

**OT Narratives Bible Study Series**  
**Genesis 16-18 & 21-22 - Abraham & the life of faith, Part 2**

**For Discussion:**

-Has following God ever meant giving up something (or someone) that really meant a lot to you? How did you handle it?

**For review: Read Genesis 12:1-9 and 15:1-6.**

-What did God promise Abram? How did Abram respond?

- God called Abram to leave his family & home, to go to a place that God would show him
- God promised to bless Abraham (12:2-3)
  - to make him into a great nation, and make his name great
  - to make him a blessing --> all peoples on earth would be blessed through him
  - to bless those who blessed Him; to curse those who dishonored him
- God also promised him the land he was in (12:7), and numerous descendants (15:5)
  
- Abram responded in obedience and worship (12:1-9) and in faith (15:6)

**Read Genesis 16:1-16; 17:1-27; 18:1-15; and 21:1-21**

-Why might Sarai & Abram have decided to try to have children through Sarai's maidservant Hagar? What were the consequences?

- not an uncommon practice in those days, to have children through a servant, if a couple were unable to have children (seen also in Jacob's family in Genesis 30)
  - the children through such an arrangement would be considered part of the family; Sarai building a family 'through Hagar'
- they decided to do this most likely because nothing seemed to be happening with God's promise to give them offspring...
  - this was now 10 years after God had called Abram, and still no children
  - > perhaps this would be the way that God's promise would be fulfilled?
- resulted in discord within the family, both at the time, and down through the ages (16:12)
  - the practice is described but not condoned by Scripture --> at odds with God's design for marriage and the sexual relationship, as established in Genesis 2
    - that this practice was not condoned is also suggested by the negative consequences arising from it
  - God nevertheless promised to make Ishmael into a great nation, for Abram's sake (16:10; 17:20)
  - traditionally held that Arabic people are Ishmael's descendants

-Why do you think God waited so long to bring Isaac into the picture?

- We don't really know - the Scriptures don't say
  - doing it all in His time
  - testing of his faith --> perseverance
  - revealing His glory in doing something that seemed impossible; by this point it seemed beyond question that Sarah was unable to have children
    - the possibility that Sarah would have children seemed laughable even to Abraham (17:17) and Sarah (18:11-12)
    - > hence the name, Isaac ("he laughs")

-How do God's promises regarding Ishmael (16:10-12, 17:20) differ from His promises regarding Isaac (17:19-21), and why is this important? (**For further study:** What is the significance of these differences, according to Romans 9:6-9 & Galatians 4:21-31?)

- promises to bless Ishmael and make him into a great nation for Abraham's sake
- but God makes it clear that Isaac, not Ishmael, is the one through whom His covenant with Abraham will be fulfilled
  - speaks of God's sovereign choice/election --> chose Isaac, not Ishmael
  - used by Paul in Romans 9 as an illustration that not all of Abraham's physical descendants are "children of the promise" (therefore, not all who are descended by Israel are Israel)
    - rather it is those who are justified by faith, rather than by works of the law, who are children of the promise (as per the Romans 4 and Galatians 3-4, as discussed in the previous study)
    - Galatians 4:21-31 contrasts Hagar & Sarah and the sons born to them - Ishmael born "according to the flesh" into slavery, and Isaac born "through promise" into freedom --> a contrast between those seeking to be justified through obedience to the Law and those who are justified by faith in Christ

## Read Genesis 22:1-19

--Why did God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? Why might this command have been perplexing?

- God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to test him i.e. to test his faith (v.1)
  - not for God's benefit, but Abraham's, i.e. that his faith might be demonstrated to be genuine (cf. James 1:3, 1 Peter 1:6-7)
  - also to foreshadow Christ (see later)
- to provide an example for others to learn from
- might not have made sense since God had promised that His promises to Abraham to bless him & make him a great nation would be fulfilled through Isaac and his descendants
  - Abraham's offspring would be reckoned through Isaac, and God had therefore told Abraham to go ahead and send Ishmael away (21:8-11)

-How does this account of Abraham & Isaac foreshadow Jesus Christ?

- Mount Moriah's significance as area where Jesus would be crucified --> "on the mountain of the LORD it will be provided"
  - cf. 2 Chronicles 3:1 - Mount Moriah is where the temple would be built
- Isaac as a type of Jesus Christ
  - "your son, your only son, whom you love" (v.2) cf. Matthew 3:17 – reminiscent of Jesus as God's Son, whom He loves
    - also John 3:16 – Jesus as God's 'one and only Son'
  - Isaac made to carry the wood on which he was to be sacrificed; reminiscent of Jesus being made to carry His own cross
  - Isaac a willing sacrifice – like Jesus Christ (John 10:18)
    - Isaac likely an adolescent or young man by this point (strong enough to carry the wood needed for the sacrifice); could likely easily have escaped Abraham (>100 years old!) if wanted to
    - 21:34 & 22:1 suggests passage of long time since his birth
    - thus, almost certainly allowed himself to be bound and laid on the altar as a sacrifice
  - 'God Himself will provide the lamb' (v.8), or 'God will provide for Himself a lamb' --> brings to mind God's provision of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (i.e. Jesus Christ) (e.g. John 1:29)
    - God provides a substitute sacrifice (i.e. the ram) to stand in Isaac's place --> points to substitutionary atonement of Christ
    - what God would not allow Abraham to do (i.e. sacrifice his son), God Himself did on our behalf, in providing His own Son to be our sacrifice
- God's reiteration of the promise that through Abraham's offspring all nations would be blessed – most appropriate place to reiterate it

-What do Abraham & Sarah's examples teach us about the life of faith? (consider also Hebrews 11:8-19) What are ways you can follow their examples in your life?

- faith means trusting God and taking Him at His word, even when the way forward may not seem clear to us, and when fulfillment of His promises are still far in the future
  - e.g. trusting God that he would have descendants that couldn't be numbered, even when he didn't have a single one
  - may involve wrestling with understanding God and His purposes, but does not descend into distrust or unbelief
  - looks beyond what we can see (or not see) - not "blind" faith, but "visionary", as per Hebrews 11:10,13
  - trusting that God would fulfill His promises, even if it meant that He would have to raise Isaac from the dead
- faith shows itself in active obedience
  - as we saw last time, a life of active trust that places following God above personal comfort/convenience --> 'sojourners & exiles'
  - as we saw today, immediate obedience (in leaving to sacrifice Isaac early the next morning)
  - but it's a "work in progress" --> does not exempt us from making mistakes or even from sinning (as we saw in the episode with Hagar), but the basic posture is one of trust in God

## For further reflection

When God tested his faith, by faith Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice, even though God had said to him that it was through Isaac that his offspring would be reckoned. He believed God's promises and trusted that God would fulfill every single one, even if it meant having to raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19), and so he obeyed God's command immediately and completely, and he continued on in an attitude of worship. In so doing, he received even greater assurance of the certainty of God's promises. More than that, in God's provision of a substitute for Isaac, he caught a glimpse of the coming glory of Jesus Christ. What God prevented Abraham from doing in sacrificing his son Isaac, God Himself would do, by providing His One and Only Son as the Lamb who would be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

When God brings trials into our lives for the testing of our faith, we ought to respond with the same faith and trust as Abraham did. If we respond in faith and obedience, such testing will refine our faith, producing perseverance and maturity that will bear fruit for the glory of Jesus Christ (James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:3-7). Not only that, but we will receive the crown of life that God has promised to all who love him (James 1:12). Spend some time reflecting this weekend on times in your life when God has used trials to test your faith. How did you respond? Resolve to respond in obedience and worship when next your faith is tested.

## Additional Resources

CGYG/LIFE website: [www.cgygfellowship.com](http://www.cgygfellowship.com) (Resources section)

- Genesis Bible study series: [http://www.cgygfellowship.com/BBS\\_Genesis.shtml](http://www.cgygfellowship.com/BBS_Genesis.shtml)
- OT Daily Devotional series

CGC website: OT Survey and Genesis adult Christian education materials: <http://www.cgctorenglish.chinesegospelchurch.ca> (Resources section)