

## *Patriarchs Study and Discussion Questions*

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

#### Read Genesis 20.

- 1) Based on the interaction between God and Abimelech in verses 2-7, was Abraham's the only family for whom God was concerned? See also Psalm 33:13-15. **God has always been interested in all people. The Old Testament is full of stories in which people outside of Abraham's family are brought into a relationship with God. Genesis 14 speaks of Melchizedek, a Gentile God-worshipper. Later, other Gentiles (such as Jethro, Rahab, and Ruth) are portrayed in relationship with God. 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 (God told Abram, "Through you all nations will be blessed"), but they were not the only people for whom God cared.**
- 2) How did Abraham sin? Had he done this before? **Abraham lied by claiming Sarah was his sister and asking her to play along. It was a half-truth (still a lie). He had done the same thing in Egypt shortly after he arrived in Canaan (Genesis 12).**
- 3) Reread God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:15-21 and its fulfillment in Genesis 21:1-7.
  - a) How much time transpired between God's promise to Abraham and its fulfillment? See Genesis 17:1 and 21:5. **In 17:21, God promised that Sarah would bear Abraham a son within one year (thus, no more than one year transpired between the events of Genesis 17 and Genesis 21:2). Genesis 19:31-38 is a parenthetical passage that describes the long-range result of the displacement of Lot and his daughters from Sodom. Chapter 20 resumes Abraham and Sarah's story sometime shortly after the fall of Sodom (compare 19:27-29 with 20:1).**
  - b) Considering this relatively short time frame, what shocking risk did Abraham make in Genesis 20? **In the same year that God said Sarah would become pregnant by Abraham, Abraham allowed her to be taken into Abimelech's household, jeopardizing the birth of the son he had waited so long for (Abimelech could have impregnated her).**
  - c) Which verse tells specifically how God protected His own plan? **Verse 6: "That is why I did not let you touch her."**
- 4) Think of a time when you made a bad decision and God mercifully spared you the potentially serious consequence. How does this impact your attitude toward your present life? **Personal sharing**

#### Read Genesis 21:1-7.

- 5) Recalling what you learned in Question 3a and from Genesis 17:1, 11, 24 and 21:5, how long before Isaac's birth had Abraham been circumcised? **Abraham was circumcised one year before Isaac was born.**
- 6) Try to put yourself in Abraham and Sarah's place. Were they likely to have connected Abraham's circumcision with Isaac's birth? **Prior to Abraham's circumcision, Abraham and Sarah had never conceived a child. They surely must have connected Abraham's radical obedience (in circumcising himself) to Isaac's birth.**
- 7) Apply Jesus' words in Matthew 25:21 and Luke 16:10a to Abraham's circumcision and Isaac's birth. What are some of the "little" things with which you need to be faithful this week? Be specific. **The New Testament references tell us that when we are faithful in small matters, God entrusts us with more responsibility. Abraham had been obedient to God by circumcising himself. This paved the way for God to give him greater blessing and responsibility (the promised son). Personal sharing**

Read Genesis 21:8-34.

- 8) What does the story in verses 8-20 teach us about God? God is sometimes behind the voice of someone with influence in our life, even when we wouldn't naturally agree with his or her counsel (21:12). God gives us what we do not deserve (21:13). God sees and can meet the needs of our loved ones in ways that we cannot (21:17-19). God cared for Hagar and Ishmael, even though they were not His instruments in bringing salvation and blessing to the earth. He cares for everyone (21:13, 17-19).
- 9) Consider Abraham's grief in sending his own son, Ishmael, away. Has God asked you to let go and trust Him with something precious? If so, what is it? **Personal sharing**
- 10) Explain how the testimony (verse 22) and request (verse 23) of the local Canaanite rulers was proof that God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2 was being fulfilled. **The local rulers' acknowledgement of Abraham's influence and power in Canaan, despite his status as an alien (not a landowner), shows that God was blessing Abraham and making his name great (Genesis 12:2).**

Read Genesis 22:1-19.

- 11) Imagine and describe the thoughts that might have gone through Abraham's mind during the night between verses 2 and 3. What insight does Hebrews 11:17-19 give into Abraham's reasoning? **Surely it was an agonizing and sleepless night for Abraham! He had to consider whether or not he would obey God's order to kill the son He had given him. One can imagine that Abraham might have wondered if he had understood God correctly. Would God ask him to do such a thing? Maybe he questioned whether it was even God's voice. Once he overcame these obstacles to obedience, he would have had to think through the logistics of the trip and how to convince Isaac to cooperate. Hebrews 11:17-19 says that Abraham reasoned God could raise Isaac from the dead. There is no mention in Scripture of God ever having raised someone from the dead during or prior to Abraham's time. Abraham knew that God had promised to give him many descendants through this promised son (21:12), and thus he merely reasoned that if God wanted him to put Isaac to death, He *could*, and surely *would*, raise him.**
- 12) In which present circumstance are you struggling to believe that obedience to God is really in your best interest? **Personal sharing**

Read Genesis 22:1-24.

- 13) The story of Abraham and Isaac prefigures the central Biblical drama. What is that central drama? See John 3:16, Luke 3:22, and Romans 8:32. **The central drama of the Scriptures is God the Father's sacrifice of His One and Only beloved Son Jesus Christ. The story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his one and only, beloved son was surely told and retold through the centuries and should have prepared the Jews (their descendants) to recognize Christ's sacrificial death as God the Father's predetermined will for the Messiah.**
- 14) What does Abraham and Isaac's story teach us about saving faith? See Genesis 15:6 with John 14:15, 21-24, Romans 2:13, Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19, James 2:20-24, and 1 John 2:3. **The New Testament teaches that obedient actions prove saving faith. Hebrews 11 says that Abraham acted in faith by going to a place he didn't know about (Canaan) in obedience to God. He believed God would give him the land of Canaan, even though he was an alien there. He also believed God's promise to give him a son, even when he and his wife became too old to conceive. Then, when God finally gave him this promised son, Abraham prepared to sacrifice him because God asked him to. Abraham trusted God to work all these things out. The Genesis and Hebrews verses teach us that it was Abraham's *faith* that saved him. The James passage points out that his actions proved his faith to be genuine.**
- 15) According to Genesis 22:1, God *tested* Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. In what area of obedience are you currently being tested? Considering what you discovered in Question 14, why is your response to this test so significant? **Our response to testing is extremely significant because it reveals the true nature of our relationship to God. Personal sharing**