



2022 Q2 Genesis: Lesson 8 The Promise

by Russell Atkins

SABBATH

The first 3 days of this weeks lesson focuses on God's command to sacrifice Isaac. I think this is one of the most misunderstood stories in all of Scripture. It's also one of the most beautiful understood from a design law perspective. I've heard this story referenced as evidence that God issues arbitrary commands up to and including child sacrifice. The fact that Isaac was not sacrificed often escapes their notice, and usually leads to mumbled non sequiturs.

SUNDAY

Mount Moriah.

Put yourself in Abraham's 120 year old shoes for a moment. He had already listened to his wife and taken her handmaid Hagar, who bore him a son — Ishmael. He loved Ishmael, however, Ishmael was the product of human decisions and efforts. Sarah's reproductive capability was restored and Isaac was born — The Child of the Promise. I have little doubt that Abraham's love for Isaac exceeded his affections for Ishmael, and yet history will show that Isaac was not spoiled or willful. God then asks Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son and he's left in the dark as to why. What would go through your head?? Didn't God tell him that he would father a great nation that could not be counted?? Wasn't Isaac the start of that nation??

Consider the following:

Three days this father traveled with his son, having sufficient time to reason and doubt God if he was disposed to doubt. But he did not distrust God. He did not now reason that the promise would be fulfilled through Ishmael, for God plainly told him that through Isaac should the promise be fulfilled.

Abraham believed that Isaac was the son of promise. He also believed that God meant just what He said when He bade him to go offer him as a burnt offering. He staggered not at the promise of God but believed that God, who had in His providence given Sarah a son in her old age, and who had required him to take that son's life, could also give life again and bring up Isaac from the dead.

Abraham left the servants by the way and proposed to go alone with his son to worship some distance from them. He would not permit his servants to accompany them, lest their love for Isaac might lead them to prevent him from carrying out what God had commanded him to do. He took the wood from the hands of his servants and laid it upon the shoulders of his son. He also took the



fire and the knife. He was prepared to execute the dreadful mission given him of God. Father and son walked on together. -- The Story of Redemption, pg 81

Now put yourself in Isaac's young shoes. He could have overcome his aged father with minimal effort. He could have simply outrun him. But he didn't. He allowed himself to be bound and laid on an altar. One marvels at the devotion of a young son to his elderly father.

Consider this:

Yet none but God could understand how great was the father's sacrifice in yielding up his son to death; Abraham desired that none but God should witness the parting scene. He bade his servants remain behind, saying, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." The wood was laid upon Isaac, the one to be offered, the father took the knife and the fire, and together they ascended toward the mountain summit, the young man silently wondering whence, so far from folds and flocks, the offering was to come. At last he spoke, "My father," "behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Oh, what a test was this! How the endearing words, "my father," pierced Abraham's heart! Not yet—he could not tell him now. "My son," he said, "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

At the appointed place they built the altar and laid the wood upon it. Then, with trembling voice, Abraham unfolded to his son the divine message. It was with terror and amazement that Isaac learned his fate, but he offered no resistance. He could have escaped his doom, had he chosen to do so; the grief-stricken old man, exhausted with the struggle of those three terrible days, could not have opposed the will of the vigorous youth. But Isaac had been trained from childhood to ready, trusting obedience, and as the purpose of God was opened before him, he yielded a willing submission. He was a sharer in Abraham's faith, and he felt that he was honored in being called to give his life as an offering to God. He tenderly seeks to lighten the father's grief, and encourages his nerveless hands to bind the cords that confine him to the altar.

And now the last words of love are spoken, the last tears are shed, the last embrace is given. The father lifts the knife to slay his son, when suddenly his arm is stayed. An angel of God calls to the patriarch out of heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" He quickly answers, "Here am I," And again the voice is heard, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." -- Patriarchs and Prophets, pg 152

Why did God issue such a difficult command?? Was it a test for God's understanding or Abraham's?? Or the onlooking universe??

Abraham had already tried to "Fix" the infertility issue by fathering Ishmael and thereby showed a lack of faith in God's promise. Was this God's way of purifying Abraham's character??



God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction in order to prove them firm and true, and purge them from all unrighteousness. After Abraham and his son had borne the severest test that could be imposed upon them, God spoke through His angel unto Abraham: “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me.” This great act of faith causes the character of Abraham to shine forth with remarkable luster. It forcibly illustrates his perfect confidence in the Lord, from whom he withheld nothing, not even his son by promise. -- Testimonies to the Church, vol 4, pg 19

Again the Lord saw fit to test the faith of Abraham by a most fearful trial. If he had endured the first test, and had patiently waited for the promise to be fulfilled in Sarah, and had not taken Hagar as his wife, he would not have been subjected to the closest test that was ever required of man. – Spiritual Gifts, vol 3, pg 106

The lesson asks: “After all, what is faith if not trust in what we don’t see or fully understand? Also, biblical faith is not so much about our capacity to give to God and to sacrifice for Him — though that has a role, no doubt [Rom. 12:1] — but about our capacity to trust Him and to receive His grace while understanding **just how underserving we are.**” Emphasis mine.

Deserve has nothing to do with the problem. Language like this is diagnostic. “Deserve” comes from an imposed law bias. Does the cancer patient deserve a remedy or is healing the cancer patient simply the RIGHT thing to do. God gives us grace because it’s the RIGHT [aka JUST] thing to do in accordance with His character.

From the teacher’s notes: **The Significance of Atonement**

The reference to “atonement” is already present in the notion of “test.” The meaning of the Hebrew verb *nissah*, “tested” (*Gen. 22:1, NKJV*), embraces two opposite ideas. On the one hand, it concerns judgment. God “tests” in order “ ‘to know what is in your heart’ ” (*Deut. 8:2, NKJV; compare Ps. 139:1, 23, 24*). This aspect is clearly enunciated by the Angel of the Lord (*Gen. 22:11, 12*).

Does God not already know what’s in our hearts?

MONDAY

God Will Provide.

In the first paragraph the author references Gen. 22:8 “... provide for Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” I like the lesson’s point regarding the Hebrew verb “provide”, and its meaning “provide Himself”. Isn’t that what God did — provide Himself as a sacrifice?? Wasn’t God Himself on that cross?? [see Matt 1:23, Matt 28: 19, John 1:8, John 10:30, John 14: 9-11 [basically the entire gospel of John], Philippians 2:5-6.]



Consider the following:

when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption. Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unfaltering obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false. God declared to His servant, “Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me.” God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.

It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham made answer, “God will provide Himself a lamb;” and, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation. 1 Peter 1:12. -- Patriarchs and Prophets, pg 155

The teachers edition asks “What is the theological and prophetic significance of the failed sacrifice?”

“FAILED” sacrifice?? I’m having a hard time calling it failed. It was perfect.

Is it possible that angels thought God would interpose at the Crucifixion?? Don’t you think they vividly remembered the scenes on Mt Moriah with Abraham and Isaac and were thinking to themselves that God would provide some other means for Salvation?? Why was the death of Jesus the ONLY method for restoring man back to his original design nobility and securing the Remedy for the sin condition??

TUESDAY

The Death of Sarah.

The lesson suggests that because Scripture juxtapositioned Sarah’s death next to the return of Abraham and Isaac’s trip to Mount Moriah may somehow be related. I’m sure Sarah was disturbed by the news, however, the fact that God did NOT require a human [read any] sacrifice, and Isaac was safe and sound leads me to believe that this news was unrelated to her passing. We can get the details when we get to heaven.

I find the bargaining for the field / cave for Sarah’s burial place fascinating. If you’ve ever been to the Middle East you can still find similar bargaining practiced.



WEDNESDAY

A Wife for Isaac.

- Can we learn any lessons today, from the process of selecting a mate and the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah??
- Should parents select from their own families??
- Should parents be involved in the selection process at all??
- How much input should other family members have [if any]??
- Was Isaac and Rebekah's marriage any violation of the Law of Liberty??

“Should parents,” you ask, “select a companion without regard the the mind or feelings of son or daughter?” I put the question to you as it should be: Should a son or daughter select a companion without first consulting the parents, when such a step must materially affect the happiness of parents if they have any affection for their children? And should that child, notwithstanding the counsel and entreaties of his parents, persist in following his own course? I answer decidedly: No; not if never marries. The fifth commandment forbids such a course. “Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” Here is a commandment with a promise which the Lord will surely fulfill to those who obey. Wise parents will never select companions for their children without respect to their wishes.” Adventist Home, pg 75

THURSDAY

A[nother] Wife for Abraham.

I've never before heard of the notion that Keturah and Hagar might be the same woman. Some Jewish commentators suggest this. My question is why doesn't the author mention it?? It makes more sense that they would be two different women — Hagar had probably passed her fertility window, and I suspect Keturah was much younger and [obviously] fertile. Does it matter to salvation?? NO.

I think the listing of Abraham's sons [from the three women] is primarily to distinguish the lineage of The Seed [Jesus of Nazareth] from the other two bloodlines.

The lesson makes the point that “... the Lord remained true to His promises of grace to His faithful servant Abraham, whose faith is depicted in Scripture as a great example, if not *the best* example, in the Old Testament of salvation by faith (*see Rom. 4:1–12*). What makes Abraham “the best” example of OT faith, or can you think of anyone with stronger faith??