

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 22

GENESIS 21 IS A CHAPTER OF GREAT JOY AND CELEBRATION. AT LONG LAST, THE SON OF ABRAHAM, THROUGH SARAH, HAS BEEN BORN. THE PROMISED CHILD. THE PROMISED DESCENDANT. THE ONE FOR WHOM ABRAHAM AND SARAH HAD BEEN WAITING FOR FOR 25 YEARS. CELEBRATION, JOY, RELIEF, AND THANKSGIVING PERMEATE THEIR HEARTS AND THE BIBLICAL TEXT. AND AS IT TYPICAL WITH BIBLE READING, WE FIND OURSELVES JUMPING QUICKLY THROUGH YEARS IN JUST A FEW VERSES. ISAAC IS BORN (21:1-3). ISAAC IS A TODDLER (WEANED) (21:8). AND AT THE OPENING OF GENESIS 22 HE'S SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A BOY AND A YOUNG MAN. WHAT FOLLOWS IN GENESIS 22 IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL AND RADICAL STORIES IN THE BIBLE. IT TEACHES US ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER, AS WELL AS TRUST, OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE.

GENESIS 22:1-3 - A SHOCKING REQUEST, A SHOCKING RESPONSE

WE KNOW FROM THE OPENING LINE THAT THE FOLLOWING STORY WAS A "TEST" FOR ABRAHAM. IT'S UNLIKELY ABRAHAM KNEW THOSE DETAILS AHEAD OF TIME. HE'S GOING TO LIVE AND EXPERIENCE THIS IN REAL TIME.

GOD COMMANDS ABRAHAM TO TAKE ISAAC AND TRAVEL TO THE LAND OF MORIAH AND OFFER HIS SON AS A BURNT OFFERING. AGAIN, GOD VISITS ABRAHAM AND COMMANDS HIM TO SACRIFICE HIS SON, "HIS ONLY SON (22:2)". THE PROMISED CHILD IS NOW TO BE OFFERED UP TO THE LORD? WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

YET, THE TEXTS GIVES US NOT INDICATION OF QUESTIONING, HESITANCY, OR DELAY ON ABRAHAM'S PART. IN FACT IT APPEARS THAT ABRAHAM RESPONDED IN OBEDIENCE IMMEDIATELY.

SOMEONE ONCE SAID THAT "TESTING REVEALS WHERE YOUR ALLEGIANCE LIES." PRESSURE AND CHALLENGES IN LIFE, WHETHER PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL, REVEAL WHERE OUR TRUST IS, WHERE OUR HOPE IS, AND WHERE OUR DEPENDENCY IS. THIS IS TRUE OF THIS TEST FOR ABRAHAM. DOES HE LOVE HIS LONG PROMISED AND FINALLY GIVEN SON MORE THAN THE LORD? DOES HE STILL TRUST THE WORD OF THE LORD NOW THAT WORD IS NO LONGER SOMETHING THAT SEEMS TO BE IN ABRAHAM'S BEST INTEREST?

GENESIS 22:4-8 - ABRAHAM AND ISAAC HEAD UP THE MOUNTAIN

THIS WASN'T A QUICK TRIP. IT TOOK THREE DAYS FOR ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND THEIR TRAVELING COMPANIONS TO WALK FROM BEERSHEBA TO MORIAH. IN FACT THE DISTANCE WAS ABOUT 45 MILES. THIS IS SIGNIFICANT NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE WILLINGNESS OF ABRAHAM TO LITERALLY "GO THE DISTANCE" BUT ALSO BECAUSE THIS WAS NOT AN INSTANTANEOUS EVENT.

GOD GIVES THE COMMAND IN 22:2 AND THEN ABRAHAM HAS TO TAKE THE TIME TO PACK, LEAVE AND WALK THE 3 DAY, 45 MILE TREK. EACH MINUTE WOULD HAVE PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ABRAHAM TO THINK ABOUT WHAT HE WAS ABOUT TO DO. EACH STEP WOULD HAVE BEEN A CHANCE TO RECONSIDER. EACH CONVERSATION WITH HIS SON WOULD HAVE HIT HIM DEEPLY. AND YET ABRAHAM TAKES EVERY STEP TOWARDS MORIAH AND ALLOWS EACH MINUTE TO PASS UNTIL HE ARRIVES AT THIS CRITICAL HOUR.

IN ONE OF THE MOST HEART WRENCHING EXCHANGES IN THE BIBLE, ISAAC CALLS HIS FATHER:

GENESIS 22:7 (NIV) - ..."FATHER?" "YES, MY SON?" ABRAHAM REPLIED. "THE FIRE AND WOOD ARE HERE," ISAAC SAID, "BUT WHERE IS THE LAMB FOR THE BURNT OFFERING?"

AND ABRAHAM, FULLY AWARE OF WHAT GOD HAS ASKED HIM TO DO, REPLIES:

GENESIS 22:8 (NIV) - ..."GOD HIMSELF WILL PROVIDE THE LAMB FOR THE BURNT OFFERING, MY SON." AND THE TWO OF THEM WENT ON TOGETHER.

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC ARE NOW ALONE, WALKING TO THE TOP OF MOUNT MORIAH. WHEN THEY REACH THE TOP, ABRAHAM IS GOING TO KILL HIS SON BECAUSE THE LORD COMMANDED HIM TO. CAN YOU EVEN IMAGINE?

GENESIS 22:9-14 - DIVINE INTERVENTION

ABRAHAM GOES THROUGH WITH THE WHOLE PROCESS. THE STONES ARE GATHERED, THE ALTAR IS CONSTRUCTED. ABRAHAM ARRANGES THE WOOD. AND HE PICKS UP HIS SON, BINDS HIM AND LAID HIS OWN SON ON TOP OF THE WOOD. ABRAHAM FINDS HIS KNIFE AND IS ABOUT TO PIERCE HIS OWN SON. DID ISAAC WATCH ALL OF THIS? DID ABRAHAM PLACE A BLINDFOLD OVER HIS SON'S FACE? "AND ABRAHAM PICKED UP THE KNIFE TO KILL HIS SON AS A SACRIFICE (GENESIS 22:10 NLT)." IN HIS HEART, HE SURELY HAD PREPARED HIMSELF TO COMPLETE THIS ACT OR ELSE HE WOULD NEVER HAD GOTTEN THIS FAR.

AND SECONDS BEFORE THE KNIFE FALLS, THE ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARS AND STOPS ABRAHAM.

AND WITH THAT THE LORD REVEALS TO ABRAHAM THAT HE HAD PASSED THE "TEST". HE DECLARES THAT INDEED ABRAHAM FEARED AND LOVED THE LORD MORE THAN ANYTHING, EVEN HIS ONLY SON. MANY PEOPLE SAY THEY LOVE GOD MORE THAN ANYTHING, ABRAHAM PROVED THAT THOSE WEREN'T JUST WORDS. HE WAS WILLING TO DO, WHATEVER THE LORD ASKED OF HIM, HE WAS WILLING TO SACRIFICE WHATEVER THE LORD ASKED OF HIM.

AND PROVING ABRAHAM'S WORDS TRUE, THE LORD PROVIDED A SACRIFICE. A RAM, CAUGHT IN A THICKET, IS OFFERED UP INSTEAD. AND ABRAHAM CALLED THE PLACE "YAHWEH YIREH" MEANING "YAHWEH (THE LORD) WILL PROVIDE."

GENESIS 22:15-19 - THE LORD'S RESPONSE TO ABRAHAM'S FAITH

IN RESPONSE TO THIS AMAZING FAITH OF ABRAHAM, THE LORD EXPANDS AND CONFIRMS HIS PROMISE TO ABRAHAM ONCE AGAIN. THE LORD PROMISES TO "GREATLY BLESS AND MULTIPLY" ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS AS THE "STARS OF THE HEAVENS AND AS THE SAND WHICH IS ON THE SEASHORE." AND THE LORD ADDS THAT ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS WILL "POSSESS THE GATES OF THEIR ENEMIES" A POWERFUL IMAGE OF THE FAVOR AND BLESSING OF GOD ON THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM. IN FACT GOD CONCLUDES BY SAYING THAT IT WILL BE THROUGH ABRAHAM'S FAMILY THAT THE ENTIRE WORLD WILL BE BLESSED - A PROMISE THAT BRINGS US BACK TO AN EDEN-LIKE STATE.

AND WHY? "BECAUSE YOU HAVE OBEYED MY VOICE." INCREDIBLE. PERHAPS MOST NOTABLE ABOUT THIS RENEWED AND ENLARGED BLESSING IS THAT GOD IS SO COMMITTED TO BRINGING THIS TO PASS FOR ABRAHAM THAT THE LORD HIMSELF "SWEARS TO GOD" (22:16). THERE IS NO WAY THIS WILL NOT BE DONE. AFTER ALL, ABRAHAM WAS WILLING TO DO AND GIVE WHATEVER THE LORD WANTED. AND THIS REMARKABLE ACT PROVED TO THE LORD THAT ABRAHAM, DESPITE ALL HIS FLAWS AND FAILINGS, WAS THE RIGHT MAN IN THE END.

GENESIS 22:20-24 - NAHOR'S GENEALOGY

THE CHAPTER ENDS WITH A LISTING OF THE CHILDREN OF NAHOR, ABRAHAM'S BROTHER. THIS INFORMATION WAS LIKELY "TOLD" TO ABRAHAM (V. 20) SINCE ABRAHAM HAD LONG SINCE SEPARATED FROM HIS FAMILY WHO LIVED IN UR. ONE NOTABLE NAME IN THIS SECTION IS "REBEKAH" (V. 23). ABRAHAM'S NEPHEW BEHUEL HAD A DAUGHTER NAMED REBEKAH AND THIS REBEKAH WILL EVENTUALLY BECOME THE WIFE OF ISAAC (GENESIS 24).

WHAT A POWERFUL AND AMAZING CHAPTER. IT'S ALMOST HARD TO FIND THE RIGHT WORDS TO EXPRESS THE IMPACT OF GENESIS 22. AS WE NOTED IN THE OPENING PARAGRAPHS - THIS CHAPTER TEACHES US A LOT ABOUT SACRIFICE AND TRUST AND OBEDIENCE - BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING WE LEARN ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF THE LORD.

IN EVERY CULTURE, IN EVERY RELIGION THE HUMAN WORSHIPPER PROVIDES THE SACRIFICE TO MAKE RECONCILIATION WITH OR APPEASE THEIR GOD. HUMANS MUST WORK HARD TO KEEP THEIR DIETY HAPPY. IT IS HUMAN EFFORT THAT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THE RAIN COMES, THE CROPS GROW, THEIR WOMEN HAVE CHILDREN. AND ONE CAN NEVER BE TOO SURE IF THEY HAVE DONE ENOUGH TO EARN THEIR DISTANT COSMIC OVERLORDS HAPPY. AND SADLY, IN SOME CULTURES AND IN SOME RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS, HUMANS WERE SO TWISTEDLY FEARFUL OF THE WRATH OF THEIR GODS AND SO PERVERTEDELY HUNGRY FOR THE BLESSING OF THEIR GODS THAT THEY WOULD EVEN OFFER THEIR SONS UPON THE ALTAR.

PERHAPS THE LESSON OF THE BINDING OF ISAAC ISN'T THAT YAHWEH WANTS TO SEE IF YOU LOVE HIM SO MUCH THAT YOU'LL BE *WILLING* TO SACRIFICE THAT WHICH YOU HOLD MOST DEAR - BUT THAT GOD ALREADY LOVES YOU SO MUCH THAT HE PROVIDES THE LAMB SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO OFFER UP YOUR SONS.

HE'S NOT LIKE THE GODS YOU HAVE HEARD OF. HE'S NOT LIKE THE GODS YOUR FATHERS TOLD YOU ABOUT. HE'S NOT LIKE THE GODS YOU HAVE CREATED IN YOUR OWN HEART. HE'S NOT THE ANGRY GOD WHO IS LOOKING TO STRIKE YOU DOWN ANY TIME YOU MAKE A MISTAKE. NOR IS HE THE LOVEY-DOVEY GOD WHO DOESN'T CARE WHAT YOU DO. THAT'S NOT YAHWEH. YAHWEH IS PAINED BY THE SINS OF HIS CREATION AND PASSIONATELY CARES WHEN THE ONES HE LOVES TURN FROM HIM. HE CARES DEEPLY WHAT WE DO AND DON'T DO. AND WE KNOW THIS BECAUSE MOVED BY HIS COMPASSION AND LOVE TOWARDS YOU, HE PROVIDED AND OFFERED HIS OWN LAMB ON THE ALTAR TO PAY FOR THE SIN YOU AND I COMMITTED AND ALSO.

AND CONSIDER THE TRUE LAMB OF GOD THAT WAS SLAIN FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD. IT WAS *GOD'S* ISAAC THAT WAS BOUND AND SLAUGHTERED ON THE PIECES OF WOOD. IT WAS GOD'S ONE AND ONLY. IT WAS GOD'S "BELOVED SON IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED." SOME HAVE ARGUED THAT IF GOD DIED ON BEHALF OF THE SINS OF THE WORLD THAT WOULD BE A GREAT EXPRESSION OF LOVE. PERHAPS. HOWEVER, AS A PARENT I RECOGNIZE MY OWN WILLINGNESS TO GIVE MY LIFE FOR MY CHILDREN. BUT I WOULDN'T GIVE MY CHILDREN UP FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE. THE DEPTHS OF THAT KIND OF LOVE ARE SO DEEP AND UNIMAGINABLE THAT IT ALMOST SEEMS WRONG.

I AM CERTAIN ABRAHAM WOULD HAVE DIED SO ISAAC COULD LIVE. THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A GREAT ACT OF LOVE. BUT I WILL ARGUE THAT THE EVEN *GREATER* EXPRESSION OF LOVE WAS THAT GOD GAVE *HIS* SON. LET THAT SINK IN.

GOD WALKED HAND IN HAND WITH JESUS THROUGH HIS LIFE. AND THEY TOOK A JOURNEY TO THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN. IN THIS STORY, IT WAS GOD'S SON WHO GOT UP ON THE ALTAR AND WILLINGLY GAVE HIS LIFE AS A SACRIFICE FOR YOU. OH WHAT LOVE THE FATHER HAS BESTOWED UPON US THAT WE COULD BE CALLED THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD.

ONE FINAL POINT. THOUGH THE POWER OF THIS STORY RESTS PRIMARILY IN THE LOVE OF GOD, WE CAN'T IGNORE THE KIND OF MAN ABRAHAM PROVES TO BE HERE. AS THE NEW TESTAMENT IMPLIES, ABRAHAM MUST HAVE SORTED OUT IN HIS MIND THAT GOD WAS GOING TO RAISE ISAAC

FROM THE DEAD. HE RECONCILED IN HIS BRAIN THAT ISAAC WAS THE PROMISED CHILD THROUGH WHOM THE EVERLASTING COVENANT WAS GOING TO FLOW. SO IF I'M TO KILL THE BOY TODAY ON MOUNT MORIAH, GOD'S GONNA GET HIM UP AT SOME POINT ALONG THE WAY.

AND SO, WITH HIS FAITH ROOTED IN GOD'S PROMISE, ABRAHAM IS ABLE TO OBEY GOD EVEN IN THE MOST DIFFICULT OF ASSIGNMENTS BECAUSE HE KNOWS THAT HIS HOPE WASN'T ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE HERE AND NOW BUT HOPE IS ABOUT WHAT GOD IS ULTIMATELY GOING TO DO WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE. THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANYTHING THAT GOD ASKS OF ABRAHAM EASY - BUT IT DOES GIVE ABRAHAM THE ABILITY TO LIVE BY FAITH IN THE "IN BETWEEN" THAT DOESN'T MAKE ALL THAT MUCH SENSE BECAUSE HE WAS CONVINCED THAT GOD WILL "WORK ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD AND ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE" (ROMANS 8:28). WAS THERE EVER ANYONE ELSE MORE CLEARLY CALLED ACCORDING TO GOD'S PURPOSES THAN ABRAHAM?! SURELY GOD WILL WORK THINGS OUT FOR ABRAHAM'S GOOD IN THE END.

AND THAT BRINGS US BACK TO CHRIST AND HIS LOVE FOR YOU. HIS WILLINGNESS TO DIE ON THE CROSS FOR YOU INDIVIDUALLY AND THE COLLECTIVE SINS OF THE EVIL AND REBELLIOUS WORLD GENERALLY WAS ROOTED IN THE TRUTH THAT HIS FATHER PROMISED TO RAISE HIM FROM THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY. JESUS TRUSTED IN GOD'S PROMISE AND THAT FREED HIM AND FUELED HIM TO LOVE, EVEN UNTO THE DEATH. HE WAS WILLING TO SACRIFICE NOW BECAUSE OF WHAT HE KNEW WOULD HAPPEN IN THE END. AS WE'VE HEARD HE DID IT "FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM..." ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD'S WORD AND TRUSTED IN THE LORD TO SORT THINGS OUT FOR GOOD IN THE END. JESUS BELIEVED GOD'S WORD AND TRUSTED IN THE LORD TO SORT THINGS OUT FOR GOOD IN THE END. AND THEY NOW HOLD OUT THEIR EXAMPLE AND LEGACY TOWARDS US, INVITING, NO PLEADING WITH US TO LIVE THE SAME WAY.

"DO YOU SEE WHAT THIS MEANS—ALL THESE PIONEERS WHO BLAZED THE WAY, ALL THESE VETERANS CHEERING US ON? IT MEANS WE'D BETTER GET ON WITH IT. STRIP DOWN, START RUNNING—AND NEVER QUIT! NO EXTRA SPIRITUAL FAT, NO PARASITIC SINS. KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS, WHO BOTH BEGAN AND FINISHED THIS RACE WE'RE IN. STUDY HOW HE DID IT. BECAUSE HE NEVER LOST SIGHT OF WHERE HE WAS HEADED—THAT EXHILARATING FINISH IN AND WITH GOD—HE COULD PUT UP WITH ANYTHING ALONG THE WAY: CROSS, SHAME, WHATEVER. AND NOW HE'S THERE, IN THE PLACE OF HONOR, RIGHT ALONGSIDE GOD. WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELVES FLAGGING IN YOUR FAITH, GO OVER THAT STORY AGAIN, ITEM BY ITEM, THAT LONG LITANY OF HOSTILITY HE PLOWED THROUGH. THAT WILL SHOOT ADRENALINE INTO YOUR SOULS!" (EUGENE PETERSON, "THE MESSAGE", HEBREWS 12:1-3)