

Beginnings and Belongings
The Triumph of Faith

Lesson #9 for December 2, 2006

Scripture: Genesis 20:1-25:10.

1. This lesson covers the last 75 years of Abraham's 175 years of life. Fortunately, although the story begins with some lows it ends on a very high note. Read Genesis 20. Why do you think this story is included in Scripture? What does it teach us about Abraham, the great man of faith? Why do you think a king from Gaza would want to marry a ninety-year-old woman? What do you think was so attractive about Sarah?
2. How do you think God communicated with this pagan monarch? How long do you think Sarah stayed with him? **In Genesis 20, we discover for the first time that Abraham's father was a polygamist.** Does this help us to understand Abraham's experience with Hagar? Did Sarah's mother travel with them to Haran? Why don't we know anything about either Abraham's mother or Sarah's mother?
3. **Ladies, would you be willing to lie for your husbands?**
4. How do you explain Genesis 20:17-18? How long did it take for the women of Abimelech's household to realize that they were not fertile? What was the point of this part of the story? Do you think Sarah verbally lied about her true status? Or did she only lie through silence? Did Abimelech, or the people of Gerar, have any idea about God's conversation with Abraham regarding Sodom and Gomorrah? What was their idea about what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah?
5. Do we ever lie through silence? Is it even possible, in our society, to be fully and completely honest all the time? Is it a lie to say you are "fine" when you really aren't? How often do we, either by our statements or by our silence, twist the truth?
6. Review God's statement about Abraham. (Hebrews 11:8-11) Should God have rejected Abraham on the basis of the failures recorded in Genesis? If God rejected people every time they made a mistake, would he have any followers left? What are we supposed to learn about God from this story about lying through silence?
7. If Sarah had stopped having periods, how long did it take her to figure out she was pregnant? How did she know for sure?
8. Why was Isaac given the name "laughter"? (Genesis 17:17; 18:9-15) What does it do to your faith to laugh at God in his face? What about lying to him to his face? Abraham had gotten into the Hagar-Ishmael debacle because of a lack of faith. Was it an act of faith to send them away?
9. Try to imagine yourself in the position of Hagar or Ishmael after Isaac was born. Did Abraham's attitude toward Ishmael change? Ishmael was about 14 or 15 years older than Isaac. Isaac would normally have been weaned in one or two years so that the weaning party would take place when Ishmael was about 16 or 17. Were Abraham and God fair to Hagar and Ishmael? Was it the actions of God and Abraham that led him to be the kind of person he was? Given the fact that Ishmael was about 17 years old, what does it mean in Genesis 21:14 "put the child on her back and sent her away"? Why does Genesis 21:14-16 seem to imply that Ishmael was still a small child?
10. As Abraham aged, the size of his household continued to grow and he was recognized as a powerful force in the community. Even kings thought it safer to have agreements with

him!

11. **Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice the “son of promise”? Would this be breaking the sixth commandment?** Abraham was 120 years old and Isaac about 20 years old when this event took place.

God had called Abraham to be the father of the faithful, and his life was to stand as an example of faith to succeeding generations. But his faith had not been perfect. He had shown distrust of God in concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, and again in his marriage with Hagar. **That he might reach the highest standard, God subjected him to another test, the closest which man was ever called to endure. In a vision of the night he was directed to repair to the land of Moriah, and there offer up his son as a burnt offering upon a mountain that should be shown him.** {PP 147.2}

12. Abraham was the owner of thousands of sheep and cattle and had hundreds of workers in his employment. After years of delay and disappointment, everything seemed to be going right for him. But God had one more test for Abraham! What evidence do we have in the scripture of Abraham’s faith so far?

In the obedience of faith, Abraham had forsaken his native country—had turned away from the graves of his fathers and the home of his kindred. He had wandered as a stranger in the land of his inheritance. He had waited long for the birth of the promised heir. At the command of God he had sent away his son Ishmael. And now, when the child so long desired was entering upon manhood, and the patriarch seemed able to discern the fruition of his hopes, a trial greater than all others was before him. {PP 148.1}

13. If faith is a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a friend well-known, what was the basis for Abraham’s faith? He had no Bible, no church, no pastor, and no congregation with whom to consult. Did he have frequent communication with God?
14. How do you think God spoke to Abraham on this occasion? Was it in a vision? Did God appear to him in person? Abraham apparently was very certain that it was God who had spoken to him. In our day Abraham would have been taken immediately to a psychiatrist. What possible reason could be important enough for God to ask such a sacrifice of Abraham? Satan was on hand and must have suggested many doubts to Abraham. If “God never asks us to believe anything for which he does not give adequate evidence...,” (SC 105) what evidence did Abraham have that this was indeed God’s will? How could this “son of promise” who was to be the father of kings and nations now be offered as a sacrifice? Abraham did everything he could think of to try to get some further confirmation from God, without effect!
15. **Ladies, what would you think if you woke up in the morning and found your husband and only son missing? What if someone hinted to you that your son had gone with his father in order to be sacrificed? What would you do?** Abraham had finally awakened Isaac but did not awaken Sarah. The two of them set off with two servants and a donkey to carry the wood. They traveled for three days to reach Mount Moriah. Every night Abraham prayed and sought God’s favor through the entire night without sleeping. Finally,

As they were about to begin the journey of the third day, the patriarch,

looking northward, saw the promised sign, a cloud of glory hovering over Mount Moriah, and he knew that the voice which had spoken to him was from heaven. {PP 151.3}

16. Abraham was left clinging to the promise that Isaac was to be the “father of a great nation.” It was the only consolation he had. Does this kind of experience strengthen one’s faith or tend to destroy it?
17. **What would be an equivalent test in our day? If God asked you to give up your car, your home, your favorite dietary items, your bank account, your 401(k) in order to do some important thing for him, would you be willing?**
18. For those of you who have older children, try to imagine saying to your teenager or to your child who is twenty-something, that God had instructed you to sacrifice him/her on an altar! What would be his/her response? Does God ever ask us to make such sacrifices in our day? What do you think Abraham’s last words to Isaac were?
19. Why was Isaac willing to cooperate with his aged father in this incredible experience? He could easily have escaped. Fortunately, we know the outcome. Abraham’s arm was held back and Isaac did not die.

Abraham’s great act of faith stands like a pillar of light, illuminating the pathway of God’s servants in all succeeding ages. Abraham did not seek to excuse himself from doing the will of God. During that three days’ journey he had sufficient time to reason, and to doubt God, if he was disposed to doubt. He might have reasoned that the slaying of his son would cause him to be looked upon as a murderer, a second Cain; that it would cause his teaching to be rejected and despised; and thus destroy his power to do good to his fellow men. He might have pleaded that age should excuse him from obedience. But the patriarch did not take refuge in any of these excuses. Abraham was human; his passions and attachments were like ours; but he did not stop to question how the promise could be fulfilled if Isaac should be slain. He did not stay to reason with his aching heart. He knew that God is just and righteous in all His requirements, and he obeyed the command to the very letter. {PP 153.3}

It was to impress Abraham’s mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. The agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man’s redemption. No other test could have caused Abraham such torture of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame. The angels who witnessed the humiliation and soul anguish of the Son of God were not permitted to interpose, as in the case of Isaac. There was no voice to cry, “It is enough.” To save the fallen race, the King of glory yielded up His life. What stronger proof can be given of the infinite compassion and love of God? “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Romans 8:32. {PP 154.2}

The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds. The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the universe. **Because Abraham had [155]**

shown a lack of faith in God's promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings. God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation. {PP 154.3}

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. **All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unfaltering obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false.** God declared to His servant, "Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded. {PP 155.1}

It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham made answer, "God will provide Himself a lamb;" and when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation. 1 Peter 1:12. {PP 155.2}

20. What does this story say to us about faith? The New Testament authors writing about this story make it plain that Abraham's faith worked! (Hebrews 11:17-19; James 2:17-26; see also Romans 3:28; 5:1; Galatians 2:16,17)
21. **So what do you think qualifies Abraham to be the central figure in the chapter on faith? Why is Sarah mentioned there?**
22. When Isaac was 40 years old, Abraham sent a trusted servant back to Haran to look for a wife for him. How many young people today would accept this kind of arrangement? Why do you think things are so different today?
23. Some 400 years later, Moses was instructed to tell the people not to marry sisters or cousins or aunts or uncles but in the early history of this family, as we have it recorded, there is a lot of marriage within one family! (Leviticus 18:6-18) Did this raise any questions in the minds of the people who came along later?

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