

STUDY NINE — GENESIS 22
OBEDIENT FAITH

P R O M I S E

— GENESIS 12 - 25 —

GOD'S GRACIOUS INITIATIVE
IN THE LIFE & TIMES OF ABRAHAM

OVERVIEW

Genesis 22:1-8 – As muscle develops only when exercised, so too does faith. Over decades Abraham has grown in faith as he has learned to trust God rather than his own devices. Now Abraham's faith meets its greatest test as God commands him to sacrifice Isaac.

The cost of the command is highlighted in verse 2 – *your only Son whom you love*. Yet not only would the command have strained Abraham's heart, but also his hopes, for Isaac was the promised offspring through whom God's earlier promises would be fulfilled.

Though perhaps not widespread, child sacrifice did happen in the region (cf. 2 Kings 3:26-27). Hughes helpfully points out that,

'...it was not beyond the range of Abraham's experience or credulity. Human sacrifice took place in Ur, and it was also a part of Canaanite culture. Human sacrifice was therefore familiar to his conceptual worldview, however dumbfounding and repulsive it may have been to him.' (Hughes, 301).

Not yet having the later revelation that child sacrifice is abhorrent to God (Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut 18:9-12; Jer 19:5), Abraham immediately obeys and saddles up the next morning. Hebrews 11:17-19 states that in the face of God's earlier promises, Abraham reasons that God will raise Isaac from the dead. This hope is perhaps evidenced in his statement to his servants (v 5).

Genesis 22:9-19 – Yet the God who tests is also the God who provides. Abraham's obedient faith is vindicated, Isaac spared, and a ram provided. One can only imagine the elation of father and son.

Taking place at the site of the future Temple (2 Chron 3:1), God's provision of a substitute anticipates Israel's future sacrificial worship. Yet even more so, as per the sidebar, this heart-wrenching moment for father and son foreshadows the cross, not least in Isaac's willing obedience. As the carrier of the wood, the adolescent¹ Isaac was clearly the stronger of the two and could have resisted the elderly Abraham. Yet as father *and* son willingly ascended the mountain, so too did God the Father *and* the Son at Calvary (Isa 53:7. 10).

Abraham is commended for his fear of God (v 12). Indeed, genuine faith doesn't trifle when it comes to matters of obedience. If we really trust God, like Abraham, we will obey. We are justified by faith alone, but genuine faith is never alone. As an accent betrays one's locality, so too does our obedience reveal genuine faith. James 2:21-24 thus calls us to heed the example of Abraham and exposes spurious faith.

¹ The Hebrew word for 'boy' (*na'ar*, v. 12) is also used to refer to the 16-year-old Ishmael (21:17) as well as the servants in this passage.

PROMISE+FULFILMENT

ONLY SON

God had promised to bless the nations through Abraham's Seed. It is in this climactic chapter and it's searching events that we are given something of a window into how God will bring that blessing about.

Just as Abraham's heart was wrenched at offering up his only Son, so too did God the Father have to make such a sacrifice (cf. Mark 1:11; Isa 53:10). Just as Isaac bore the firewood up Mount Moriah, so too did Jesus bear the cross up the nearby Golgotha (Jn 19:17). Just as Isaac willingly obeyed his father, so too did Jesus (cf. Mark 14:36; Isa 53:7).

Yet ultimately, Abraham was not called to sacrifice his only Son, but only to trust God who would provide the necessary sacrifice for sin. As verse 8 more literally says, *'God will provide for himself the lamb...'* (ESV).

As God provided a substitute for Isaac on Moriah, so too has God ultimately provided a substitute to satisfy his wrath – *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."* (Jn 1:29)

Genesis 22 begins to make more sense when understood in light of the cross. In it we have a very real and vivid insight into the Father's love for us. As Iain Duguid writes, *'It was not just the Son who paid the price of our sin on the cross: the Father also paid deeply for our sin as he laid it all on his beloved Son, bringing down the knife of his righteous judgement against sin upon his Son's defenceless head.'* (p 147).

GETTING STARTED

1. Share with the group any personal highlights from our time in Genesis so far this term.

INTO THE TEXT

Read Genesis 22:1-8

2. In light of all the promises, all that has happened, and his fatherly love, how do you think Abraham must have felt upon receiving God's command?
3. At times Abraham's faith has faltered, what strikes you about his response here?
4. Read Heb 11:17-19. On what basis did Abraham hold resurrection hope for Isaac? Do you see any early hints of Abraham's hope in the passage?
5. Has there been a time in your life when you've had to make a significant sacrifice in following Jesus? What happened and how were you blessed from this experience?²

Read Genesis 22:9-19

6. How does this event foreshadow the cross and help us understand the Father's love?
7. Read Jas 2:21-24. What does Abraham's example teach us about genuine justifying faith?
8. What did Abraham come to learn of God's character and how is this an encouragement for us? (cf. Rom 8:32)

TAKEAWAY

9. Listen to *How Deep the Father's Love* (lyrics below) and together reflect on the love of God poured out for us at the cross. Respond in prayer by giving thanks to God.
10. *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* (Romans 12:1)

'...we can't claim that our obedience is sacrificial until it hurts.'

Are there areas in your life that are more precious to you than God and in which you would struggle to make costly sacrifices in obedience to God? Pray for each other.

² Question adapted from Duguid, *The Gospel According to Abraham*, 149.

³ Richard Coekin, *A Few Good Men*, 43.

How Deep The Father's Love For Us

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart –
His wounds have paid my ransom.