

Learning from the Faith of Abraham

David Flatt

The Bible commends the faith of Abraham. God intervened in the life of Abraham. When God revealed His will to Abraham, Abraham believed. The New Testament records, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8). Abraham is presented as an example for how the righteousness of God is received by faith (Rom. 4).

Abraham was not a perfect man. Sometimes we are given the impression that he was, but he was not. His relationship with God was not gained through self-righteousness. Abraham received God's grace by faith. In this article, we will consider a single event in Abraham's life in which his faith was tested.

The Test

God had promised Abraham and Sara an heir. This was quite surprising to them. They were older. Abraham was confident in God's promise. Sara was doubtful. Yet, they were open to the possibility of having a son. Both grew impatient. They tried to expedite God's plans through a surrogate mother: Hagar. This only created problems. In God's time, however, Sara gave birth to a son: Isaac (Gen. 17:18-27, 21:1-7).

The birth of Isaac must have been a most joyous occasion. Not only did Abraham and Sara have a new baby boy, but their faith in God had also been confirmed. God kept His promise. Yet, little did they know how their faith would be tested.

A couple of years after the birth of Isaac, God gave shocking instructions to Abraham: "...Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen. 22:2). Abraham packed and left with Isaac the next morning.

Young children are perceptive. Little Isaac asked Abraham, "...My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:7). Parents are often at a loss for words to answer their children's questions. Abraham had a wise answer for his inquisitive son: "...God will provide..." (Gen. 22:8).

When Abraham and Isaac reached the mountain, Abraham readied an altar and bound Isaac for sacrifice. Thankfully, an angel Abraham was stopped from sacrificing Isaac. The angel said, "...But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen. 22:11-12).

The angel later called Abraham a second time. The angel reaffirmed God's original promise to Abraham that God would multiply Abraham's offspring as the stars of the sky and as

the sand on the seashore. The chapter closes with news of Abraham's brother and sister-in-law giving birth to children. Isaac's future wife, Rebekah, was the granddaughter of Nahor and Milcah. God's promise was unfolding.

Lessons of Faith

1. We must not interfere with God's plans. Faith is not about scheming and inventing. Faith is about trust and obedience. Abraham and Sara became impatient with God. Rather than wait for Sara's pregnancy, they produced a child through a surrogate: Hagar. God's promise was not fulfilled through this means. Their actions only created conflict within the family.

Likewise, we cannot alter God's plans. We are not permitted to add or subtract from God's will. Such actions are presumptuous and cannot produce godly results. We cannot expect to receive a blessing from Him by taking His will into our hands. His will is to be taken into our hearts, not our hands. His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8-9).

2. Faith is action. Abraham's faith was more than what he thought. Abraham's faith was demonstrated by what he did. He believed in and trusted God. When God told Abraham to leave his homeland, Abraham relocated his family. When God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, he made provisions. Abraham was not a perfect man, but he was a faithful man.

Abraham serves as an example of faithfulness for us. God wants us to obey Him. Our obedience is made reasonable by God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness is most clearly proven through the Messiah. The resurrection of the Messiah from the dead is how God kept His promise to Abraham of making him a great nation. The consequence of God's faithfulness to Abraham is that we can become part of Abraham's family by faith (Rom. 1-4).

3. God provides. We can only imagine what was going through Abraham's mind throughout this trial. Abraham believed that God would provide the sacrifice. This was not merely wishful thinking. The faithfulness of God had been proven to Abraham by the birth of Isaac. Therefore, God's provision was his conviction and hope.

On this occasion, God provided a ram to be sacrificed. In time, God provided much more. He provided His son, His only Son, to be sacrificed for our sins. Jesus famously said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Our greatest needs correspond to salvation from the consequences of our sins. These needs are completely provided for by Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection offer forgiveness, renewal, and hope. The Gospel can presently transform and improve our lives. The Gospel assures our prospects for the future. Whenever we become doubtful or fearful about our lives, we must remember that God has provided.

Conclusion

Abraham was a common man in his time. He was a sinner. Yet, when God came to him, Abraham believed and obeyed. The life of Abraham shows what God can do with and for us if we have faith.