

YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Spring 2019 Leader Commentary



Unit 1: The Faith Journey
Session 4: Faith Tested and Approved (see pp. 114-117)

The Question: Why would God test my faith?

The Point: Tested faith leads to spiritual maturity.

Background Passage: Genesis 22

Focal Passage: Genesis 22:1-2,5-12

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, “Why would God test my faith?” and drive home this one truth: Tested faith leads to spiritual maturity.

Focus on These Points

To Let Us Know a Teaching Cycle Has Ended
(Gen. 22:1-2)

From the beginning of this event the Lord’s intention was to test Abraham’s faith, not to have him institute human sacrifice as an act of devotion. In God’s plan Isaac never was in real danger. Nevertheless, this occasion was a real test for Abraham. It also was unique to Abraham. God provided later generations with specific prohibitions forbidding child sacrifice. God addressed the one He was testing by name, further emphasizing the test’s uniqueness. Abraham’s answer characterized an individual who lived by faith, ready to obey God in an instant. “Here I am” anticipated availability and readiness.

God’s instructions began with an immediate focus on Isaac and his relationship to Abraham as son. Abraham had reared him from birth. He had watched with a parent’s pride as Isaac grew and matured. His son represented the future, the next generation. But Isaac was more than a son. He is described as Abraham’s only son. Abraham had an older biological son, Ishmael. Isaac was Abraham’s unique son in that he was his heir, not just to his material possessions but to God’s promises. So, in a real sense the young boy represented everything God had said to Abraham. Finally, Isaac is described as the one Abraham loved. This test would not be easy.

Moriah [muh RIGH uh] designates the rocky outcropping in Jerusalem north of the ancient city. Later Solomon erected Israel’s first temple on this site (see 2 Chron. 3:1). The primary focus here is that it was the place God selected.

The Lord previously had promised to carry out His covenant with Abraham through Isaac. That promise, and this new command seemed contradictory. Why did the man who so boldly

interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah not challenge God for the life of his own son? He trusted God wholly.

Abraham and Isaac were accompanied by two servants. Their presence reflected Abraham's affluence. However, the clarification that they are young may also hint that he was uncertain how Isaac might react.

Abraham's ability to subdue a teenage boy, the age most Bible scholars believe Isaac to be at this time, might be in doubt. So, the presence of the young men may reveal that Abraham intended to obey God regardless of the circumstance and therefore provided for every contingency. Abraham's example provides a pattern for how we should respond to God's commands.

To Pass Faith On to Our Children (Gen. 22:5-8)

Abraham told the two young men to stay back while he and Isaac continued the journey. We have no idea what was going on in Abraham's mind unless we consult the inspired record of Hebrews 11:8-12. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. When God's people act in faith, they never try to designate the method God will use to achieve the ends they believe He has promised.

Abraham placed the pile of wood on Isaac's back. In his hands Abraham carried the sacrificial knife, a large blade used for dismemberment and the fire. Together the father and his son walked to the site of the sacrificial offering. Each carried a heavy burden. The son carried a physical load; the father carried the knowledge that he would sacrifice his son.

The poignant repetition of the notation that the two walked on together follows Abraham's answer to Isaac's question. Neither father nor son fully understood what was happening. But the son trusted his father, and his father trusted God. We are to promptly begin to obey God's commands by faith, trusting in His power even when His purposes may not be clear to us.

To Let Us Know How Much We Learned (Gen. 22:9-12)

The place refers to the site God had designated (v. 9). Abraham immediately set about making the necessary preparation. First, he erected an altar. The Bible does not provide any details about its construction. It could have been made of either stones or dirt. Once it was completed, the wood was arranged on top of the altar. Still there was no lamb.

The critical moment had arrived. Abraham then bound Isaac and placed him on the altar. Abraham's faith in the Lord can be seen in the absence of any hesitation to obey a command that seemed to nullify the divine promise. Isaac's faith can be seen in his willingness to allow himself to be bound. At that point there could have been no doubt about his father's intention.

Continuing to listen to the Lord is important. As Abraham, knife in hand, stood before the altar on which his son lay, God spoke once more, addressing Abraham by name.

Wherever the designation the Angel of the LORD appears in the Old Testament, it seems to refer to some kind of divine manifestation. Often the Lord spoke through Him in first person. In Genesis 22 He is equated with the Lord Himself (22:11-12,15-16). Those who encounter Him generally consider their experience to have been an encounter with God Himself.

For the third time in this chapter, Abraham uttered the words, "Here I am." They had been his initial response when God first spoke (22:1) where they indicated his readiness to obey God. They had indicated his readiness to hear his son (22:7). Here once more they indicate Abraham's readiness to obey God.

God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac and instead provided what Abraham needed. A ram was caught in a nearby thicket. In this case the sacrifice was a substitute for the designated victim. This concept of substitution became a vital element of the burnt offerings in the later Israelite sacrificial system (see Lev. 1:4). Abraham named the site The Lord Will Provide.