

For GC Discussion

- How was Abraham able to perform such a great act of sacrifice? Can we apply any of this to our own lives?
- What might this kind of 'test of faith' look like in our life situations now?

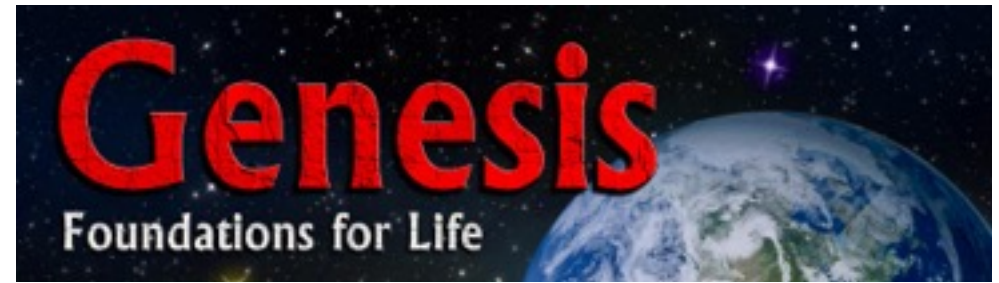
For the Kids

What does it mean to live a life of sacrifice?
What might help us give up things in our lives for Jesus?

Next Week: we move on in our study to think briefly about the life of Isaac in chapters 24-26

Notes and Questions

For Worship: Listen to '*I Surrender all (All to Jesus)*' by Casting Crowns. You can find it on YouTube, or on the Hill City Church blog on the website.



Week 12: Abraham Pt 6: The Test - Ch 22-23

This Weeks Summary

Having spent 20 years waiting for the Son of Promise to arrive, Abraham's faith is now put to the ultimate test as God tells him to literally sacrifice the most precious thing in his life

For Study:

Read the following verses, all on subjects touched by this weeks passage:

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| The Testing of Faith | - James 1:2-4 & 12-15 |
| | - Psalm 66:5-12 |
| | - Deuteronomy 8:1-20 |
| | - 1 Peter 1:3-9 |
| A life of self-sacrifice | - Luke 13:25-33 |
| | - Mark 8:31-38 |
| | - Mark 10:17-31 |
| | - 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 |
| | - Philippians 3:8-16 |

This week we see Abraham's faith tested to the limit as he's asked to sacrifice the son he waited so long to receive. As we see the request He gives to Abraham it teaches us a couple of clear principles in our own discipleship.

Don't despise the waiting time

We looked last week at how God had kept Abraham waiting for a long time before He gives Him the son that he desires so much - the son who is the key to the fulfilment of the big promise of Genesis 12:1-3. We talked about how God doesn't require us to achieve great things, perform great miracles, or change the world for Him to be please with us - He primarily wants us to trust Him. Some of us may do great things, and even change the world, but the message of Abraham's life is this: unless what we do is done in faith then it is worthless. The world is focussed on it's achievements for its greatness - we're focussed on our God, who is the definition of greatness, and it's only in complete dependence on Him that we will truly do great things that will last. So what is happening for those 20 years while Abraham is waiting for Isaac to show up - is it wasted time? Not at all - God is using all that time to mould and shape Abraham - to create the man who we now know as the Father of faith, and to get him ready for the day when he would be given the ultimate test. Abraham is brought to a place where he trusts God so much that he is willing to sacrifice Isaac, believing completely in the goodness of God, and fully expecting Him to raise Isaac from the dead if He allows him to go through with it (Hebrews 11:19).

I wonder how many of us would pass this test of faith if something similar was put before us today? I wonder how Abraham would have done if he'd been thrust right into Genesis 23 immediately after God had called him away from his family? The reality is Abraham probably would have failed, and we may do too, and that's ok. What we need to do is exactly what Abraham did - learn to trust God in the everyday and the mundane, learn to depend on Him through the hard times and the smooth times, and never despise anything that God brings into our lives no matter how small - we have no idea what 'big' things God may be preparing us for in the future.

Dying that we might live

It's possible to be surprised at how chapter 22 pans out following on from Abraham's obedience to the command of God. In verses 15-19 God gives the final confirmation of the covenant He began with Abraham back in chapter 12, but it reads as if the promise was conditional on what Abraham has just done - 'because you have done this' (verse 16) God says He will multiply Abraham's offspring. What would have happened if Abraham had

failed the test is thankfully not necessary to even think about, but the process does remind me of some things that Jesus said in the New Testament:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25)

Isn't this exactly what Abraham went through - to find fulfilment of the promise of God he had to deny that which was most precious to him, and be willing to go through something that surely to Abraham would have been worse even than his own death. But in doing so, and trusting God through it, Abraham found real life, and we would do well to follow his example. Abraham came to realise that there is nothing in life that is worth holding back from the God who had given him everything, and we should see that even more clearly that Abraham did. As we look back at the cross, we know that God 'did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all' (Romans 8:32). How can we ever withhold anything from such a good God, and even more so when we see the gracious promise of life if we will deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him.

Sarah receives her reward

We shouldn't leave this week without giving a mention to Sarah who dies in chapter 23 and is buried in a Hittite tomb in what was to be one day called Hebron. We focus a lot on Abraham and rightly so as he is the main subject of the chapters we've been studying, but Sarah also has her own journey of faith over the 20 years between the call of God and the birth of Isaac. The Bible doesn't tend to paint Sarah in the best light as we see her prompting Abraham to sleep with Hagar, then sending her servant girl away twice, and finally laughing at the promise of God. However, Hebrews 11 has the final word on Sarah and tells us that despite her faults and failures Sarah in the end received strength she needed to conceive Isaac 'by faith... since she considered Him faithful who had promised' (Hebrews 11:11). This same chapter goes on to say that Sarah, along with many other men and women of faith 'died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar' (11:13).

Though I'm sure the birth of Isaac brought her great joy, it surely cannot even come close to the moment when she was received into glory and heard those words 'well done good and faithful servant'. Sarah stands as yet another example of how God can take a person with abundant flaws and use them to show His glory and fulfil His purposes here on earth.