



History of the Patriarchs

Genesis 12 - 50

Abraham's Supreme Test and Sarah's Death

Genesis 22-23

Introduction

There are four distinct periods in the life of Abraham, each beginning with a revelation from God.

1. The patriarch was called to his work.
2. He received the promise of the heir, and the covenant was made with him.
3. That covenant was established in the change of his name from Abram to Abraham and in circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant.
4. His faith was tried, proven and perfected in the offering up of Isaac.

These are the high points in Abraham's history. God trained him in a life of discipline by separations. He left his home in Ur. He was then separated from his kindred in Haran. He later separated from Lot at Ai and traveled homeless in Canaan. He had built his hopes on Ishmael, only to see them crossed with disappointment, for he had to send this son forth into the wilderness like a scapegoat. At this point in time, Abraham has yet another son who is very dear to him and one in whom he has the greatest hopes for the future.

From Genesis 21, we find Abraham in peaceful prosperity and in treaty with his neighbors, the Philistines. Abraham was also a very rich man with great wealth in cattle in a well-watered and fertile land. Isaac was growing up to young manhood and was his chief comfort and hope in the world. But times of prosperity are often times when trial is needed for us, and so we find that God brought Abraham to this supreme test of his life through his son Isaac. Tradition preserved by the Jewish historian, Josephus, makes Isaac twenty-five years old at the time of the crowning trial of Abraham's faith.

I. The Offering of Isaac

(Genesis 22:1-19)

A. The Test

(Genesis 22:1-2)

The words used in the text, "*After these things,*" refer to all that had been happening to Abraham in the previous chapters. The promised son had been given to him and the patriarch's life was peaceful and prosperous.

Can faith or can self-surrender be complete until it has accomplished its perfect work? God may bring us into circumstances of special testing, not for the purpose of giving God information, but in order to manifest, or make plain to us and others, the disposition of our own hearts. Abraham had to face one of the most difficult tests recorded in scripture. Moses told the Children of Israel, "*For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*" (Deuteronomy 13:3). Because God loves us and wants the best for us, there will be times of testing. In the New Testament we read of another reason that God tests our faith. "*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?*" (James 2:21-22). In this passage James used Abraham's experience to teach us that faith and self-surrender are made complete and perfect when we put our faith into action.

God said to Abraham, "*Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.*" Each phrase in the command seems to add to the difficulty

of the trial. *“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.”* Isaac was the only son of his wife Sarah, the only son of promise; he was the only son left in Abraham’s house. In other words, God said *“take this son, the one you have waited so long for, the one so full of promise and so dear to you, and offer him as a burnt offering.”*

The whole history of Abraham is a history of his moral and spiritual education by the teaching of God Himself. He was to be the head of the chosen seed, the father of the faithful, himself the type of justifying faith. Now, after years of training, there is this one great test of his matured faith. God gave Abraham a special opportunity to show his complete trust in Him, and through this he obtained the title of the “father of the faithful.” God had been training Abraham from the first to live only by faith in His promise. In Isaac the supreme blessing had been realized; now there must also take place the supreme trial of Abraham’s faith and obedience.

B. The Obedience (Genesis 22:3-10)

To slay Isaac who was childless — would this not be nullifying the very future of the covenant and the promised blessing to all mankind? Abraham not only had his natural affection to contend with, but also his reason and his faith. He was, in the natural man, destroying all his hopes in offering up Isaac. All this was to be done by himself, with his own hand. It was a trial in the strongest sense, a trial of Abraham’s faith. Would his love of God, his deep trust and faith in God’s providence, enable him to do God’s will in such a self-denying way that he would give the thing dearer to him than even his own life? Not that God really intended the surrender of Isaac to death, but only the proof of such a surrender in the heart of his servant Abraham. Such proof could only be found in an unconditional command to sacrifice and an unresisting compliance with the command up to the final step in the process. Many feel there was a tempting as well as a trying of Abraham, since that which was required seemed to be an enactment of a most revolting heathen practice and at the same time in opposition to the word of God which had been given concerning Isaac. (*“In Isaac your seed shall be called.”*) To slay such a son seemed to be like slaying the very word of God. Yet in heart and purpose it must be done. This was an exhibition of the great truth that

God’s working in the covenant of grace must have its counterpart in man’s obedience to God’s Word. Abraham received a special gift from the grace of God, and he freely surrendered it again to Him who gave it.

Isaac, the child of promise, represents those who would be channels of blessing. All who would share in the life of grace must also surrender their lives to the service and glory of Him who redeemed them.

C. The Place of Sacrifice - Mount Moriah

Many Biblical scholars accept the view that the place of Abraham’s sacrifice was the same mountain on which Solomon’s temple was built. Today the Moslem mosque “Dome of the Rock” is located on this site. Traveling from Beersheba, Jerusalem would be reached on the third day. This mount was Abraham’s destination as he slipped away quietly in the fresh dawn of the early morning. There is no record of his sharing or confiding his purpose with anyone. The pleading of a mother might have influenced him. The anguish of a young son, shrinking from an early death, might have proved more than he could endure. Two days of walking along rugged paths and two nights were spent en route. Gold tried in the fire! God knew He spoke to an Abraham who knew God and who, through trial and testing, had been taught to obey. The one who feels the need of consulting with flesh and blood will never offer up his Isaac to God.

Abraham’s faith had stood all former tests. It had been strong enough to break the ties that bound him to country, home and kindred. It had endured the many and long delays in the fulfilling of the promises. It had risen above all the obstacles, physical and moral, that stood in the way of the accomplishment of these promises. It had given up Ishmael and accepted Isaac. Would it stand the last demand to give up to God the best-loved thing on earth and to do what appeared to be alien to God’s character and contrary to His word and promise? It seemed the command and the promise were in conflict. If he obeyed the command, he frustrated the promise.

“. . . the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.” How could Abraham consistently say this when he knew he was going to

make his son a burnt offering? The writer of Hebrews answers for him: *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, . . . concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”* (Hebrews 11:17-19). Abraham knew Isaac’s birth was, in a sense, life from the dead. He knew his duty was obedience. Abraham believed God. He knew it was just as easy for God to restore him to life after he had been a burnt-offering as it was for him to give life in the beginning. Abraham told the young men who journeyed with them that he and the lad would go and worship and come again.

In verses seven and eight of chapter 22, we read the brief dialogue between Abraham and his son Isaac. *“My father!”* look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” *“My son, God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”* The heart’s deepest grief must have been experienced in those brief moments. No sobs, no tears and no words telling of the struggle within. In the repetition of “my father” and “my son,” in the simplicity of Isaac’s questioning and Abraham’s answer, the Scripture tells us that they went both of them together, Abraham in determined obedience to God’s command and Isaac in complete trust in his father.

D. The Altar (Genesis 22:9-10)

The erection of a crude stone altar, the arrangement of the wood, the binding of Isaac, the solemn act which laid his helpless figure for an offering, even the gesture of the officiating priest who raised his knife to strike is given so that we may understand how complete the surrender of Abraham was and of the triumph of his faith. Abraham offered Isaac and had God not intervened to prevent it, he would have actually done it. God counted it as done because He knew what was in the heart.

II. The Divine Provision (Genesis 22:11-14)

A. Isaac Spared

In the moment when Abraham would have slain his son, the angel of the Lord intervened and commanded him not to harm Isaac. The sacrifice, the resignation of the will in the father and the son, was accepted. The literal act of sacrifice was prevented by

divine intervention. We are reminded here of the great principle taught throughout the Scriptures: that mercy is better than sacrifice. The giving of ourselves to God is the highest and holiest sacrifice He can receive (Romans 12:1-2). A ram, caught in the thicket nearby, was provided as a substitute sacrifice.

B. The Divine Blessing (Genesis 22:15-19)

The voice of God came to Abraham after this trial. He reaffirmed, in unusual fullness, all the promises of His great covenant and confirmed them by an oath. This is the last of the revelations of God to Abraham of which Scripture makes mention. Thus it was a strong consolation to him during the remainder of his earthly pilgrimage. Isaac, whom he had first received from the grace of God, in the natural way, in recompense of his obedience, now in a higher spiritual way receives him as a special child of grace and promise. Abraham descends from the mount, his sacrifice offered and Isaac still living. Abraham knew in a very special way that *“God will provide.”* Jehovah-jireh.

Conclusion

The Christian Church has seen in this chapter an illustration of God’s love for us. From this sacrifice on Mount Moriah, we see prefigured the sacrifice of the Son of God at Calvary. In the moral significance of this history of Abraham, the Jew and the Christian are agreed. Today the Jew, though he has rejected Christ, sees in the binding of Isaac on the altar a meritorious deed which still pleads on behalf of Israel with God. While the Christian Church still prays to God for pardon and blessing through Jesus Christ, the Jewish people beseech God to have compassion upon them for the sake of the binding of Isaac. Christ Jesus came to do the Father’s will and to give His life a ransom for many. By His obedience we are made righteous.

III. The Death and Burial of Sarah (Genesis 23)

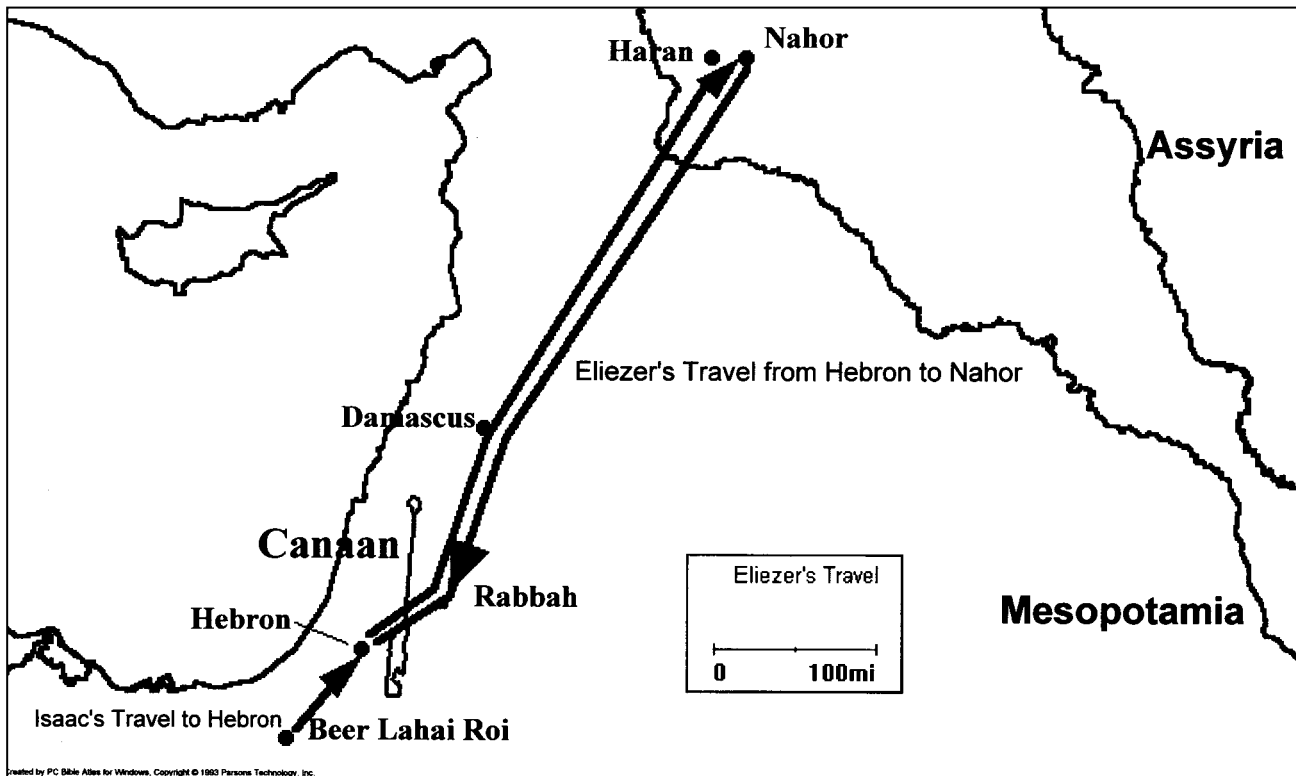
This chapter is interesting as it contains the first record of mourning for the dead, of burial, of property in land, of purchase of land, of silver as a medium of purchase and of a standard of weight. It also gives a fascinating picture of the bartering involved in business — a practice that is still found in this part of the world.

Sarah is the only woman in Scripture whose age, death and burial are distinctly noted. She died at the age of 127 at Hebron. This means that Abraham must have moved from Beersheba to his old home. Isaac

was 37 years of age at the time of Sarah's death.

Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah as a burial place for Sarah. This was the only piece of property that Abraham owned during his lifetime.

Map for Questions on Genesis Lesson 18 – Third Day



Daily Bible Study Questions for Group Discussion

Note: Read notes and Scripture references before answering the questions. Some questions are for those more advanced in Bible study. Try to answer all questions, but don't be discouraged if some seem a little hard. Unless otherwise instructed, use Bible only in answering questions.

FIRST DAY: Read notes on Lesson #18. Read Genesis 24 - 25:18.

1. What part of last week's lesson on the supreme trial of Abraham's life was most meaningful to you?
2. One of the longest chapters in the Pentateuch is devoted to what subject?
3. What does **Chapter 24** of Genesis reveal about the workings of God?

SECOND DAY

Note: In **Genesis 22:20-24**, we are introduced to a genealogy from which the wife of Isaac was to come and connects with the beginning of **Genesis 24**. Milcah may have been a sister or sister-in-law of Sarah, and Nahor was a brother of Abraham.

4. There were, perhaps, two ruling considerations which Abraham had in making the arrangements for a bride for Isaac. What do you think they were?
5. (a) Abraham was "a mighty prince" in the land partly due to his wealth. What might Abraham have been tempted to do as far as a bride for Isaac was concerned?

(b) What verse in **Genesis 24** shows that Abraham had a firm reliance on divine providence?

- (c) Is there something mothers and fathers can learn from this today?
6. What one thing was Abraham fully persuaded of that would bring a happy marriage to his son?

THIRD DAY: (See map "Eliezer's Travel" in Appendix)

7. What is beautiful about the prayer of Abraham's servant?
8. (a) In thinking of the nature of the servant's request regarding the woman he sought for his master, what were the characteristics he was mostly interested in?
- (b) Are we too often guilty of being more concerned about the attractiveness of the body than we are about attractiveness of character?
9. Because of the deceitfulness of appearance, for what definite sign did he ask to be sure of God's choice? **Read I Samuel 16:7.**
10. There are several important decisions and choices made in this chapter. What, in your opinion, was the most important? Why?

FOURTH DAY

11. List the verses which show that the servant was a God-fearing man.

12. Who finally determined whether Rebekah would go or stay? Give verse.
13. What one verse in this chapter would be considered prophetic?
14. What New Testament picture do we get from this chapter in Biblical history?

FIFTH DAY

15. (a) In what verse of **Genesis 24** is Isaac introduced?

(b) What do we learn about the character of Isaac in **verses 62-67**?
16. In **Genesis 25**, what careful provision does Abraham continue to make for Isaac?
17. How old was Abraham when he died?

SIXTH DAY

18. What is interesting about the burial of Abraham?
19. How old was Isaac at the death of his father?
20. What gives Abraham an outstanding place in history and makes him an example to us all? **Read Isaiah 41:8; Isaiah 51:2; Galatians 3:9; James 2:21-24.**

Notes