
Day 9 - January 9

Period of the Patriarchs (2100 -1525 BCE)

Abraham's Ultimate Test of Faith

News Regarding Nahor's Family

Sarah's Death and Burial

Readings: *Genesis 22:1-23:20*

Reflections:

- This story is outrageous. It begins by clearly stating that God is testing Abraham. He is not testing him to see if he would fail but rather to provide a concrete expression to what God knew to be true in Abraham's heart. God asks Abraham to do something that went directly against everything Abraham new about God, everything he understood about his purposes, everything he felt as a father, and everything that seemed right. Human sacrifice was the combination of the two greatest sins of Israel - worshipping other gods and murder. It is the direct violation of the two greatest commands to love God with everything you are and have and to love your neighbor as yourself. Here God is asking Abraham, the father of the new nation, the father of faith, to do something that is literally the complete contradiction of everything he knows to be true and everything Israel will know to be true. But God's ways are higher. God knew that this test would reveal Abraham's faith for his descendents to see and learn from. This test would create a picture for the Israelite community thousands of years later to grasp what God did when Jesus died.
- We discover through Abraham that walking by faith often means going through a phase when obeying God looks like doing something completely wrong. Jesus did this consistently. Yet underneath that feeling of doing something completely wrong is the experience of actually trusting God more than we trust ourselves. This undoes what the fall did to the human heart. The fall makes us naturally trust ourselves more than God. If God only asks us to do things that make sense to us, this part is never challenged.
- Great sentence from this text. "Abraham answered Isaac's question about the sacrifice by saying, 'God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'" Here it would seem that in faith Abraham is actually trusting God will intervene and provide an animal sacrifice. Hebrews 11:17-19 states, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered

Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." In this text the writer of Hebrews suggests that Abraham was actually trusting that God would raise Isaac from the dead. It may be that Abraham had both options in mind but regardless of how God was going to resolve the situation, Abraham trusted God. As James wrote in James 2:21-23, "Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend." We see again how a trust-based friendship is at the heart of God's desire for humanity. He is not interested in religion or religious sensibilities. Friendship with God means you trust God even when the data around you tells you that everything is going wrong. When you know God's heart and know the full extent of his power, then regardless of what happens around you, you can still remain quietly confident in your trust that God will do what is best.

- Another powerful statement, "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your only son." Trusting God in complete obedience means giving up what you cling to most dearly. Jesus restates this in his teaching to his disciples in Luke 14:25-33, "Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate (Note: Jesus uses the term hate as hyperbole to drive the point home) to his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple....In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.'" This may seem offensive, that God wants to be unchallenged as the greatest of our loves and priorities. We should understand that when God is first in our lives then that single highest love for God will help us order all of our other loves and priorities.
- "And so Abraham called the place: 'The Lord will Provide.' And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'" In the place of ultimate worship, abandonment, and surrender, God provides all that we need.
- Based on Abraham's faith, God promises his descendants will become nation-sized and in fact "through your offspring (literally 'seed') all the nations of the earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me." The notion of the seed is that it contains the potential for an entire forest of trees. God's vision right from day one is inclusive of the entire human race. God's desire was to open up the way that all people could learn to live as his intimate friends.

- We should also note that Ishmael was taken away before God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. This would make it even harder because Abraham would have had no son at all if God hadn't stopped the sacrifice.
- Sarah waited a long time for the promise to be fulfilled but then when the promised son came she still lived for another thirty seven years. It seems like Abraham wasn't around when Sarah died. As nomads, their lives were far from ideal.
- Abraham paying to get a piece of land in Canaan is a sign of God beginning to actually possess the Promised Land. Owning land is important to nomads and so this is a small but important sign. All of these clues would be very important to future generations of Israelites.