

## ***PATRIARCHS: Lesson Four, Isaac's Birth and Abraham's Test*** ***Genesis 20-22***

**Subject:** Sarah was at risk, then safely bore Isaac; but Abraham agreed to sacrifice him.

**Main Idea:** Events in Abraham's life illustrate God's love for the world.

**Principles:**

1. *God loves without discrimination.*
2. *God's love is sacrificial.*

### **Introduction**

During the years our children were growing up, one of our daughters enjoyed swimming. We encouraged her in this for a couple of reasons. Of course, it was good exercise. But because she was a somewhat timid child, we hoped if she excelled in swimming, her confidence would increase. When she was about 10 years old, a day came in her lessons in which, in order to progress and achieve a junior lifeguard status, she had to swim to the bottom of a deep pool and carry a heavy brick up from the bottom. Being both naturally timid and especially petite, the thought of being under the water too long trying to get the brick to the surface terrified her – so much so that she wanted to quit her course of lessons. Now, I was not in the least worried. First, I knew that, in the worst case, she could let go of the brick rather than drown. I also knew that instructors would be watching her the entire time and would come to her rescue if the situation looked desperate. So I strongly encouraged her to stay with the course and cheered her on to take the dreaded test. Much to her surprise, she did so successfully. As I think back on that, I realize that the experience not only helped shape our daughter's character, it was one of the occasions that grew her confidence in me. My love and encouragement gave her the security she needed to face the threat.

It is a tragedy when children grow up without the advantage of knowing a parent's unconditional love. As adults, they often struggle with deep insecurities. But even those who have known such love discover that significant adults in our lives cannot shelter us from all of life's troubles. There are many threats no one can control. Any of us might lose our health, our loved ones, our source of income and other resources. In fact, eventually, most of us do lose some of these things. Naturally speaking, those are frightening thoughts. Where can we find *real security*? The answer is the love of God! The deep, unfailing, personal love of God for each of us leads to genuine security – a security that calms fears of any and every threat! Only perfect love deserves absolute trust. And that is the kind of love God has for us. Embracing His love is the secret to finding real security amidst life's threats!

In this week's lesson, Abraham and Sarah experienced some serious threats.

- Abraham felt his life was threatened when they moved to Gerar.
- Sarah felt her son's position and inheritance was threatened by the presence of Ishmael.
- And finally, Abraham faced the threat of losing his one and only son by obeying God.

As the stories reveal, Abraham and Sarah didn't always remember to trust God when circumstances threatened them. But *when Abraham did*, he was able to face a threat *so* great with *such* confidence that his actions have stood as the supreme example of trusting and obeying God throughout history!

## I. The Promised Son's Birth and Inheritance Threatened – Genesis 20-21

### A. God Protected Sarah – 20:1-7

#### i. Gerar and the "Philistines"

1. An unspecified amount of time after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham left Mamre and headed south into Philistine territory to a place called "Gerar." Later (21:31-34), Beersheba is also noted as being located within the "land of the Philistines" at that time.
2. Other than a brief mention in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10), the first of over 300 Old Testament references to "Philistines" is found here in the stories of Abimelech in Genesis 20-21 (21:32, 34). Archaeologists do not believe this is the same people group as the "Philistines" who became bitter enemies of King David and of Israel. They entered Canaan much later, around 1200 B.C. <sup>i</sup>
3. Interestingly, the modern name "Palestine" was derived from the word "Philistine."<sup>ii</sup> ("Palestine" means "Land of the Philistines.")

#### ii. "Abraham said, 'She is my sister'."

1. Abraham was thrown out of Egypt earlier in his life for having deceived Pharaoh (and all the Egyptians) by claiming Sarah was his sister. Many years later, he repeated the ruse.
2. Abraham seemed to be a spiritual giant in the preceding chapter, in which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. It is rather shocking to find him falling back into an old, sinful habit.
3. Some cultures prize trickery, believing that it proves intelligence and cunning. However, the Bible does not applaud Abraham for his deceptions. Jesus denounced deception, categorizing it with murder, adultery, slander, and folly (among other evils), saying they made a person "unclean" (Mark 7:20-22).
4. Sadly, we will learn that both Abraham's son Isaac and his grandson Jacob struggled with the same sin.
5. Have you been able to identify sins or temptations to which you've fallen prey repeatedly?

iii. Abimelech “took her.”

1. “Abimelech” is the Philistine king in both Genesis 20 and 26. Some have suggested that the name (which means “my father is king”) may have been a Philistine title given to their rulers, rather than a personal name, just as “Pharaoh” was a title in Egypt.
2. Why would Abimelech have been interested in taking a 90-year-old woman into his harem?
  - a. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was immediately preceded by divine assurance that Sarah would give birth within a year’s time (17:21, 18:10). Some have suggested that the post-menopausal Sarah was in the process of being physically rejuvenated by a renewal of hormones, in preparation to bear Isaac. This may have caused Sarah to appear much younger than she was. We were told previously that Sarah was considered quite beautiful (12:11, 14).
  - b. Scholars Keil and Delitzsch suggest that Abimelech took her “to ally himself with Abraham, the rich nomad prince.”<sup>iii</sup>
3. Regardless, the fact that God promised her a son within a year is critical information. For we must believe she had become fertile. To be taken into Abimelech’s harem greatly jeopardized God’s plan to give her Isaac through Abraham.
4. Furthermore, “throughout the ancient orient, adultery warranted the death penalty.”<sup>iv</sup> If Abimelech engaged Sarah sexually and she was discovered to be Abraham’s wife, her life was at risk! Later, the Lord told Abimelech that unless he returned Sarah, his own life would also be taken, as well (20:7).
5. Why would Abraham have made such a foolish mistake and risked losing Sarah and the child she was to bear him? 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” None of us is ever beyond temptation. Abraham felt threatened and resorted to an old, self-made plan instead of trusting God.

iv. God came to Abimelech in a dream.

1. Abimelech’s relationship to God is not clearly explained. But we see that he responded quickly to a dream from the Lord and that the Lord protected him because of his innocent intentions. Under similar circumstances, Pharaoh had been unmoved to return Sarah except that disease came upon his household. Of the two, Abimelech is portrayed more favorably.
2. From the beginning, God has always been concerned about *all people*.

- a. The Old Testament is full of stories where people outside of Abraham's family (Israel) are brought into relationship with God. In Genesis 14, Melchizedek was one such individual. Later, Rahab, Ruth, and Jethro are all shown to be in relationship with God, even though none of them were Israelites.
  - b. Abraham's family is the focus of the Old Testament because God's purpose was to use them to reach the rest of the world, not because God was only concerned for Abraham and his descendants.
3. After Abimelech claimed his innocence in the matter, God stated that preventing him from touching Sarah was His own doing. He protected Sarah *and* Abimelech. But, most importantly, in doing so He protected His plan and promise to give Abraham and Sarah a child of their own that year.
  4. God told Abimelech to have Abraham pray for him, stating Abraham was a prophet. This is the first use of the word "prophet" in the Bible. The word means, "to serve as a channel of communication between the human and the divine."

## **B. Abimelech Confronted Abraham – 20:8-18**

- i. Abraham's "sister" Sarah
  1. Abimelech rebuked Abraham for his deceit.
  2. In defense, Abraham told him that Sarah *really was* his half-sister and this "game" was one they had played for years to protect Abraham. Speaking of the danger of justifying "half-truths," F.B. Meyer says, "A lie consists in the motive quite as much as in the actual words... A half-truth has just enough fact in it to make it plausible and just enough deception to make it dangerous."<sup>v</sup>
- ii. Abimelech's Gifts: Abimelech gave Abraham and Sarah gifts to restore her honor in the eyes of her own household and the people of the land, who surely learned of their scheme (20:16). Unlike Pharaoh, he invited them to remain in his territory.
- iii. Abraham's Testimony
  1. Without doubt, Abraham was shamed before this local ruler. By his own testimony, he "thought there was no fear of God in this place" (v. 11), and yet Abimelech had acted more honorably than he.

2. To add to his embarrassment, Abraham was to pray for Abimelech, absolving him of guilt and restoring fertility to his household (20:7, 17-18.) How humbling this must have been for Abraham! Had he trusted God and told Abimelech the truth about Sarah when they first arrived in Gerar, he would have discovered Abimelech was honorable and the perceived threat was unfounded!

### **C. Sarah Gave Birth to Isaac – 21:1-7**

#### **i. God’s Graciousness to Abraham and Sarah**

1. Immediately following this event, we learn that Sarah did indeed become pregnant by Abraham and gave birth to Isaac “at the very time God had promised” (21:2).
2. The Lord’s graciousness in fulfilling His promise is emphasized in 21:1. In light of recent events, Abraham and Sarah did not deserve such a miraculous gift.

#### **ii. Isaac’s Name and Circumcision**

1. While the laughter of Abraham and Sarah, upon hearing God’s promise that a son would be born to them, was (quite possibly for both of them) the laughter of disbelief, at the time of Isaac’s birth, their laughter resulted from joy. Isaac’s name (“he laughs”) was fitting.
2. According to God’s instructions, Abraham circumcised Isaac when he was eight days old.

### **D. Abraham Sent Ishmael Away – 21:8-14**

#### **i. Celebration of Isaac’s Weaning Turned Sour**

1. Children were normally weaned at age three, according to ancient Middle Eastern custom. A feast to celebrate the event was held.
2. If Isaac was three, then Ishmael, Hagar’s son, would have been seventeen years old (17:21, 25) when he infamously mocked Isaac (Genesis 21:9; Galatians 4:29).
3. Witnessing this, Sarah insisted that Abraham immediately put Hagar and Ishmael out of the household. She claimed her reason for wanting this was that Ishmael “would never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac” (v. 10).
  - a. Scholars Hughes and Laney comment: “According to custom, if a natural heir was born, the heir through the slave woman would lose the right of being chief inheritor (21:10–11). However, previous heirs were to be well treated.”<sup>vi</sup>

- b. Meredith Kline (*New Bible Commentary, Revised*) further explains that the laws of the day *entitled* Ishmael to an inheritance, *unless*, as the son of a slave, he chose his freedom in its place.<sup>vii</sup> By insisting they were put out, Sarah *forced* Hagar and Ishmael to “choose” freedom over inheritance.
- ii. Abraham’s Distress and Sarah’s Sin
    1. The English translation indicating Abraham’s distress underestimates the force of the original language. Abraham “exploded in anger.” Despite Ishmael’s difficult nature (Genesis 16:12, 21:9; Galatians 4:29), Abraham surely loved him. Furthermore, he had received God’s assurance that Ishmael would be blessed and become a great nation (17:20).
    2. However, God spoke to Abraham, affirming His plan to make Ishmael into a great nation and telling him to comply with Sarah’s wishes. He reminded Abraham that Isaac would be the sole inheritor of the patriarchal covenant.
    3. While it seems God planned a separation between Ishmael and Isaac, the manner in which it occurred could not have been pleasing to God. Sarah’s wishes were consistent with God’s plans, but her spirit was not one He condoned.
      - a. Sarah acted out of unresolved resentment toward Hagar and Ishmael. She could have trusted God to ensure Isaac would receive all He promised him, in His time and in His way! She could have waited for God to remove the threat she felt.
      - b. Walter Kaiser comments, “Thus Sarah sinned in recommending that Abraham take Hagar as his wife and sinned again in the attitude that prompted her to urge Abraham to send her away. But just as in the case of Joseph, where his brothers intended him harm, God meant it for good—the good of both Isaac and Ishmael.”<sup>viii</sup>
    4. Obedient to the Lord’s command, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away early the very next morning. He set provisions on Hagar’s shoulders and sent the two away. (Some translations mistakenly indicate that Abraham put Ishmael on Hagar’s shoulders, as if he were a small child.)

### **E. God Provided for Ishmael – 21:15-21**

- i. For a second time, Hagar met “the angel of the Lord” in the desert in a desperate situation.
- ii. “Ishmael” means, “he hears”; God said he “heard” Ishmael crying.
- iii. God provided water for them, and assured Hagar they had a future.

- iv. The scene ends with the commentary, “God was with the boy as he grew up,” he and his mother lived in the desert, he became an archer, and his mother later got a wife for him from her homeland, Egypt.

#### **F. Abraham’s Influence was Recognized – 21:22-34**

- i. Just as we will find at the end of Genesis 22, Genesis 21 ends with information that is peripheral to the immediate story but of great importance in the larger story.
- ii. Abimelech initiated a treaty with Abraham in Beersheba. Despite Abraham’s ongoing position as an alien (not a landowner) in Canaan, Abimelech was acknowledging his influence. He believed it was in his best interest, and that of his people, to be at peace with Abraham.
- iii. His interest in the treaty shows that God’s promises to bless Abraham and make his name great were “taking hold”.<sup>ix</sup>
- iv. This event and the birth of Isaac highlight God’s graciousness toward Abraham. This is all the more evident in light of the accounts that surround them – Abraham’s deceit of Abimelech (chapter 20) and Sarah’s sullenness and anger over the foolishness of teenaged Ishmael (21:8-21).

**Summary Statement:** Abraham and Sarah failed to remember that God promised to bless *all nations* through them. He wanted them to be a blessing to Abimelech and to Hagar!

**Principle:** *God loves without discrimination.*

Abraham did not have the full revelation of God that we have in His word today. For example, we don’t know how fully God revealed His loving nature to him. But as the recipient of His promises, Abraham certainly knew of God’s goodness and His desire to bless all nations.

Genesis 20-21 illustrates God’s loving concern for individuals of *every* ethnicity, economic status, and gender.

- God was not only concerned for Abraham, he was concerned for Abimelech, a male Gentile of royal stature, and for an Egyptian female slave and her son, Hagar and Ishmael.
- Romans 10:11-13 says, “As the Scripture says, ‘*Anyone* who believes in Him will never be put to shame.’ For *there is no difference between Jew and Gentile* – the same Lord is Lord of *all* and richly blesses *all* who call on Him, for ‘*Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’.” (my emphasis).
- Romans 2:11 says, “God does not show favoritism.”
- Although God chose to work through Abraham and his son Isaac, he did so to accomplish His plan of salvation *for the benefit of the entire world – to bless all nations.*

**Application:** We have the benefit of the full revelation in the Scriptures of God’s loving nature and concern for all people. How much more, then, should we, His representatives, seek to love and bless everyone? Even our enemies! Jesus instructs us, “Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back” (Luke 6:35).

Will you choose to love those by whom you feel threatened?

**Transition:** God’s plan to demonstrate His love to the world through His people is illustrated for us quite graphically in Genesis 22.

## II. The Promised Son’s Life Threatened – Genesis 22

### A. God Tested Abraham – 22:1-8

#### i. Instructions Given

1. “Some time later,” God told Abraham to sacrifice his only beloved son, Isaac. The force of the imperatives, “take”, “go”, and “sacrifice”, is more obvious in the original Hebrew language, indicating that God’s command was exceedingly clear.
2. God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. “A *burnt offering* was a common type of sacrifice, in which the whole victim was burnt upon the altar (*cf.* Lv. 1).”<sup>x</sup>
3. While *we* are told in verse 1 that this was a “test” (and later we learn that God never intended Isaac be sacrificed), from Abraham’s perspective, he could not have understood the command to mean anything other than that God *was requiring him* to sacrifice Isaac.

#### ii. The Nature of the Test

##### 1. *Child Sacrifice*

- a. God’s demand forced Abraham to choose between obedience to Him and the love of his own child! One cannot conceive of a more difficult demand.
- b. Our “civilized” senses are repulsed by the barbaric notion of child sacrifice. However, we must understand this story in the context of the time in which it took place.
  - i. Child sacrifice was already known in Abraham’s day as a demand of local gods.
  - ii. As previously stated, Abraham did not have the written revelation of God that we have in His Word today.
  - iii. Both of these facts considered, Abraham would have been much more willing than we would be to believe that God would require this of him.

- c. God (later) forbade the Israelites from this and other heathen practices used by the nations around them. But that was not because He didn't have the right to require it!
  - i. Walt Kaiser explains: *“God has the right to require human sacrifice. All biblical sacrifice rests on the idea that the gift of life to God, either in consecration or in expiation, is necessary to restore the broken fellowship with God caused by sin. In the abstract, human sacrifice cannot be condemned on principle. The truth is that God owns all life and has a right to give or take it as he wills. To reject on all grounds God’s legitimate right to ask for life under any conditions would be to remove his sovereignty and question his justice in providing his own sacrifice as the central work of redemption.”*<sup>xi</sup>
  - ii. In the Mosaic Law, God commanded firstborn sons and animals to be given as an offering to Him. However, firstborn *sons* were to be redeemed by an animal (substitution); all other ‘firstborns’ were given to the Lord (sacrificed) – Exodus 22:29; 34:20.
  - iii. The point is, nothing belongs to us. God is the author, creator, and owner of all. Everything we have, He has lent to us.

## 2. God “Testing” People

- a. Some may be offended that God “tested” Abraham. It is important to understand that God’s test was not to tempt Abraham to evil. “For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone” (James 1:13).
- b. God was not trying to destroy Abraham by giving him this test; He tested him in order to benefit him! God tests us to refine and improve us (James 1), while Satan tempts us to destroy us (John 10:10).
- c. Finally, God *never intended* to allow Abraham to kill Isaac.

### iii. The Location of the Test

- 1. God told Abraham to “go to the region of Moriah” to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering “on a mountain I will show you.”
- 2. A sharp observer can see the parallel between Abraham’s first test of faith, when God also instructed Abraham to “go”, indicating He would lead him to “the land I will show you” (12:1), and this one.
- 3. Not all agree the “region of Moriah” where Abraham was sent by God is the same location as the “Mount Moriah,” in Jerusalem, on which Solomon’s temple was later built (2 Chronicles 3:1).

- a. The distance between Beersheba, where Abraham was living, and Jerusalem does, however, correspond to the three-day journey Abraham and Isaac made (The two are about 50 miles [80 km] apart,<sup>xii</sup> roughly 20-1/2 hours on foot.<sup>xiii</sup>)
- b. Furthermore, if God only intended to test Abraham's willingness to obey, the location would seem irrelevant and such a long journey unnecessary. It seems God had a distinct purpose for sending Abraham to Moriah. Mount Moriah, in Jerusalem, was the site on which Israel later sacrificed animals in substitution for their own sin, for centuries.

iv. Abraham's Response to the Test

1. One wonders what went on in Abraham's mind during the night. Surely it was an agonizing and sleepless one!

- a. He had to consider whether or not he would obey God's command, first and foremost. He likely replayed God's command over and over. If it had been any less specific, Abraham probably would have doubted that he understood correctly. Early Jewish interpreters illustrated Abraham's dialogue with God in a way that emphasizes Abraham's struggle as a father:

“Abraham, take your son!”

“Which one, God? I have two sons.”

“Take your only son!” came God's reply.

“But Lord,” argued Abraham, “Ishmael is the only son of Hagar, and Isaac is the only son of Sarah.”

“Whom you love,” answered God.

“Lord, I love them both.”

“Isaac!” was God's solemn reply.<sup>xiv</sup>

- b. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us that Abraham reasoned that God could raise Isaac from the dead. There is no precedent given in Scripture, prior to Abraham's time, of God raising the dead. So Abraham seemed merely to “reason” that God *could* do this. He acted in faith based on what he knew God was capable of. Hadn't God previously said, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (18:14)
- c. Abraham knew God had promised to give him many descendants through *Isaac*. So Abraham believed resurrection was a way to reconcile the seeming conflict with God's command to sacrifice Isaac. (That Abraham considered this as the solution proves that he fully believed God was asking him to literally kill his son.)

- d. Once Abraham determined to obey, we assume he must have also had to think through the logistics of the trip and what he would (or wouldn't) tell Isaac and Sarah about it.
  2. Abraham acted early the very next morning, loading his donkey and making ready the provisions for the journey.
  3. Two servants accompanied Abraham and Isaac. They took a donkey loaded with supplies, including the wood for the sacrifice.
  4. When they arrived at the place God told him about, Abraham told the servants to wait behind with the donkey. "We will worship and then we will come back to you" (verse 5). This statement affirms Abraham's belief that Isaac would indeed return with him.
  5. As difficult as it would be to obey, and although Abraham may not have fully understood, he knew that obedience to a good God could never present any real threat.
- v. Isaac and the Test
1. *Isaac's Willingness Implied*
    - a. The only conversation recorded between the time God issued the test and the time the "angel of the Lord" spoke to stop Abraham from slaying Isaac was a brief exchange between Abraham and Isaac. Once the two were alone, Isaac asked Abraham, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered that God himself would provide the lamb. One senses Abraham's agony in having to answer. It was inevitable that Isaac would eventually ask, but how could Abraham bring himself to tell Isaac what was about to happen?
    - b. Scholars believe Isaac would have been at least a teenager by this time, possibly 20. Isaac was old enough and strong enough to carry all the wood for the sacrifice up the mountain alone.
    - c. As the time approached for Abraham to bind him, Abraham must have eventually told Isaac what God asked of him, although not recorded, since Isaac was old enough to resist. Apparently Isaac trusted his father, just as his father trusted God.
  2. *Isaac's Place In Abraham's Heart*
    - a. As Abraham and Sarah's only son, the long-awaited *promised* son, given in their old age, Isaac may have been very indulged by them.
    - b. The suggestion has been made that perhaps Abraham himself began to wonder who he loved more – Isaac or God.

- c. Affirming this idea, Bill Arnold (*Encountering the Book of Genesis*) has written, “*God wanted Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac on an altar, but to sacrifice him in his heart.*”<sup>xv</sup>

### **B. God Provided a Substitute – 22:9-14**

- i. Just as Abraham was about to slay Isaac with a knife, the “angel of the Lord” called to Abraham, stopping him. “Do not lay a hand on the boy... Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”
- ii. At that moment Abraham saw a ram caught in the nearby thicket. God had indeed provided the lamb – a substitute for Isaac. Abraham offered the ram in Isaac’s place, naming the place, “The Lord Will Provide.”

**C. God Reiterated His Promises – 22:15-19** The Lord swore by Himself that, because of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his only son, He would bless him, multiply his descendants and bless all nations on earth through them. These were not entirely new promises but an affirmation that Abraham’s faith was pleasing to God.

### **D. God’s Purpose in the Test**

- i. Principle of Substitution Taught: Just as the love of God was being illustrated in Abraham’s life long before it was revealed in His word, the principle of substitutionary sacrifice was also being illustrated.
  1. Illustrating the principle of substitutionary sacrifice was significant for Abraham’s descendants who, for centuries, presented animals as substitutionary sacrifices for their own sins, in accordance with the Mosaic Law.
  2. But even more important, it was significant in preparing people in every subsequent age to understand the substitutionary nature of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. He died in our place.
- ii. Principle that Faith is Proved by Actions Depicted
  1. Hebrews 11 says that Abraham acted in faith by going to Canaan (a place he didn’t even know about), by believing God would cause him to inherit Canaan (although he was an alien there), by believing God’s promise to give him a son (even when he and his barren wife were too old to conceive), and by preparing to sacrifice Isaac (even when doing so seemed to conflict with God’s promises concerning him.)
  2. While Genesis 15:6 and Hebrews 11 teach that it was Abraham’s faith that saved him, the book of James points out Abraham’s action were essential proof that his faith was genuine.

iii. Abraham's Faith Deepened

1. Among the great blessings Abraham learned from his obedience was that God provides for those who put their trust in Him! His confidence in the Lord – his faith – must have been deepened.
2. Abraham experienced God in a new way – as provider. He had responded in faith to God's promises and call in the past. But, on previous occasions, he had repeatedly taken matters into his own hands when threatened.
  - a. When threatened by famine, Abraham went to Egypt without consulting the Lord (Genesis 12).
  - b. In Egypt, he denied the beautiful Sarah was his wife (calling her his sister) because he believed his life was at risk (Genesis 12).
  - c. When Isaac's birth was delayed, believing God's promises were at risk, he agreed to father a child through Hagar (Genesis 16).
  - d. He sought to protect his life a second time by lying about Sarah to Abimelech (Genesis 20).
  - e. But on the occasion of God's call to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham trusted God to provide the solution. He came to know God as his Provider. As a result, his story not only points out God's willingness to provide for us, it also illustrates God's love for the world.

iv. A Portrait is Given of God's Ultimate Blessing Through Abraham

1. Although Abraham reasoned God would raise Isaac from the dead, (Hebrews 11), that was never God's plan for Isaac. However, it *was* God's plan for His *own* son Jesus! Abraham and Isaac's story prefigures God the Father's sacrifice of *His* one and only son Jesus Christ, whom He loved. The phrases "*your only son*" and "*whom you love*", repeated in Genesis 22:2 and 22:16, are reflected in God's words, recorded in the New Testament, about His own son Jesus (Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 20:13; John 3:16, Romans 8:32, 2 Peter 1:17, and 1 John 4:9).
2. During the years after God gave His specific promises to Abraham, Abraham must have thought long and hard about the promises God had made to him. It certainly seems he would have wondered exactly *how* God would go about fulfilling these promises (1 Peter 1:10), especially His promise to bless the entire world through him (Genesis 12:3). In the *Beginnings* study, I suggested that after God told Eve her "seed" would crush her enemy's head, women in every generation likely hoped they would be the woman blessed to bear this Deliverer.

- a. Some have conjectured, based on these suppositions, that God’s command to sacrifice Isaac was not only a “test” of Abraham’s faith, *but also an answer to Abraham’s question concerning how God would bless all nations through him.*<sup>xvi</sup>
  - b. God gave Abraham a graphic illustration of the future sacrificial, substitutionary death of the Messiah (Abraham’s greatest descendant) as the means by which He would ultimately fulfill His promise to bless all nations.
  - c. Walter Kaiser reminds us that “*John 8:56 substantiates this claim when Jesus said, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.’*” Kaiser says that Jesus seems to be suggesting that Abraham had some understanding of what his “greatest son” (Christ) would do.<sup>xvii</sup>
3. Most information in Abraham’s day was passed down orally. Handing down stories has been important in many cultures as a way of communicating memorable, significant events and lessons.
- a. Without doubt, Abraham’s call to sacrifice Isaac was a story repeated by Abraham, by Isaac, and by all their children for centuries until penned by Moses.
  - b. *If* Abraham understood any part of the significance of his test as it related the future role of the Messiah, he certainly would have passed this information along as well.
  - c. This story of a father’s willingness to sacrifice his one and only son, retold through the centuries, should have prepared the Jews to see Christ’s death on the Cross as God’s plan for the Messiah from the beginning of time.

#### **E. Isaac’s Future In-laws Mentioned – 22:20-24**

- i. Abraham learned his brother Nahor fathered eight sons through his wife and four through his concubine. Altogether, twelve sons are named. This number parallels the number of sons born to Ishmael (recorded in 25:12-18) and the number of sons born to Jacob (Genesis 29-35).
- ii. Once again, the information at the end of this chapter is peripheral to the immediate story but important in the larger one.
  1. The listing of Nahor’s sons prepares the reader for the later story about Abraham’s servant’s journey to find Isaac a wife among Nahor’s family (Genesis 24).
  2. With this information, the Biblical account transitions to focus on Isaac. “From this point on, Abraham’s task was to prepare for receiving future blessings through Isaac.”<sup>xviii</sup>

**Summary Statement:** Obeying God, even when we do not understand His reasons, may be rewarded in ways we never could have imagined! Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his one and only son Isaac illustrates God's sacrifice of His one and only Son Jesus.

**Principle:** *God's love is sacrificial.*

Isaac is not a perfect "type" of Christ because his life was spared. God did *not* spare His son (Romans 8:32). He made the sacrifice because of the depth of His love for us.

John 3:16 says that *out of love* for us God *gave* His one and only Son. Romans 5:8 echoes this, saying Christ's death on our behalf is a demonstration of God's love for us. Saving us was costly to God. It cost the life of His Son. But it was a price He paid out of love for us.

### Conclusion

Would you describe yourself as a person who is deeply secure in God's love for you?

- He wants you to have that sense of security! He wants us to be rooted and established in His love. He wants us to know how wide and long and high and deep His love for us is (Ephesians 3:17-19).
- God's unfailing love gives us the security we need to face the threats introduced to the world by sin. Once we find our security in His love, anxieties melt away. We can relax and trust Him. We experience peace.
- He was willing to pay a great price so that we would know His love for us.

Will you ask Him to help you *know* His love *experientially*?

<sup>i</sup> *The NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (2005) (p. xxi-xxii). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>ii</sup> Mitchell, T. C. (1996). Philistines, Philistia. In (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman, Eds.) *New Bible Dictionary*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InCerVarsity Press.

<sup>iii</sup> Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 153). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

<sup>iv</sup> Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., p. 75). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>v</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (p. 87). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>vi</sup> Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 17). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>vii</sup> Guthrie, D and Motyer, J.A. (1970). *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*, (p. 99). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>viii</sup> Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 124). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

<sup>ix</sup> Arnold, Bill T. (1998). *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (p. 106). Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

<sup>x</sup> Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., p. 77). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>xi</sup> Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 124). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

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- <sup>xii</sup> Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., p. 76). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 159). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Adapted from Midrash Rabbah to Genesis (Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. [London: Soncino, 1961], 1:486) as quoted in: Arnold, Bill T. (1998). *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (p. 107). Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- <sup>xv</sup> Arnold, Bill T. (1998). *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (p. 110). Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 126). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.