of God" (James 2:23).

Another lesson in faith was seen in Abraham's purchase of a burial place for his wife in the land which the Lord had promised to him (15:7-8). Although the Lord had promised him and his posterity the whole land of Canaan, he owned none of it after he had been there for over sixty years. In fact, the only piece of land that he owned in the promised land was a field that he purchased from Ephron the Hittite in which he could bury Sarah, his wife (23:8ff). This field contained the cave which became the burial place, not only of Sarah, but also of Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and finally, Jacob. By faith Abraham buried his wife in the land of promise.

One more lesson in faith was shown by Abraham's instructions to his servant (probably Eliezer) to find a bride for Isaac among his relatives in Mesopotamia. Abraham made his servant take a vow that he would not to seek a wife for his son among the daughters of the Canaanites for they were a cursed people (24:3; cf. 9:25). Neither was he to take his son out of the land of Canaan to get a wife, because God had given him Canaan and he was to stay in that land (24: 4-10). Abraham's servant was fully dependent upon God to bless him on this difficult assignment (24:12ff). God answered his prayer and he quickly found Rebekah and she returned to Canaan with Abraham's servant to become Isaac's wife. By faith Abraham found a proper wife for Isaac without any compromise of the principle of separation.

I. The Test of Abraham's Faith — 22:1-24

A. God's Command — 22:1- 2

1. The purpose of God's command — 22:1

22:1 — There are three statements in this verse which indicate the purpose of this test.

a. "After these things" — this seems to refer to the events of Abraham's life since he left Ur. His entire life after leaving Ur of the Chaldees had been designed to build his character of faith. His entire life had been one of training in preparation for this final supreme test (22:12).

b. "God did tempt Abraham" — tempt means to test in this context. God tempts no one, but He tests people to improve their faith. He tested Abraham's faith to reveal his dedicated devotion to Him. God's tests are designed to build character and faith in His children but Satan's temptations are crafted to lead them into sin. God's desire is for man to pass the test but Satan's desire is for man to fail or succumb to his temptation (James 1:13, 14). God only tests those who are growing spiritually (cf. Deut. 8:16). There was no need for Him to test Lot since his lack of devotion and dedication were evident.

c. "Behold, here I am" — this shows Abraham's close fellowship with God. When God spoke to Abraham, he not only heard Him, but was quick to obey Him. Contrast this with Lot's slowness to obey the angels who cared for his spiritual maturity (19:17-20). Abraham had matured by previous tests, but he still had an ear open to God's voice for more tests.

2. The content of God's command — 22:2

22:2 — God directed Abraham to take his only son, that earthly possession most dear to his heart, and offer him as a burnt offering to the Lord. This was more than sending his son away as he had done to

Ishmael (cf. 21:9-21), but completely giving him as a sacrifice to God. Man's dedication to God is in proportion to what he withholds from God in all areas of his life.

B. Abraham's Obedience — 22:3-12

22:3-12 — There are three important elements to note concerning Abraham's response to God's clear command. First, his response was characterized by immediate obedience. He rose up early in the morning and began his journey. There was no waiting to try to change God's directive (22:3). Some argue that God did not really want Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but only to dedicate his son since God would not require a human sacrifice. This is not the clear teaching of the text (22:10), nor is it totally true, for God did require the death of the perfect God-man to atone for our sins. However, it is true that God did forbid human sacrifice in the Mosaic Law (Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31).

Second, Abraham's attitude was one of worship as he carried out God's command. After arriving at Moriah, he told his servants that he was going to worship, something quite common in Abraham's life. Worship really means adoration or recognizing and ascribing praise to God. So in the most severe test of his life, Abraham was able to praise God and trust His leading (Rom 8:28).

Third, Abraham's faith was manifested in several ways. Notice, he did not falter even once under this severe test. This test was so severe because God had clearly promised in the past that Abraham was to have a great progeny and now He wanted to prove Abraham's faith to its greatest limits (12:2; 15:5). Part of Abraham's maturity of faith consisted in trusting the Lord for Isaac (cp. Study Notes 15:2ff; 16:1ff; 17:15-19; 21:12). Furthermore, when Isaac came, Ishmael was expelled from Abraham's home (21:9ff). Now for Abraham to slay Isaac would seem to sever any hope of fulfilling the covenant. But note Abraham's faith when he indicated that he and the lad would return (22:5) and that God would provide a sacrifice (22:8). From the New Testament, one learns that Abraham did believe that if he had to slay his son, God would resurrect him (Heb. 11:17-19). God used this episode to illustrate some important truths concerning the sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

22:10, 11 — Abraham demonstrated his faith by raising his knife to slay Isaac (James 2:21). It is important to realize that James is not saying that Abraham was saved by works. Paul indicates that Abraham was saved before he was circumcised (Rom 4:9-12). James is saying that saving faith will produce obedient converts. When Abraham showed his faith, God intervened to save Isaac's life. Abraham's faith had been tested and was proven to be of the highest quality (22:12, I Pet 1:7).

C. God's Provision — 22:13-24

1. He provided a substitute — 22:13, 14

22:13 — After God stayed Abraham's hand, Abraham turned to see a ram caught in the brush. This ram can represent the Perfect Substitute to be found in Jesus Christ about 2000 years later. Because of Christ's sacrifice, we can become possessors of eternal life.

22:14 — "Jehovah-jireh" - a significant title which demonstrated Abraham's faith. This title means "Jehovah will provide." When God sees a genuine need, He will provide to meet that need.

2. He promised a progeny — 22:15-19

22:15-18 — Following Abraham's obedience, God called out from heaven to reconfirm His covenant once again. Notice the authority behind the covenant--He swore by Himself, that is, God Himself would bring it to pass (cf. Gen 15:17). The similes that God used to symbolize Abraham's posterity, seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand upon the seashore, show the extent of the covenant. Furthermore, all nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed. In Christ this is being fulfilled, but will be more fulfilled when Christ sets up His Millennial Kingdom.

22:19 — When Abraham passed the supreme test in his life, he returned to Beersheba reassured that God would keep His covenant.

3. He produced a bride — 22:20-24

22:20-24 — These five verses provide an interlude which show that God was not only working directly with Abraham, but He was also providentially working to provide a suitable bride for Abraham's son, separated from the Canaanites that were cursed by Noah (cf. Gen 9:25; 24:3).

II. The Burial of Abraham's Wife — 23:1-20

A. Abraham's Mourning — 23:1, 2

23:1, 2 — When Sarah died at 127 years of age, Isaac would have been 37 and Abraham 137. Apparently Abraham had moved from Beersheba and resettled in Hebron. This was truly a sorrowful episode for Abraham. Abraham and Sarah had undergone many trials together (including her many years of barrenness) and had grown together in spiritual maturity. Hence it is most appropriate that Abraham mourned and wept for His closest earthly companion.

B. Abraham's Purchase — 23:3-18

23:3ff — Sarah's death not only brought sorrow in Abraham's life, it also produced a challenge for him because he needed a place to bury her. God had promised all of this land to Abraham, yet he had been there for over 60 years and owned none of it. His bargaining to purchase a site for a grave is a demonstration of his faith that God would one day give the land to his descendants. He did not take Sarah back to her homeland. For a later example of this type of faith, compare Joseph's desire to be entombed in the promised land. He died in Egypt, but he made his brethren promise that they would carry him back to the promised land when they left Egypt. This occurred several hundred years after his death. His dusty bones were carried back as a symbol of his faith in God's promise that He would give his brethren the promised land (Gen 50:24-26; Josh 24:32; Heb. 11:22). So Abraham's purchase of a piece of ground is evidence of his faith in God's promise since he was a stranger in a culture and society not characteristic of his way of life.

23:5, 6 — Note the testimony that Abraham had among these Hittite people. They called him a "mighty prince" because of his testimony and prosperity. He was respected because he had followed the principle of separation. There is no evidence that the world so respected Lot, who followed the principle of infiltration. Because of Abraham's testimony, they offered to let him use one of their sepulchers.

23:7-18 — In Abraham's purchase of a burying place, several ancient Near Eastern customs are readily recognized. First, true courtesy was shown (v. 7). Second, Ephron's offer to give the cave to Abraham was a custom used to open up the bargaining (v. 10). Third, Near Eastern peoples (to this day) make bargaining and dealing a way of life. As it is today, they started with a high price, but Abraham did not barter in this instance. Fourth, Ephron wanted to sell the land with the cave for an important reason. According to Hittite Law, he who owned the land also owed certain responsibilities (feudal services such as military obligations) to the Hittite king. Ephron wanted to rid himself of these. Fifth, it was customary in Hittite land documents to mention the trees of the property.

23:16 — Abraham paid a high price for the property (400 shekels) in light of the fact that the average salary of a working man was between 6-8 shekels per year. Abraham dealt honestly and correctly in his business transactions.

C. Sarah's Internment — 23:19, 20

23:19, 20 — Abraham buried Sarah in the cave which was known as the cave of Machpelah. This tomb later became the resting place for Abraham (25:9), Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah (49:31) and also Jacob (50:13).

III. The Marriage of Abraham's Son — 24:1-67

A. The Servant's Vow — 24:1-9

24:1, 2 — Abraham, being 140 years old (25:20; 21:5), realized the necessity of a proper choice for a wife if his descendants would remain true to God and avoid God's judgment. He, therefore, instructed his servant (probably Eliezer) and made him swear to certain agreements. The reference to Abraham's

thigh literally means "loins" and had to do with the man's procreative organs. The significance was that if the servant failed to fulfill his promise, the descendants would avenge the wrong or disloyalty.

24:3-8 — Abraham, surrounded by the wicked Canaanite influence, knew that a Canaanite bride would destroy the faith of his descendants in the only true God. The servant was to select a woman from among Abraham's relatives and God would lead him in this matter. Abraham trusted that God would work out the details because Isaac was in the promised land; Abraham did not want him to return to Mesopotamia to find a bride.

B. The Servant's Journey — 24:10-60

24:10-14 — The servant made his journey (some 450 miles) back to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor (near Haran). Upon his arrival, he asked God to show him the right mate for Isaac. It was an important responsibility to make the right choice. He was by the city well where many came to get water for their households. He asked God to send to him a maid that would respond to his request for a drink of water from her pitcher and also to give water to all ten of his camels. The maid who responded in that way would be God's way to show him who He had chosen to be the wife of Isaac. He had learned well from Abraham to seek God's help and to walk by faith. Rebekah was the one that responded to his request for a drink of water and volunteered to give water to his camels.

24:15-27 — Abraham's servant noticed several characteristics about Rebekah which were important. She was pleasant in appearance and pure in conduct. She was industrious, courteous, and compassionate (24:17-24). In addition, she had an excellent relationship with her parents — a good indication that she would be a good wife (24:25-26). The servant acknowledged God's providential leading in his life because he walked with God day by day (24:27).

24:28-54 — The servant went to Rebekah's house (Nahor, Abraham's brother, may well have been dead since he is not mentioned and Laban, his son, was in charge of the house). The servant retold how the Lord led him in discovering Rebekah and they agreed that God's leading was evident.

24:55-60 — Rebekah agreed to go with Abraham's servant to Canaan. This indicates that she likewise was a woman of faith.

C. The Servant's Return — 24:61-67

24:61ff — The servant returned with Rebekah and her nurse. They arrived at home in the south country one evening where they found Isaac in the field meditating. There he met Rebekah and she became his wife. She was a comfort to him and filled the void in his life left by his mother's death. A second generation of the Abrahamic Covenant was begun. Subsequent chapters will record their faith and their failures.