

# Better Way Apostolic Church – Bible Class

## **Subject: Focus on the promises, not the explanations: Genesis 22**

Genesis 22 records the greatest test that Abraham ever faced. True, it also presents a beautiful picture of our Lord's sacrifice at Calvary; but the main lesson is obedient faith that overcomes in the trials of life. Abraham teaches us how to face and handle the tests of life to the glory of God. Consider five simple instructions.

### **Expect tests from God (Genesis 22:1-2)**

In the "School of Faith" we must have occasional tests, or we will never know where we are spiritually. Abraham had his share of tests right from the beginning. First was the "family test," when he had to leave his loved ones and step out by faith to go to a new land (11:27-12:5). This was followed by the "famine test," which Abraham failed because he doubted God and went down to Egypt for help (12:10-13:4).

Once back in the land, Abraham passed the "fellowship test" when he gave Lot first choice in using the pastureland (vv. 5-18). He also passed the "fight test" when he defeated the kings (14:1-16) and the "fortune test" when he said no to Sodom's wealth (vv. 17-24). But he failed the "fatherhood test" when Sarah got impatient with God and suggested that Abraham have a child by Hagar (Genesis 16). When the time came to send Ishmael away, Abraham passed the "farewell test" even though it broke his heart (21:14-21).

Not every difficult experience in life is necessarily a personal test from God. (Of course, any experience could become a test or a temptation, depending on how we deal with it. See James 1:12-16.) Sometimes our own disobedience causes the pain or disappointment, as when Abraham went to Egypt (Genesis 12:10 ff) and to Gerar (Genesis 20). Sometimes our hurts are simply a part of normal human life: As we grow older, friends and loved ones relocate or even die, life changes around us, and we must make painful adjustments.

Learn to distinguish between trials and temptations. Temptations come from our desires within us (James 1:12-16) while trials come from the Lord who has a special purpose to fulfill.

Temptations are used by the devil to bring out the worst in us, but trials are used by the Holy Spirit to bring out the best in us (vv. 1-6). Temptations seem logical while trials seem very unreasonable. Why would God give Abraham a son and then ask Abraham to kill him?

All believers face similar temptations to sin (1 Corinthians 10:13), but not all believers experience the same trials of faith. God's testings are tailor-made for each child of God, and each experience is unique. God never asked Lot to face the tests that Abraham faced. Why? Because Lot was being tempted by the world and the flesh and never grew to the place of maturity that Abraham reached. In one sense, it is a compliment when God sends us a test; it shows God wants to "promote us" in the "School of Faith." God never sends a test until He knows you are ready for it.

"Life is difficult," wrote psychiatrist M. Scott Peck. "Once we truly know that life is difficult — once we truly understand and accept it — then life is no longer difficult" (The Road Less Traveled, 15). That is the first lesson we must learn: Expect trials from God, because the Christian life is not easy.

### **Focus on promises, not explanations (Genesis 22:3-5)**

"In the commencement of the spiritual life," wrote French mystic Madame Guyon, "our hardest task is to bear with our neighbor; in its progress, with ourselves; and in its end, with God." Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible. Whether you look at Joseph in prison, Moses and Israel at the Red Sea, David in the cave, or Jesus at Calvary, the lesson is the same: We live by promises, not by explanations.

Consider how unreasonable God's request was. Isaac was Abraham's only son, and the future of the covenant rested in him. Isaac was a miracle child, the gift of God to Abraham and Sarah in response to their faith. Abraham and Sarah loved Isaac very much and had built their whole future around him. When God asked Abraham to offer his son, He was testing Abraham's faith, hope, and love; and it looked like God was wiping out everything Abraham and Sarah had lived for.

When God sends a trial to us, our first response is usually, "Why, Lord?" and then, "Why me?" Right away, we want God to give us explanations. Of course, we know that God has reasons for sending tests — perhaps to purify our faith (1 Peter 1:6-9), or perfect our character (James 1:1-4), or even to protect us from sin (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) — but we fail to see how these things apply to us. The fact that we ask our Father for explanations suggests that we may not know ourselves as we should or God as we should.

Abraham heard God's word and immediately obeyed it by faith. He knew that God's will never contradicts God's promise, so he held on to the promise "in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Genesis 21:12). Abraham believed that even if God allowed him to slay his son, He could raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19). Faith does not demand explanations; faith rests on promises.

Abraham told the two servants, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Genesis 22:5). Because he believed God, Abraham had no intentions of bringing back a corpse! It has been pointed out that Abraham believed God and obeyed Him when he did not know where (Hebrews 11:8), when he did not know when (vv. 9-10,13-16), when he did not know how (vv. 11-12), and when he did not know why (vv. 17-19).

### **Depend on God's provision (Genesis 22:6-14)**

Two statements reveal the emphasis of this passage: "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (v. 8); and "Jehovah-jireh" (22:14), which means, "The Lord will see to it," that is, "The Lord will provide." As he climbed Mount Moriah with his son, Abraham was confident that God would meet every need.

On what could Abraham depend? He certainly could not depend on his feelings, for there must have been terrible pain within as he contemplated slaying his son on the altar. He loved his only son, but he also loved his God and wanted to obey Him.

Nor could Abraham depend on other people. Sarah was at home, and the two servants who accompanied him were back at the camp. We thank God for friends and family members who can help us carry our burdens, but there are some trials in life that we must face alone. It is only then that we can see what our Father really can do for us!

Abraham could depend on the promise and provision of the Lord. He had already experienced the resurrection power of God in his own body (Romans 4:19-21), so he knew that God could raise Isaac from the dead if that was His plan. Apparently no resurrections had taken place before that time, so Abraham was exercising great faith in God.

According to Ephesians 1:19-20 and 3:20-21, believers today have Christ's resurrection power available in their own bodies as they yield to the Spirit of God. We can know "the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10) as we face the daily demands and trials of life. When the situation appears to be hopeless, ask yourself, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14) and remind yourself, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13, NKJV).

**God did provide the sacrifice that was needed, and a ram took Isaac's place on the altar** (Genesis 22:13). Abraham discovered a new name for God — "Jehovah-jireh" — -which can be translated "The Lord will see to it" or "The Lord will be seen." The statement "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" helps us understand some truths about the provision of the Lord.

Where does the Lord provide our needs? In the place of His assignment. Abraham was at the right place, so God could meet his needs. We have no right to expect the provision of God if we are not in the will of God.

**When does God meet our needs? Just when we have the need and not a minute before.**

When you bring your requests to the throne of grace, God answers with mercy and grace "in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Sometimes it looks like God waits until the last minute to send help, but that is only from our human point of view. God is never late.

How does God provide for us? In ways that are usually quite natural. God did not send an angel with a sacrifice; He simply allowed a ram to get caught in a bush at a time when Abraham needed it and in a place where Abraham could get his hands on it. All Abraham needed was one animal, so God did not send a whole flock of sheep.

To whom does God give His provision? To those who trust Him and obey His instructions. When we are doing the will of God, we have the right to expect the provision of God. A deacon in the first church I pastored used to remind us, "When God's work is done in God's way, it will not lack God's support." God is not obligated to bless my ideas or projects, but He is obligated to support His work if it is done in His way.

Why does God provide our every need? For the great glory of His name! "Hallowed be Thy name" is the first petition in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), and it governs all the other requests. God was glorified on Mount Moriah because Abraham and Isaac did the will of the Lord and glorified Jesus Christ. We must pause to consider this important truth.