

GENESIS Why The Beginning Matters

Study 17

Abraham and His Sons: The Final Test of Faith

Genesis 20-22

Part 1 of 3: God uses broken and failed people

Genesis 20:1-2; 11-13

Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

....

Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'"

1) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture slide, fill in some of the lessons on God's grace in this story.

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Abraham was an | | man |
| Driven by | | Despite all of God's promises |
| Abraham was not morally | | To Abimelech |
| The power of grace and | | No matter how imperfect Abraham was |
| <i>Therefore</i> | | |
| Don't be haughty towards | | You are only what you are by grace. |
| Don't think that you will ever | | You will need to maintain your guard against sin |
| Don't think you have to be | | God uses broken and failed people |

Genesis 20:17-18

Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

2) Reflection question. Abraham prayed for other people so they could have children even though he did not have the promised child yet. Rate from 0 to 10, how willing and comfortable you are to pray for someone else for something you personally do not have. (0= not comfortable at all, 10=perfectly comfortable)

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |

Genesis 21:1-3

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

2) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture slide, fill in the meaning behind Issac’s name (laughter).

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Verse | “God has brought me laughter, | and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” |
| Type of feeling | Exaltation | Humiliation |
| Why so? | | |
| Applied to us | His delightful love | Our laughable weakness |

Genesis 21:8-20

The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

2) a) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture slide, fill in the similarities and differences between Ishmael and Isaac's story.

| Similarities | Differences | |
|--------------|-------------|-------|
| | Ishmael | Issac |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

b) Fill in Blanks. According to the video lecture slide, what lessons can we learn from both Isaac’s and Ishmael’s stories?

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Pain and suffering come to | |
| Some because of | |
| Others because of | |

Part 2 of 3: The Ultimate Test is not Irrational Blind faith

Genesis 22:1-2
 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”
 “Here I am,” he replied.
 Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

c) Reflection question. Knowing that there is no strict formula around the reason bad things happen to us, how do you personally think and handle bad things that happen to you?

Part 2 of 3: The Ultimate Test is not Irrational Blind faith

Deuteronomy 12:31
 You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.

3) a) Objective Question. Select all that apply. According to the video lecture, what is the reason God demanded the sacrifice of Isaac if he hates the sacrifice of children as mentioned in Deuteronomy 12:31?

- A. It is a test of blind faith, no matter how outrageous the command, you do it if you are really faithful
- B. Abraham should not have done it, he should have rejected it because God detests the sacrifice of children
- C. The story should not be about blind faith because that would be out of its context, because if purely about obedience, then Isaac can be stabbed at home than in the mountains.
- D. There is a context to the story. Historically in Jewish culture, firstborns represent the hope and dream for the family, firstborns are to forfeit to God (Exo 22:29-30, 13:11-16), and the

firstborn can be redeemed back (Num 18:15-16), therefore the calling of sacrificing of Isaac is God calling in the debt of sin every family owes to God.

E. It is a rational act of faith because Abraham went through a journey of faith with God in the earlier chapters and trusted God more and more, the highest act of trust is when Isaac is asked to be sacrifice.

F. God showed Abraham how He operates (Gen 18:17-19), Abraham knows of God's Justice and Mercy in Genesis 19, seeing how God remembered the promise about Lot his nephew, and he knows God would keep his promise about his son Isaac (Heb 11:17-18).

b) Objective Question. Select all that apply. According to the video lecture, what is Abraham's basis of rational faith for the act of the sacrifice of his son?

- A. The culture of family is considered
- B. There was a cultural significance tied to the firstborn son (primogeniture law)
- C. Firstborn belongs to God because of sin
- D. Abraham's journey of faith helped him
- E. Abraham witnessed God's justice and mercy
- F. God made a covenantal promise to Abraham and he know that God remembers it

c) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture, what is the verse that showed the following about Abraham's belief?

| Abraham's belief | Verse |
|--|-------|
| Abraham believed that his son will be safe | |
| Abraham believed that God will provide | |

d) Reflection question. There is a tension between obeying the command of God and depending on the promise of God. Out of 100 percent, how many percent do you think you are operating on "I can do this, I can do this" and how many of the rest do you think that "He can do this, He will provide" in your current journey of faith?

| "I can do this, I can do this" | Percent (out of 100) | "He can do this, He will provide." | Percent (out of 100) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| | | | |

Part 3 of 3: Tension between Faith, Works & Salvation

Genesis 22:15-18

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

4) a) Fill in the blanks. Fill in the following on the covenant formula and formula by other religions according to the slide provided in the video lecture.

| Covenant Formula | Election | Live Righteously | Covenantal Promises |
|-------------------|------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Abraham | Genesis 12 | Genesis 13-22 | Still to come |
| Modern Christians | | | |
| 1 Peter 1:3-5 | | | |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Every other religion's formula | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|

b) Fill in the blanks. Fill in the following on the differences between the way Apostle Paul and James use the word 'works'.

| Author | Paul | James |
|--|---|------------------------------|
| Verse | Romans 3:28 | James 2:21-24 |
| The part referring to 'works' | "One is justified by faith apart from works of the law" | "Abraham justified by works" |
| Definition of 'work' in each of their own sentence | | |
| Both are correct and do not contradict each other | | |

Take Away

Part 1 of 3: God uses broken and failed people
Part 2 of 3: The Ultimate Test is not Irrational Blind faith
Part 3 of 3: Tension between Faith, Works & Salvation

Case Study

Case 1 – Salvation

Caroline had been attending Alpha for a number of weeks and was coming to a point where she wanted to make the decision to turn to Christ.

However, she was struggling with many problems in her life. She was a drug addict hooked on cocaine and was also a guest relations officer at a local bar where she was expected to entertain guests with amongst others, sexual services. She was monitored by a pimp who wielded great control over her.

She no longer wanted to live like this but cannot possibly see herself making the decision to repent and turn away from this sort of life. She did not think she had the moral strength to do this. She wanted to but how was she to do this? She believed Jesus is God and wanted to give her life but she cannot possibly live up to His standards.

She ran away from the Alpha group and did not want to attend anymore. When her leader visited her, she told her that she was going to get her life all cleaned up and if this was done then she can make a decision for Christ.

- 1) a) Discussion question. Has Caroline understood salvation properly? What is her misunderstanding?
- b) Discussion question. If you were her Alpha group leader what would you say to her?
- c) Discussion question. How does the story of Abraham help her in the understanding of her situation?
- d) Discussion question. Can Caroline still keep her line of work and still be a Christian? After all it is the only thing she knows how to do and Jesus has paid for her sin, past, present and future. Why does she then have to give up this particular career whilst other Christians do not have to give up theirs?

e) Discussion question. What concrete steps can you take to help her as a group?

f) Discussion question. Suppose after 4 years of leaving the brothel, Caroline goes back to her old habits and takes up her old career again, against all the wishes of her church friends. Do you think she will be saved at the end of time? Consider that she did make a commitment to Christ and said the sinner's prayer.

Case 2 – “All things to work together for good”

Andy and Tom are two students at Inti College studying Pharmacy. They have grown up together and are fast friends. Both attend the second Baptist Church in Subang Jaya. On their final exams, both boys came down with Dengue fever, and even though they had recovered a week beforehand they both failed their final exams. They both reacted badly to the setback.

They were comforted by their church leader who brought out the verse:

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren”

(Romans 8:28-29 NASB)

He told them you don't know the future but God will use this to His great plan and make all things good for them in the future. He said God had destined them to be victorious in all things in life. We are destined for glory. They will defeat life circumstances and be successful. But they must have faith otherwise it will be their fault.

They both believed the Word and obediently continued in their faith.

Andy continued his studies but failed the next year when he again fell ill and had meningitis just before the exams. He became bitter towards God, stopped attending church and gave up his course. He became a businessman. He started up a new software company and became very successful and Google bought out his company 6 years on. He came back to church after that and was praising God because if he had not failed he would not have started his company and would have been a pharmacist working impossible hours!!!

Tom on the other hand studied again very hard and passed his exam the following year. All the pharmacists who graduated in his year had great difficulties in getting good jobs because of the recession that year and he could not get any job in KL. He became a pharmacist and managed to get a job at a small town pharmacy at Grik in Perak. He was very confused and wondered if this was the victory God had promised him. How can he see any victory in this? He started to doubt. One day he was helping out a colleague by working his shift because she was sick and there was a robbery. He was shot by the robber and wound up disabled in a

wheelchair for the rest of his life. He felt that this was God's punishment for his doubt.

They both met up for a class reunion and reflected on the verse in Romans.

Andy thought, *"How great God is. He really made all things work out for good for him."* Now his faith was greatly strengthened.

Tom thought, *"Life sucks, and God's promises can't be trusted and I feel really bitter towards God"* It did not work out for good but for bad. He also felt guilty as well for doubting Him.

2) a) Discussion question. What does the story of the two sons of Abraham tell us about life for Christians and the issue of suffering?

b) Discussion question. What was actually wrong with the church leaders' interpretation of the popular Roman verse?

c) Discussion question. Given the right way of interpreting the Romans passage, how should Andy reflect on his good fortune and how should Tom reflect on his disability? How does this affect the way you live and interpret your own circumstances in life? Can you share with the group?

d) Discussion question. Should Tom rightly feel guilty about his feelings of doubt and blame his paraplegia or disability on his own lack of faith? He doubted God and hence did not receive a good outcome.

Case 3 – Test of Faith

There was a pastor Rainier from the 3rd Baptist church of PJ who preached to his congregation and said that God had just spoken to him and his message was that He requires all of them to bring their most valued possessions to the church and they will all be sold off to pay for their church building which had run over budget by RM 2 million.

He used the example of Abraham and said that God tested him and asked him to give up his most valued possession Isaac and Abraham passed the test. It cost Abraham everything as all his future was tied up in Isaac. Material possessions are our idols and to prove our faithfulness to God, we need to go above and beyond and pay for the church building fund. We too needed to be tested like Abraham. Find the most valuable item in your entire house. It could be your Ferarri or your house, sell it for God. Give till it hurts and you give everything

like Abraham gave everything.

Then God will say to you as He said to Abraham *"Now I know that you fear me"*.

3) a) Discussion question. Is Pastor Rainier correct in asking his church to do this? If he is wrong, why is he wrong?

b) Discussion question. How do we apply the lesson of Abraham to our lives today?

c) Reflection question. What is the ultimate thing in the world that is most precious to you and does that detract from your devotion to Him? Share.