

TUTORIAL
1.23

God gave Isaac and delivered him from death

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **Genesis 21:1-3, 22:1-18.**

Last time

God promised to give Abram and his many descendants the land of Canaan. Abram's faith, we note from information given later in the Narrative, was credited against his sin-debt, with God proclaiming him righteous in his eyes. Abram became Abraham and Sarai, Sarah. The Narrative describes the events surrounding the rescue of Lot and family from Sodom as God destroyed it along with the city of Gomorrah because of those communities' incessant, unrestrained evil life-styles.

God gives a son to Abraham and Sarah

God continues to tell us His Story (Genesis 21:1-3) with the record of the birth of a son to Abraham and Sarah at the ages of 100 and 90 respectively. God is honouring His promises to Abraham first given many years before. And the circumstances make it very clear that God was responsible. This demonstrates again something we've already seen highlighted in the Narrative so far...God always does what He says, always fulfills His promises – He always acts consistently with who He is. Unlike us, He is not affected by the passing of time, changing interests, new perspectives, different circumstances, trends or public opinion. He speaks and acts out of His own complete and perfect being.

And so having once promised a son to Abraham – with all the implications of that – He made sure that it happened. The time that had gone by, Abraham and Sarah's advanced years, her barrenness...none of these were obstacles or caused God the slightest concern in giving them the son He'd promised.

God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac

We pick up the story again after some years have passed. Abraham and Sarah's son, named Isaac, is now a young man. God, the text says, is going to test Abraham's faith. The test will be unimaginably tough. One day, quite

suddenly, God tells Abraham to go with Isaac to a particular mountain and there to sacrifice his son.

The simple words of the Narrative provide the outer surface of something full of implications and meaning. Abraham has known the Lord for many years and believed the promises, reaffirmed a number of times over the years. God has said that this entire land of Canaan will be owned by Abraham's descendants, a line that will come through a son God will give to Abraham and Sarah. Through him, Abraham, all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Now the long-promised, long-awaited-for son is here. They've watched him grow...no doubt have been delighted at each stage of his development. We don't know, perhaps Abraham even thought this son was the fulfillment of the prophecy given so long ago to Adam...the Deliverer. Now, without warning, God wants him to build a platform of stones on a mountain top, to have Isaac lay there and to cut his throat until his life-blood runs out! And then to burn his body. To sacrifice him as he would a lamb.

But this is his and Sarah's son. Born against all the odds in their old age. What about the promises? The nation? The blessings to all people of the earth? How would that be fulfilled? No doubt the questions swirled around in Abraham's head. Was there turmoil, the temptation to ignore God's command as too much, too extreme, beyond reasonable expectation...? Hadn't he left his home years ago at God's urging? Hadn't he believed God's promises through the years? Didn't he need to set margins? Does he have no rights? OR, Did Abraham focus on the fact that he actually has no rights before God the Creator anyway. That as part of the lost, rebellious human race and himself a willing sinner, it was only through God's grace he hadn't already paid the ultimate penalty? Had he walked for so long with God that he didn't for one moment doubt, or consider that God would do anything but fulfill His promises? Was Abraham, although naturally as a father concerned for his son, convinced that God cared for and would look after Isaac no matter what? Did he trust God so completely that he was glad to allow Him to write the Story as He intended and as He knew it should be written? It seems so.

They travel to the mountain for the sacrifice

Whatever Abraham's exact thought processes, we do know for sure he believed God and that the belief translated into action. (Genesis 22:3-8) The Narrative says that the next morning Abraham makes preparation and sets out with two servants and Isaac. As would have been normal, given that they are going to a desert, mountainous area, they take firewood so the sacrifice can be burned. They travel for 3 days until, leaving the servants and the donkeys, Abraham and Isaac go alone, with Isaac carrying on his shoulders the firewood with which he will be sacrificed. As they climb the mountain, Isaac is curious about the fact that they have everything needed for the ritual except the usual sheep to be offered to God. Abraham's answer is full of significance. He says, "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son." This resonates with

the faith that God desires to see in us, His image-bearers. This is the opposite of Adam and Eve choosing to work out right and wrong for themselves, to be like small gods in a universe of their own making.

It is acknowledging that He writes the Story of reality, including our lives, our circumstances, and that if we have any significance at all it's because He graciously allows us to be in His Narrative. This faith recognises our absolute need for Him, in every way.

God provides a substitute to die in Isaac's place

The record, (Genesis 22:9-10) typically, describes in straightforward terms the proceedings that in reality must have involved deep emotion and drama for the players involved. God, as He sees His servant Abraham, obedient and trusting Him implicitly. Abraham, as we can only surmise, beginning to picture taking his own son's life. And Isaac: what emotions must he have experienced as he willingly allowed himself to be bound and laid down on the altar of stones with firewood around him? Then, the climax comes...Abraham picks up the knife; it is suspended above his son's throat. And, at the last possible moment, God relieves the terror and provides a way out. (Genesis 22:11-13) The Narrative says that the Lord – the personal relating One – calls out Abraham's name and tells him to stop. Abraham has proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that his devotion to God is greater even than his love for his son. But in God's economy, a sacrifice has to be made. The approach to Him has to involve death. What's to be done? God's grace again shines out when things seem darkest. He has already provided. A male sheep, a ram, is there caught in the bushes nearby. The ram is sacrificed in Isaac's place. We can only imagine the relief and joy for Abraham and Isaac.

What else is God telling us beneath the surface of these real events? For one thing, as we've already noted, He always follows through on His promises. Abraham's confidence that God would provide is well founded. He has protected the life of the son he'd promised then given to Abraham and Sarah, and He has shown His commitment to His rescue plan for mankind. The family line, the nation that would come through Isaac, the avenue for the promised Deliverer, would be put in place.

Isaac's situation also provides us with a remarkable and powerful analogy for the plight of the human race. Bound by our sin and the deception of God's Enemy we helplessly wait for death, the ultimate separation. The only hope is God Himself. His grace. His provision. Fortunately for us, that's what He has chosen to make this true Story of His interactions with Adam's hopeless fallen race all about.





DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. Given our society's strong emphasis on personal rights and the need to protect our families against extremist religious views, how does it strike you that Abraham unquestioningly obeyed God's command to sacrifice his son? Are there any relevant truth principles you can identify from the narrative so far? Is there any way of applying all of this to today's realities?
2. Comment on the fact that, like Abraham, we are meant to love and respect God, more than anyone or anything on this earth. Reflect on what this means for you. What are the difficulties? What real life factors are involved? In what direction do you look for growth, progress in this area?
3. What is your personal reaction when you consider the fact that like Isaac, bound and about to die, the majority of people are condemned to eternal punishment for their sin? What is your response to the thought that many do not know about their imminent danger or that a perfect substitution has been made on their behalf?



ACTIVITIES

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1. Research Mount Moriah - the significant events that have taken place there throughout history as well as its importance today.