

## 2. Abraham and Sarah: Faith Tested and Tried

**Biblical material:** Gen. 12:2; 16:1-5; 22; James 2:20-26.

### Quotes:

- If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them... For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. *C.S. Lewis*
- Abraham and Sarah had waited 25 years for an heir, and God had finally blessed them with Isaac. But it's more than the long wait. It's that Isaac is the *evidence* of God's promise to Abraham. *Ben Edgington*
- That's a brutal, cruel, heartless variety of "mercy" - God ordering a human sacrifice, and then "mercifully" backing out on it. If such a God existed, I would be morally compelled to try to destroy it. *wxtornado*

### Questions

How would you characterize the relationship between Abraham and Sarah? In what ways was their "faith tested and tried"? What does this say about God? If Abraham had argued with God over the sacrifice of Isaac as he did over the destruction of Sodom, how would God have responded? What of Moses' refusal to obey God and step aside so Israel could be destroyed?

### Discussion/ Comment

Abraham as God's friend surely trusted his loving Lord, yet the account reveals defects in his relationship with God. Of course, that is not to demean Abraham—for who of us would have exhibited such trust as Abraham did at many times in his life. Yet even so, and wanting to make sure that God was seen by others to be faithful, both Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands rather than trusting in God.

As we consider the evidence presented in their case we see both high points of confidence in God, and yet also all-too-human decisions to take matters into their own hands. In accepting the call to leave home and travel to the Promised Land, a total trust in the promises of God is clear. And yet, twice on the journey, Abraham "half-lies" that Sarah is his sister, fearing he will be killed so that others can gain his beautiful wife. Why if God had provided so much evidence of his continuing care should Abraham have doubted? A question that applies to us...

Similarly why should we be so surprised that *both* Abraham and Sarah laughed when told Sarah would conceive and bear a son in her old age? Logically it made no sense in terms of practicalities, and it would be so easy to rationalize that God surely meant something different. The attempt to "fix" things for God by arranging a surrogate mother in the form of Hagar does indicate a misguided desire to make sure God is not mistaken. In our humanity we all too often fail to place complete confidence in God, trying to make things work out our own way.

The story of the sacrifice of Isaac is often cited as a wonderful example of blind faith. But let's consider the whole situation. After hearing the command of God, one wonders what kind of conversation Abraham had with Sarah, if any! How would you explain that?!

Think also of the implications. This is the son that God specifically promised, and the one miraculously provided. So why would God command his murder? Is it because, as some have

suggested, that Abraham needed to realize that God knows best and had to be implicitly obeyed? Consider also that human sacrifice was practiced at that time by the pagan peoples. So why would a believer in the true God give credibility to the practice? Would not others point to this action and consider that this God was just the same as theirs? What would it say about God and his reputation? Remember Moses who refused to stand out of the way and allow God to destroy Israel and make a new nation. His argument—God it would ruin your reputation. So why didn't Abraham argue the same way?

Abraham clearly had much time to debate with God on the three-day journey to Mount Moriah. The record in Genesis gives the bare record of the events, and does not give us Abraham's reflections. But the same man who argued with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would surely have argued over the heathen human sacrifice of his son, the son God promised and provided.

That he came to settled resolution and trusting confidence is indicated in the seeming calmness of his words to his son—that God would provide the lamb. And the best insight comes from the New Testament, where Hebrews records that, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." (11:17-19 NIV).

Finally we see God, not trying to prove anything to himself, but providing the opportunity to Abraham to reveal his total trust and confidence in God to himself Not only for Abraham's benefit, but also for all those who watch with intense interest to know what kind of God Abraham believed in. A God of complete trustworthiness, who works with each of us, despite our repeated attempts to do things on our own...

### **Ellen White Comments**

If Abraham and Sarah had waited in confiding faith for the fulfillment of the promise that they should have a son, much unhappiness would have been avoided. They believed that it would be just as God had promised, but could not believe that Sarah, in her old age, would have a son. Sarah suggested a plan whereby she thought the promise of God could be fulfilled. She entreated Abraham to take Hagar as his wife. In this they both lacked faith, and a perfect trust in the power of God. By yielding to the advice of Sarah, and taking Hagar as his wife, Abraham failed to endure the test of his faith in God's unlimited power, and brought upon himself, and upon Sarah, much unhappiness. {ST, March 27, 1879}

If you become restless, as did Abraham and Sarah, and work up plans of your own in order to bring about God's promises, a condition of things which you deem desirable after your own ways and ideas, you will find that it will result in sorrow, misery, and sin. {2MR 336-7}

Abraham knew that true dignity, true elevation is to be found only in those who love and fear God. There is a debasement upon the entire character of the godless, who follow the imagination of their own hearts, and are filled with their own devices. But those who make God their trust, who are elevated by his grace, obedient to his requirements, seeking his glory, fearing his displeasure, will receive his blessing. They will have that hope and courage, that dignity, calmness, and self-possession, which only those can have who are connected with God. Abraham had maintained an habitual trust in God. {ST, April 10, 1879}

