

# OpenTheo

## Genesis 21 - 22



### Genesis - Steve Gregg

In Genesis 21-22, the faith and obedience of Abraham and Sarah are put to the test. Sarah gives birth to Isaac in her old age, which results in the departure of Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham is then commanded by God to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah, a test of faith which Abraham ultimately passes. These stories illustrate the strong faith and obedience of Abraham and Sarah, and serve as an example of prioritizing one's relationship with God over earthly attachments.

### Transcript

Genesis 21 and the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.

And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, God has made me laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me.

She also said, who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have born him a son in his old age. Now remember the question was raised, why it was that Abimelech would find Sarah attractive at age ninety. Even given the fact that people lived longer in those days, in fact she lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven.

That would mean that at age ninety she was what, about almost four-fifths of the way through her lifetime, maybe not quite that. And so definitely past middle age. But notice it says, she laughed and said, who would have thought that, who could have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? The fact that she not only bore a child but nursed a baby at that age suggests that there was a general rejuvenation of her body, which may have extended to not just the reproductive organs and the breast, but to skin, hair, who knows.

You know, she may have looked a lot younger after God restored her ability to have children and to nurse children. In any case they named him Laughter, Isaac means

Laughter because both Abraham and Sarah had laughed. And actually they both laughed apparently in disbelief, but they had then been assured by God, notwithstanding their finding it ludicrous, that he would nonetheless fulfill this and then they had believed him.

And it says in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 11, By faith Sarah received strength to conceive seed when she was past age, because she counted him faithful who had promised. By the way, there are some translations of Hebrews 11 and 11 that make that a statement about Abraham's faith, not Sarah's. But in our Bible, and I believe in the Greek, it indicates that Sarah's faith.

So after she had laughed initially and God reproached her, then she decided to believe God and she received strength to conceive seed. And so the laughter was passed. No one was laughing in disbelief anymore.

But she said, God has made me laugh in a new way because I'm rejoicing, I'm celebrating the birth of a baby. I've borne the shame that accompanies a barren woman in that society for 90 years and now no longer. I have a son.

And she says, God made me happy. I'm laughing happily now, not in ridiculing the idea. And so they have a new reason to call him Laughter.

So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.

And he would have been, at the time of Isaac's birth, Ishmael would have been 14. And now Isaac is weaned and this is probably at least three years, maybe as much as five years in that culture. They sometimes wean children as late as five years old.

But Isaac is being weaned, that means Ishmael is at least 17 years old. If, let's say, Isaac was weaned at age three, that'd be early for those societies. So we're looking at a young man in Ishmael, 16, 17 years old at least.

And that's something to keep in mind as we read the following story, because you get the impression from the way things go in the desert that he's just a little kid, a little baby. But I got a feeling he had been kind of a pampered kid. He was the only son of a wealthy sheik, Abraham, for many, many years.

And, you know, Abraham was extremely wealthy and no doubt, you know, coddled Ishmael, his son. Ishmael was like a prince, he was raised like a prince. He was apparently very delicate and we'll find that he didn't handle the outdoors very well initially.

But here he is at age 17 and he's mocking the ceremony, the weaning ceremony. Now, it's possible that the weaning ceremony was the point at which it was made clear, maybe

even announced, that Isaac, who was being weaned and becoming a little boy, was the official heir of the estate. Now, Ishmael could easily resent that because Ishmael had been the heir of the huge estate of Abraham for 13 years, old enough before anyone knew Isaac was going to come along.

He was old enough to be expecting someday to be a wealthy man himself and to inherit his father's estate. But in all likelihood, he resented Isaac because Isaac, you know, muscled into his territory and had basically taken his place as the heir. And so he's mocking, he's kind of acting kind of immature for a 17-year-old, but he's showing his contempt for Isaac and Sarah saw that happening.

Therefore, Sarah said to Abraham, verse 10, Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac. And the matter was very displeasing to Abraham, in Abraham's sight, because of his son, that is because of Ishmael. He didn't want to cast out Ishmael, he was his son.

But God said to Abraham, Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice, for in Isaac your seat shall be called. Now, here we see that the women are not always the ones making the wrong call here.

Eve may have led Adam into sin and even Sarah may have led Abraham into a mistake when she gave, when she suggested he go into Hagar. But in this case, she's speaking the word of God and God confirms it. So as you listen to Sarah, she's right about this.

Now, Paul actually quotes the words of Sarah in verse 10 as if it is the words of God. Let me show you this. It's over in Galatians chapter 4. The quotation of this verse is in Galatians 4 and verse 30, but the context of it begins in verse 22, where it says, For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free woman.

But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the free woman through the promise. This is obviously referring to Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was born of a bondwoman, Hagar, and it was simply a fleshly thing.

It was not the promised seed. Abraham and Sarah had contrived to do this on their own. There was no miracle apparently involved in it.

God was not fulfilling his promise to Abraham in the birth of his child. But the other woman was made pregnant because God had promised. In fact, Sarah would never have been able to become pregnant if not as a fulfillment of the promise God had made.

And it says in verse 24, which things are symbolic? In the Greek I think it says are an allegory. For these are the two covenants, that is the women. Hagar and Sarah are like the two covenants, the old covenant and the new covenant.

Both of them as it were bear children. There are children of the old covenant and children of the new covenant. It says the one from Mount Sinai, which gives birth to bondage, that's clearly the old covenant made at Sinai with Moses, is like Hagar.

And the people who are in that covenant are in bondage like Hagar's son was, a son of a slave. For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to Jerusalem, which now is and is in bondage with her children. Now what he is saying is Hagar, Mount Hagar, is actually named the Arabian Jews for Mount Sinai from what I've read.

And so he points out that there is a connection that justifies him seeing Hagar as sort of a picture of Mount Sinai where the old covenant was made. But he says that corresponds today with the modern, the earthly Jerusalem. Jerusalem is under that covenant, that Sinaitic covenant.

And the people of Jerusalem, he said, are the children of Jerusalem, they are born in bondage to the law, in bondage to the old covenant. But he says the Jerusalem above, and by that he means the church, he identifies the heavenly, or the writer of Hebrews identifies the heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews 12 as he calls the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. So the church, the Jerusalem above, is free which is the mother of us all.

For it is written, and he quotes from Isaiah 54, Rejoice, O barren you who do not bear. Break forth and shout, you who do not prevail. For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.

In Isaiah this means the Gentiles who had never born children for God because they had never been in covenant with God. They were the barren, they were the childless, but they were going, the Gentile nations were going to produce more children for God than the married wife who is Israel. In other words, there are going to be more people in the new covenant who come from Gentile background than from Israel, from the married wife, from she who has a husband.

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. He's talking to the Christians, most of whom in Galatia were Gentiles. We are like Isaac, we're children of the promise.

Now Isaac would never have been a son of Abraham if God hadn't made a promise and kept it supernaturally. And we Gentiles would never have been children of Abraham if God had not made a promise that God would make him the father of many nations. And then God supernaturally kept that promise by causing us to become his children through Christ.

So like Isaac, we are the children who exist because of God's promise. But as he who was born according to the flesh, that's Ishmael, then persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, that's Isaac. And he's talking about the chapter we're considering right now,

which is chapter 21 of Genesis, where Ishmael was mocking Isaac.

The way Paul puts it is he's persecuting Isaac. He who was born of the flesh was persecuting the one who was born according to the spirit. Even so it is now.

Now what Paul is saying is the Jews who are under the old covenant persecute the Christians under the new covenant, just like Ishmael persecuted Isaac. And Paul knew very well that the Jews persecuted those under the new covenant because Paul was chased around by Jews all the time and he had been one of the Jews that chased them around at one time. Before he was a Christian, he was authorized by the Jewish court to chase them around and persecute them.

He had done so quite happily. But then when he got converted, they authorized people to chase him around. He said, these Jews under the old covenant, they persecute those of us who are under the new covenant, like Ishmael persecuted Isaac.

Nevertheless, what does the scripture say, Paul says in verse 30. Now he quotes Sarah's words. It's a paraphrase, but it's definitely a paraphrase of Genesis 21.10. And Paul quotes it as if it's, you know, a word from God.

So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond woman, but of the free. Notice he has said that the children of the bond woman are the Jews under the old covenant. Children of the free woman are Jews and Gentiles under the new covenant.

And the Jews under the old covenant will not be heir. They will not inherit. There is no inheritance for people under the old covenant.

That's the bondage. The son of the bond woman will not be heir with the son of the free woman. So he's saying that the old covenant will not grant an inheritance to the Jews that they hope to have.

They have to come into the new covenant. And so that's the connection Paul makes with this whole story. And so God tells Abram to do what Sarah says and to send Ishmael away.

Now what's interesting is that Ishmael must have been really much loved by Abram. I mean, he was the only son of Abram for many years. But when he sends him away, he doesn't send him away with much.

He sends him across a desert with not enough water to get to the other side. That's weird. Abram's a rich man.

I mean, when he sends someone looking for a wife for Isaac, he sends ten camel loads across the desert of provisions and gifts. But he sends off Ishmael with his mother with just a bottle of water, which runs out before they get across the desert. I don't get it.

I don't have an answer for this. It's a strange thing. But God is still speaking about Ishmael in verse 13.

Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed. So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and putting it on her shoulder, gave it and the boy to Hagar and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

Now, maybe there was enough water to get where they were supposed to go, but she got lost and wandered. It says she wandered around. Maybe they ran out of water just because they didn't know the right course.

They got confused and maybe Abram gave them enough to make it to where they needed to go. But then because of getting lost, they end up in the desert longer than they should be. That's a possibility.

What I find interesting is that, you know, he takes the water and bread and he puts the provisions on Hagar's back and gives her the boy. You get the impression that we've got a toddler here, you know. He's too young to carry anything.

His mother has to carry the load and she has to take him too. But he's 16 or 17 years old at this time. So he's definitely a pampered little boy, a pampered big boy by now.

And his mom is still a slave. So she's treated like a slave. You carry the load, slave woman.

And yet she is seen, because she was raised as a slave and he was raised as a prince, we find that she's much more prepared to survive in the hard environs of the wilderness than he is, as we shall see. So it says in verse 15, And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him a distance of about a bow's shot.

For she said to herself, Let me not see the death of the boy. So she sat opposite him and lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad.

Now that's interesting. She placed the boy under a shrub. Again, it sounds like a baby or something, you know, like she has to put him there.

He's not getting along well. He's dying. He's not enduring this exposure to the elements well.

She's able to manage. She goes off and she thinks he's going to die. She's not, she says, I don't want to see my son die, so I'm going to go far away from him and not look.

But she doesn't seem to think she's going to die. At least she's not as close to it as her son is. And so she cries as a mother would.

But God hears the lad cry. He's apparently crying louder than her. And God heard the voice of the lad.

Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven and said to her, What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation. He apparently is very faint and couldn't even lift himself up.

So she had to lift him up, pull him back to his feet. And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. Then she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink.

So God was with the lad and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer. He dwelt in the wilderness of Paran and his mother took a wife for him out of the land of Egypt. Now, she was an Egyptian herself, so he, the boy, was half Egyptian.

Then he married an Egyptian, so his children were three quarters Egyptian. And they were the Ishmaelites. We see then the Ishmaelites were three quarters Egyptian and one quarter Abrahamic in their ancestry.

This is the second time that the angel of the Lord had appeared to her. She had been fleeing from Sarah in the desert once, before the boy was born. She was pregnant, but Sarah had been mistreated and she was fleeing and God had appeared to her and sent her back home.

Now, the angel of the Lord appears to her again and shows her the provision she needs, which is water at this point. Now, what they did after that, immediately after that, we don't know. We read that the boy grew up and became an archer, but we don't know what happened after this first drink of water, whether he stayed in the wilderness from that day on or later went there after they'd lived somewhere else.

In any case, the Ishmaelites became desert people, probably Bedouin people we call them today. And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, God is with you in all that you do. Now, therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me.

Well, why would he imagine that Abraham would deal falsely with him? Abraham had already deceived him once, so don't do that again. Swear that you won't do that again and you won't deal falsely with my offspring or with my posterity. But that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have sojourned.

And Abraham said, I will swear. So they're entering into a mutual non-aggressions pact here. Then Abraham reproved Abimelech.

He had the occasion to, you know, he didn't see Abimelech all the time. But on this occasion, he brought up a kind of a grievance that had been bugging him for a while. He reproved Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized.

And Abimelech said, I do not know who has done this thing. You did not tell me, nor had I heard of it until today. So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

And Abraham set seven new lambs of the flock by themselves. Then Abimelech asked Abraham, what is the meaning of these seven new lambs which you have set by themselves? And he said, you will take these seven new lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well. In other words, that this well is mine.

By Abimelech taking this, it's not exactly a payment for the well, but because Abraham shouldn't have to buy the well that he dug himself, it was really his. And Abimelech wasn't even challenging that. Abimelech said, I didn't know my servants had taken it from me.

I hadn't heard about this until now. But Abimelech was not denying that this was Abraham's well by right. And you might think it might be a strange thing to fuss over a well.

You can find a lot more fussing over wells in Isaac's day, in chapter 26 I believe it is, when Isaac is going from well to well and his enemies are filling up the wells and causing trouble for him. Wells were kind of really important things in the desert. When you had livestock and a family and no rain, you needed good wells.

And they didn't have well drilling equipment like we do. I know when I moved to Idaho in the rural area, everyone had to have a well, and I knew a lot of people who called well drillers in there, and they sunk lots of holes before they found any water. I mean, that was a big chore sometimes to find a good well, even when you've got automated equipment to dig the holes.

But when you're in the desert, water is going to be particularly hard to find. And you've got just probably servants with shovels to dig it. You get a well dug and you find water, that's a valuable thing.

That's like your farm, that's your ranch, that's your survival. So, I mean, wells aren't so important to us. We just go to the faucet and turn water on.

But in those days, they knew the value of water and they knew the value of a well. And so we read a lot. A lot of places are named after wells.

Remember the word Be'er, B-E-E-R, means well. And lots of the towns were named Be'er Sheba or Be'er Lehiroi or Be'er something else, because they are towns named after the



well, because they built the town around where they could find water. And so here's a well that had been disputed.

And Abram says, this is my well. And Abimelech doesn't dispute that at all. And so Abram gives him seven new lambs, not to buy the well, because Abimelech is not disputing its ownership, but as a token.

By Abimelech accepting this gift, it's his way of saying, okay, this transaction is my way of agreeing that this is your well. You know, if Abimelech had said, I'm not going to take those from you, then it could still be disputed whether this is your well or not. But by my receiving them with this understanding, then it means that the well is Abraham's and that's what he's saying.

Therefore, he called the place Be'er Sheba, because the two swore an oath there. Now Be'er Sheba means the well of the oath. And so it's because they made this oath.

Thus, they made a covenant at Be'er Sheba. So Abimelech arose with Phicol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Be'er Sheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.

That's Yahweh el olam. Olam is the Hebrew word for eternity or everlasting. In the Greek, in the New Testament, the word equivalent is aionious, age, unto the ages.

But olam is the Hebrew word for eternal or everlasting. So this is Yahweh el olam. El means God.

So it's literally Yahweh God everlasting. And so we see different names being used for God at different times. Some of them God reveals.

Some of them are revealed to people by God or by Melchizedek, for example. Melchizedek introduced the name El Elyon, the Most High God, and Abraham picked that up. The names of God are all names of the same God, but they all reflect different aspects of his character or of his being or sometimes of his promises.

And here, I'm not sure why on this occasion and in this place, Abraham wanted to celebrate the fact that God was an everlasting God. It might have had to do with the concept that this well here is by an oath made, Abraham's in perpetuity forever, and that God is a witness of the transaction that took place. And God never dies.

God's always around. So he'll always be a witness of the fact that this well belongs to Abraham. Don't know if that's what was in mind or not.

So Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days. In chapter 22, we skip over several years because in chapter 21, Isaac is a young boy. In chapter 22, we have

probably one of the most famous stories about Abraham, maybe the most famous, and that is where he offers Isaac up.

And we sometimes picture Isaac still as a young boy in this story. But no one really knows how much time has elapsed here. In the following chapter, chapter 23, Sarah dies at age 127.

That means that Isaac at that time was 37. He was 90, I mean, his mother was 90 when he was born. And when she was 127 and she died in chapter 23, he would have been 37.

So we jump from the time in chapter 21 when he's probably three or four years old, and then the next we know he's 37 years old. But in between those two times somewhere, this story takes place of God offering Isaac. The Jews, by tradition, believe that Isaac was in his 30s at this time.

I've even heard it suggested he might have been 33. I'm not sure that that can be documented, and it would be very convenient if it could because Christians understand that this offering of Isaac by Abraham is a type and a shadow of God offering Christ, and that Isaac here is a type of Christ. But let's read the story.

Now, it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, as God is prone to do. God tests the hearts. The Bible says in Proverbs, the refining part is for silver and the furnace is for gold, but God tests the hearts of men.

And so Abram, one of his times of testing is now. This is not the first test he's had. When he first came into the land of Canaan, then there was a drought.

And his faith, I think, was tested then. And I don't think he passed that test because he went down to Egypt and compromised down there. I believe that in the early days, Abram was not so strong a man of faith, and he didn't always pass his test.

But this is almost the latest story about Abraham. And it's clearly late in his life, and he's a man of strong faith, and this test is going to demonstrate how strong his faith is. And he said, Abraham.

And Abraham said, Here I am. We don't know how often God appeared to Abraham. As we read the stories of Abraham, it seems like God was always appearing to Abraham.

But we have to realize, we have 12 chapters covering a century. From the time he's 75 until he dies at 175, there's 12 chapters covering 100 years. And the chapters usually are given because something notable happens, something out of the ordinary.

And it usually involves God appearing to Abraham. We don't know if God appeared to Abraham at other times than these. For all we know, you know, Abraham just had to live in the decades between appearances of God, you know, obedient to the last thing God

said, until something new is given, until God shows up again.

And, you know, it's possible that there were, well we know, there were more than a decade sometimes between things, like between two of the chapters there was 13 years, and there's longer, there's 25 years, or there's 10 years between a couple of the chapters. So, I don't know whether Abraham heard from God very often or not. We might get the impression that the normal man of faith is going to be hearing from God every other day.

Well, but Abraham, the greatest man of faith in the Old Testament apparently, we don't know that he really heard from God all that often. And when he did, it was probably a special thing. After all, every time God had appeared to him, at least almost every time, God had said something really welcome.

You're going to have a son. I'm going to make you, I'm going to bless you. And things like that.

But now, he says, Abraham, and Abraham says, yes, here am I, not having idea of the devastating thing that God was going to say to him. And God said, take now 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. Now, how devastating that had to be to Abraham.

I mean, he had always welcomed, I'm sure, visits from God. God always had positive things to say, blessings to offer. And here it shows up God one more time.

And he says, I've got something for you to do for me. And notice how he describes Isaac. He doesn't just say, take Isaac and sacrifice him.

He says, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love. It's like every added phrase kind of almost turns the night more. And says, now I want you to take him to the land of Moriah and offer him there.

I'll show you where. And you offer him as a burnt offering. And we do not read of Abraham's verbal or emotional response at all.

What we read is, Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him. And he didn't wait till around noon to see if God was going to change his mind. He heard from God, so he got up early in the morning to obey God.

He didn't tell anyone. I'm sure he didn't tell Sarah. I don't think she'd let him go.

What mother would? And he certainly didn't tell Isaac. Nor did he tell the servants. He just had servants there to help take the equipment that was needed.

But notice, it says, he, Abraham, split the wood for the burnt offering. And arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Here's a wealthy man who's got more than 318 trained servants, plus a whole bunch of others.

The 318 were born in his house, plus he's purchased lots of servants. He's got hundreds, thousands maybe, of servants. And he cuts his own firewood? He's a hundred and something years old, and he needs firewood to be cut? Why doesn't he just tell his servants, go cut me some wood, I need to build an altar.

He's owning this whole experience himself. He's not making it easier on himself. He says, if this is what God wants me to do, I'm all on it.

I'm on it, I'm on the job, I'll cut the wood myself. Then on the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off. It took him three days to travel there.

In that period of time, obviously Isaac was, in Abraham's mind, as good as dead. I mean, those three days, Isaac didn't know it, but Abraham intended to surrender his son. You know, it's like his son was dead to him for those three days.

And he saw the place afar off, and Abraham said to the young men, stay here with the donkey, the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you. Now that's an interesting thing, we will come back to you, because he intended to kill his son up there on the mountain. How could he expect, and burn him as an offering to God? How could he promise that we will come back to you? Well, this is what I think the New Testament refers to as the faith of Abraham.

Abraham's faith is sometimes mentioned in connection with his departure from Ur of the Chaldees and going to a land that he didn't know. But more frequently, the New Testament writers are fond of telling about how great his faith was on this particular occasion. And one of the places, of course, is in James chapter 2, where it says that by faith offered Isaac when he was tested.

And it says, and his faith was made perfect by those works. But in Hebrews chapter 11, we have some specific reference to this event and perhaps a piece of information that may help understand what he meant when he said, we will come back to you. Verse 17, Hebrews 11, 17, says, By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, in Isaac your seed shall be called.

Now stop there a moment and realize what this means. Isaac was not yet married. Isaac had no children.

God had said that of Isaac, God would make a multitude of nations. And now God says, kill Isaac. Now Abraham's got to think there's some tension in all of this revelation.

If I kill Isaac, he doesn't have any kids. But there's promises that God made about Isaac that haven't been fulfilled yet. But Abraham knew that they would be fulfilled because he had faith in God's promise.

And therefore he knew that even if he killed Isaac, God's going to have to raise him from the dead. And that's specifically stated in verse 19 of Hebrews 11. That Abraham was accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from which he also received him, in a figurative sense.

The writer of Hebrews is just deducing that this must be what Abraham thought, because Abraham expected the promises of God to be fulfilled, despite the fact that he expected to kill his son. So he just figured, well, I guess God can raise him from the dead. That's what he must be planning to do.

But imagine the faith that would take. I mean, Abraham had never heard of anyone rising from the dead before. There were no resurrections of the dead prior to this in history.

The idea of someone dying and coming back to life just was unthinkable. It's less unthinkable to us because we know not only of Jesus having risen from the dead, but other cases too. Elijah raised someone from the dead.

Elisha apparently did. Paul did. Peter did.

You can even hear some reports of people rising from the dead in the intervening centuries since the time of Christ in cases where there seem to have been some miracles done on the mission field and so forth. And so we at least have the concept that sometimes the dead have risen, but still it's not easy to believe that any particular dead person will rise. When my second wife was killed, there was a woman in the church who thought God had told her that God wanted to raise my wife from the dead.

Well, I had no assurance of that. But in addition to this woman telling me that, there are a couple of other people who suggested that they thought maybe that was true too. And I thought, well, I'd hate to put her in the ground if God is telling these people that he wants to raise her from the dead.

I didn't have any conviction that God was going to raise her. But if several people were thinking that God was putting that on their heart, I thought, well, it would be pretty negligent of me to just go ahead and bury her without testing this out. So a group of about 30 people from the church who had some faith in this got together at the funeral parlor around the casket and prayed and a few of them commanded her to rise and things like that.

And of course, well, I say of course, but I mean, nothing happened. And she remained dead. But I remember thinking how difficult it was for me to even believe that she would

rise from the dead.

I didn't find that easy to imagine, although I believe that people have risen from the dead in the past and here were several people who had strong conviction. Maybe I should have thought she could. But I just, it's hard to believe that anyone's going to rise from the dead in any given case.

It's not hard for us in the abstract to say, when Jesus comes back, all the dead are going to rise. I believe that. I have no trouble believing that.

I have no trouble believing in Jesus rising from the dead. But any given dead body in front of me, to believe that that body is going to rise from the dead is really a stretch. And that, from my perspective, knowing that there have been such cases, where Abram knew of no such cases.

He'd never heard of anyone rising from the dead, but he knew that something was going to have to happen. If I'm going to kill Isaac, and God's going to fulfill his promises, well, God's going to do something amazing, like raise him from the dead. And so Abram just proceeded, and he even said to the servants, we'll come back down, we're going to go up and worship the Lord, and then we'll be back.

Verse 6, Abram took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. Isaac carried the wood up the hill. And he took the fire in his hand and a knife, and the two of them went together.

But Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, and said, My father, and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Now imagine how difficult it would be for Abram, hearing that innocent question, to even choke out any kind of an answer at all. And Abram said, My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

And the two of them went together. Now, we'll find out later on that this statement, that the Lord will provide a lamb for a burnt offering, became a recognized prophecy of the Messiah. We know this because after the story has run its course in verse 14, it says, And Abraham called the name of the place, the Lord will provide.

That's Jehovah-Jireh or Yahweh-Jireh. The Lord will provide. And Moses, who's writing this, says, As it is said to this day, that is, hundreds of years later in Moses' day, he said, Even to this day, in the days of the Exodus and Moses, hundreds of years after Abraham, to this day it is still said, in the mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.

What shall be provided? Well, this is based on the prophecy that Abram made. The Lord will provide for himself a lamb for a burnt offering. And that was recognized as fulfilled not just in the lamb that was provided later in the same day, but the Jews, apparently Abraham himself and his descendants understood that that was a prophecy that had a

much further out fulfillment so that hundreds of years later the Jews were still saying, you know, in the mount of the Lord it's going to be provided just like Abraham said it would be.

And of course that provision was Jesus. And by the way, Mount Moriah, the mountain range of Moriah is where Mount Calvary is. And many people suggest that Jesus was crucified either on the very spot or at least very near to the spot where this took place.

Now, according to the Jewish tradition, the temple was built on this very spot. Jesus was crucified not very far from the temple. He was just outside the city of Jerusalem.

The temple was in the city. But the spot where Abram offered up Isaac is traditionally the spot where the Holy of Holies later stood in Solomon's temple. So it is at least very close to where Jesus was crucified, if not the exact spot.

And the two of them went together. And in verse 9, Then they came to the place of which God had told them. And Abraham built an altar there, and placed the wood in order.

And he bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. Now, many people have talked about how amazing Isaac was in this situation. His dad is old and we would assume somewhat decrepit.

And the boy may be in his prime. He may be a little boy, but we're not told that. And again, the chronological markers in the story could have him anywhere up to in his mid-thirties.

And yet, his father binds him. And Isaac apparently does not resist. Now, when his father began to bind him, I think Isaac began to... What would he begin to think? Oh, maybe I'm the sacrifice.

Why is my father binding me, if not? And then what would be his next thought? The old man's gone crazy. I mean, this is unlike Abram. Abram has never offered human sacrifice before.

He's never done a cruel thing to his son. He's gone off the deep end. My father's gone crazy.

It's what he would naturally think. But we don't find any reference to him resisting. And it seems like he could, unless he was a very little boy and could easily be overpowered.

But I don't know. My... It doesn't say exactly how this all took place, but if I were Abraham and had to do such a thing, and I don't know that I could do such a thing even... You know, I might pass... I don't know if I'd pass this test, but if I had to kill my son, I wouldn't do it while he's conscious. I would have come up behind him with a rock

and knocked him out and then done the deed.

And so he wouldn't have to suffer. He wouldn't have to see it. I wouldn't have to look him in the eye.

You know? And I don't know if that's what Abram did. He bound him. It sounds like it was conscious.

And had to be bound. On the other hand, the sacrifices often had to be bound, even when they're dead, because they would thrash about, you know, even when they're dying or dead, on the altar. So even if he was unconscious, he might have bound him.

But I don't know. I've often thought about how this actually took place, because the transaction is not given in so much detail as to let us know exactly how willing Isaac was. It's often assumed that he was very willing, like Jesus was willing, you know, to die, because, you know, it's the cup the Father gave him.

Anyway, it says in verse 10, And Abram stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay him, to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham. And he said, Here I am.

And he said, Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. Then Abram lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns.

And Abram went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. Now, you know, one thing that people often raise when they read this is, isn't this kind of barbaric? I mean, even the suggestion, Sacrifice your son. Isn't that like something from pagan religions? How could God, Yahweh, the God of Abram, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of Jesus, how could he even make the suggestion of human sacrifice? Since that's what the demon gods always require.

And, you know, how could Abram even think for a moment that God would let him go through with it? And I guess I have to say, again, we don't, we know so much more than Abraham did. Abraham had only knowledge of God as God had revealed it in these few visitations that he'd had from God. And it was limited.

He had no Bible. He had no law. He had nothing from God to necessarily tell him that this God would never ever require human sacrifice.

And when that God shows up and says, now offer this human, you know, Abram would have no reason to know that this would be contrary to Yahweh's nature. After all, the gods of all the heathen around required human sacrifice. It was the ultimate in worship is to offer your child as a sacrifice to demon gods.



Now, God knew what Abram couldn't have known, and that is that God wouldn't let him go through with it. Either Abram wouldn't even go through with it, in which case Isaac would be spared, or Abram would go through with it, in which case God knew He wouldn't let him. So God, of course, does not approve of human sacrifice and would never have allowed it to go through like this.

But Abram didn't know that. And so it was Abram's ignorance about the nature of God in this respect that made the test a genuine test, because Abram thought he was actually going to kill his son and that God was going to raise him from the dead. But God says, no, you passed the test.

As soon as you put your hand on the knife, now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son from me. I mentioned earlier that the story of Abraham is the story of a man being progressively separated from things that he cherishes. He has to leave his homeland first.

His father dies. Then he has to separate from Lot, who had become like a son to him, and the only son in his family, has to separate from him. And then he has Ishmael, and Ishmael becomes no doubt the idol of his heart.

And yet at age 13, when the boy reaches maturity and would be taken on mature responsibilities, he's told that that's not the boy. And a few years later, he has to send him packing too out in the desert. And everyone he's ever cared for, he has to part with.

In the next chapter, he has to part with Sarah because she died. But in this chapter, the only person he doesn't ultimately and permanently part with is Isaac, but he even thinks he's going to part with him. He has to be willing to.

And I mean, the story of Abraham illustrates how God is jealous over our affections and he does not want any competitors to himself in our hearts. Not that he doesn't want us to love our families and things like that, but when Jesus said, he that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Or he that loves child or wife more than me is not worthy of me.

That's apparently seen here in Abraham's case. You can't love your son or your daughter more than you love God. And God can take from you anything he, any idol that he feels is a challenge.

And it's hard to know. If Abraham had not gone through with this, we don't know what would have happened. I mean, I can't even suggest alternatives to what could have happened to Isaac.

God could take Isaac from him, though he had made promises to him. I don't know exactly what God would have done in this case. But Abraham passed the test and, you know, God talks as if maybe he didn't know that this would happen this way.

He says, now I know that you fear God. And some people, the people who believe in what's called openness theology, they say that God really doesn't know the choices we're going to make before we do it. And this is one of their favorite verses.

Because it sounds like God had to test Abraham to find out what Abraham would do. However, this technically is not a statement about God knowing the future or not knowing the future. It's about knowing God's, Abraham's heart.

I know that you fear me now. And certainly a moment earlier, as Abraham was walking up the hill with his son, God knew that Abraham feared him. And I think God knows whether we fear him or not, even at all times.

I think God knows our hearts. So I think here we have again that anthropomorphic way of speaking that we have found so often already in times when God appears to Abraham or to Adam or to Cain and speaks as if he is a man, as if he is a person learning things, as if he is a person who doesn't know things. That's just the anthropomorphic way in which God chooses to appear to men.

But it says, Abraham called, verse 14, called the name of the place the Lord will provide, or as it said, Yahweh Jireh, or Jehovah Jireh, as it is said to this day in the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. Jireh means will provide, Jehovah will provide. And therefore, as Abraham said, the Lord will provide for himself a lamb for a burnt offering.

Beyond that story, there is an expectation of the Jews, even in Moses' time when he writes this, that the Lord will someday show up and provide something in that very mount again. And that is, as I say, the mountain upon which Jesus did die. And so, it was fulfilled.

Here we have a prediction 2,000 years before Christ of his being offered as a lamb, as an offering in that mountain. Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven and said, By myself I have sworn, says Yahweh, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son. In blessing I will bless you.

In multiplying I will multiply you, your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. Now, the gate of the enemy, again, is the place of rulership, of authority.

The courts, the judges were there. Or it might even refer to simply the portal of the enemy's walled cities in that your enemies will conquer their enemies by breaching the gates. In any way, in any case, I'm going to make your descendants like the stars of heaven or the sand which is on the seashore.

In your seed all the nations, and in your seed, of course, is Christ. All the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed my voice. So Abraham returned to his young men and they arose and went together to Beersheba.

And Abraham dwelt at Beersheba. Now, I don't know if Sarah was ever told about this. Next thing we read, she dies.

Maybe he told her. But, the servants apparently weren't told. Although Isaac apparently knew, unless he was unconscious of the whole thing.

I mean, I wonder how Isaac could keep this under his hat. In fact, Isaac may be the one who passed on the story for us to know today. And anyway, it was a little secret between God and Abraham and Isaac, assuming Isaac was in on it.

And I don't know if they ever told Mom. That'd be a dangerous thing to do, it seems to me. So, Abraham returned to his young men and they arose and went together to Beersheba, the well of the Oath.

And Abraham dwelt there for a while. Now, it came to pass after these things that it was told to Abraham, saying, Indeed, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nehru. But who's Milcah? Remember her? Back in chapter 11? She was Lot's sister.

Lot and Milcah and another sister named Iscah were the orphaned children of Abraham's brother Haran, who had died and left these three children. And Abraham had adopted his nephew Lot and the other surviving brother, Nahor, had married the niece, Milcah. And now Abraham finds out that there's some children born to that couple.

Huz, the firstborn, and Buz, his brother. Huz and Buz. And Kemuel, the father of Aaron.

Teved, Havo, Pildash, Jidlap, and Bethuel. I think they could have used some baby name books back then. Can you imagine naming your kid Pildash? Or Jidlap? Those are really funny names to me.

Huz and Buz. But Bethuel becomes significant because he is the father later on of Laban and Rebekah. So these were descended from Milcah.

Eight children born to Nahor, Abraham's brother. His concubine, whose name was Rumah, also bore Teba, Gaham, Thahash, and Meachah. So like so many other branches of the family, there were twelve children here.

Although some of them may not have been males, I'm not sure. But they probably were all males. So we have the family expanding away from where Abram is.

This birth of Milcah's children took place in Paddan-Aram. And that's where Abram later in chapter 24 is going to send his servant to find a bride for Isaac, since he wants him to marry someone somewhat related, rather than the Canaanites. But in chapter 23, which we will not take today, we're going to have the death of Sarah and the new difficulty that that creates for Abram.

The new difficulty is this. Where is he going to bury her? He doesn't own any property.

The whole land of Canaan is his by promise, but he doesn't actually own any real estate at all.

You can't bury on someone else's property. You're dead people. And so he has to buy some property, and he does.

The whole chapter is about his transaction to purchase property. In fact, the chapter reads like a legal document and probably was copied off of a legal Hittite document. But the property he buys, the cave of Machpelah, is where he buried Sarah.

Then he himself was later buried. So were Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Leah and very possibly Joseph eventually was buried there. And that cave is still, its site is known.

It's now a Muslim mosque, but it's the only it's the only piece of real estate that Abram ever owned in the land that was promised to him in his lifetime. So he died in faith that God would provide the land that he never actually possessed, but his later descendants did. .