

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM

Genesis 22:1-19

Lesson 10b

Key Verse: 22:18

"And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

God had blessed Abraham in many ways. He had given him an abundance of material blessings. He had given him his heart's desire, a son Isaac, by his wife Sarah. Abraham had learned faith in God as he struggled first with the material problem, then with his human problem. God had one more blessing for Abraham: He wanted to make him the source of blessing for all nations. This is the spiritual blessing that makes a man's life fruitful and useful, the blessing that enables him to glorify God and thus fulfill the purpose for which God created him. This is the blessing that gives meaning to life. Indeed, God had called and blessed Abraham so that he could become a channel of blessing for all mankind.

It is one thing to be blessed by God; it is another matter to bear those blessings gracefully and give glory to God. Many spiritual tragedies occur because people fail to be good stewards of their blessings. In this chapter, God trains Abraham in faith until he can bear God's blessings and become the ancestor of faith and a source of

blessing for all people.

1. Here I am (1-5)

Verse 1 says, "Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied." "Some time later" means after God had given Abraham his heart's desire, Isaac, and after Abraham had sent Ishmael away. God called Abraham by his covenant name, "Abraham." It is a reminder that God has a large purpose for Abraham--God's blessings are not given just so he can enjoy them personally. God wants to bless the world through him. Abraham's answer, "Here I am," suggests that Abraham's heart is open to God. He is spiritually ready to do whatever God commands him to do. He was not too busy with his own affairs to answer God, "Here I am."

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Wow! Abraham had hardly expected this command! But God was clear. If anything might become an idol in Abraham's heart, it was Isaac. God's servant cannot hold idols in his heart. God was training Abraham to put God first. When God blesses us by giving us our heart's desire, it is easy to become so attached to the gift that we forget the Giver. God's best blessings must be given back to God if they are to remain blessings and not become snares.

2. God himself will provide (6-8)

Early the next morning, Abraham made the necessary preparations, took 2 servants and Isaac and left for Mount Moriah. Abraham had a habit of obeying God promptly. He got up early in the morning to do hard things. It took three days to reach the region of Moriah. Abraham didn't tell anyone what he was planning to do. He couldn't tell Sarah; he couldn't tell the servants; he didn't tell Isaac. This was a lonely decision which he must make before God. No one would understand.

When he arrived in the region of Moriah, he left the servants and took Isaac and the two of them went on together up the mountain. Isaac was happy to be with his father. It must have been like a camping trip. But as they climbed the mountain together, Isaac began to sense something awesome in his father's demeanor. He thought about the preparations they had made--he was carrying the wood; his father, the fire and the knife. But where was the lamb for the sacrifice? Isaac had evidently participated in animal sacrifices with his father before. He must have been 10 or 11--maybe 12 years old. He knew what was going on. So he asked, "Father, where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham didn't bat an eye. "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. Abraham didn't try to explain. He trusted God. He knew God loved him. He had God's peace in his heart. Through the years of God's training, Abraham

had learned to trust in God. He believed that in every situation, the Lord would provide. No problem was too big; no problem too small. If God gives his servant a task to do, no matter how impossible it may seem, when his servant does everything he can to obey, the Lord will provide. The Lord is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. He is the Giver of life. The Lord had promised, "Through Isaac your offspring will be reckoned." God keeps his promises. The writer to the Hebrews says that Abraham believed that God would keep his promise; he believed that the Almighty Creator God could raise the dead--and "figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." (Heb 11:17-19) When we cannot understand what he is doing or how he is leading us, we can take hold of his promises and obey his commands, confident that the Lord who raised Jesus from the dead will provide.

Abraham must have been momentarily shaken when Isaac asked him, "Father, where is the lamb?" But his trust in God's love and his commitment to obey God's word was not moved. Abraham did not doubt God's love; he did not live by his feelings. He lived by faith in God's word, and he expressed his faith in absolute obedience. It had taken him 25 years of training in faith to come to this point.

3. Now I know that you fear God (9-19)

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and placed the wood on it. He did not hold back or try to protect

his son. He bound him and placed him on the wood. Isaac must have quietly trusted his father, for he knew that his father loved him more than life itself. Abraham took the knife. Just then the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" He stood upright and said, "Here I am!" He was still ready to obey the Lord. "Do not lay a hand on the boy... Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." The fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom (Pr 9:10), it is also the foundation of faith.

God called Abraham and trained him in faith until he learned deep love and fear of God. Faith that loves and fears God is faith that offers Isaac to God. God wants each of us to offer him our Isaac. Isaac was dearer to Abraham than life itself. But he did not withhold him from God.

Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. The Lord indeed had provided the lamb for the sacrifice. God was looking forward to the perfect Lamb whom he would provide to take away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). Abraham offered the ram God provided and worshiped God. Abraham named that place YHWH Jireh--the Lord Will Provide. He had learned an important lesson of faith: God provides everything for the person who loves and fears him. We too must learn this lesson. The only way to learn it is to offer our Isaac to God. Without this kind of faith we have no real peace in our hearts, and our

lives of faith quickly become superficial. But if we experience even once "the Lord will provide" faith, we learn the secret of the life of faith. When we have this secret, we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Abraham knew and loved the God in whom he believed and obeyed. He knew that God made promises and kept them. God had promised to bless him and make him a blessing. God had called him to leave his home country and to go the land of Canaan, and he had taken God at his word and gone. Abraham had built altars in the promised land and there he had called on the name of the Lord. God had protected him. When he was depressed and lonely, God had visited him and renewed his promise. Abraham had welcomed the Lord into his home and prepared a feast for him; he had stood before him and pled for Sodom--and had seen how God had answered his prayer and spared Lot, even while raining fire and burning sulfur down on Sodom. Abraham had tasted the meaninglessness of living as a noble father to Ishmael for 13 years. He had experienced God's love and comfort when he sent Hagar and Ishmael away; He had tasted the love of God and had experienced the faithfulness of God. His obedience was not legalistic; it was a joyful response of love and trust.

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time. This time, God reaffirmed his covenant with Abraham with an unchangeable oath (Heb 6:13-17). He had no one greater to swear by, so

he swore by himself. God promised that because Abraham had obeyed him and had not withheld even his only son, God would surely bless Abraham with descendants like the sand of the seashore; those descendants would take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through Abraham's offspring, all nations on earth would be blessed. God would keep this promise by any means--even if he had to raise up descendants of Abraham from the stones on the ground. The course of God's redemptive history had been set in motion. It would continue to flow until it reached its climax in Jesus Christ. Through his death for our sins and his resurrection, the sin problem of mankind would be solved and new life given to those who believe in him. God would raise up a people who could be a kingdom of priests to share the good news of salvation and life through Jesus with a sinsick and dying world. God is still working to keep his promise to Abraham.