



# Starlight

## Adult SS Lesson

### Genesis 21-22

These two chapters record three tests that came into the life of Abraham. Through testing, we discover what kind of faith we have. Tests of faith are opportunities for growth & victory.

#### **I. A Test from the Family (21:1-21)**

Here we see conflict between the two sons, Ishmael (@ age 17), & Isaac (who was weaned at about the age of 3). At first, Isaac's birth brought joy & laughter (21:6 with 17:17 & 18:12) for the very name "Isaac" means "laughter". But soon there was conflict as Ishmael constantly persecuted his younger brother. There are some valuable lessons here:

**A. The flesh vs. the Spirit.** Ishmael was a child of the flesh, while Isaac was a child of promise, born miraculously. Isaac's presence in the home was not due to Abraham's strength (Rom 4:19-20), but to God's promise & power. There is always conflict between the flesh & the Spirit, the old nature & the new, (Gal. 5:16-24). Salvation does not change the old nature, nor can the old nature be improved or disciplined (Rom. 6-7). The only way to overcome the old nature is to accept God's estimate of it & obey God's Word. Abraham loved Ishmael & longed to hold to him (21:10-11, 17:18); but God said, "Cast him out!" Rom 6 informs us that our only victory over the flesh is crucifixion—reckoning ourselves dead. Christians who cater to the old nature (Rom. 13:14) will always have conflict & trouble.

**B. The Old Covenant vs. the New Covenant.** Gal 4:21-31 explains that these events with Ishmael & Isaac symbolizes God's Old Covenant with Israel & His New Covenant with the church. We may briefly summarize the main ideas as follows: Hagar symbolizes the Old Covenant of law, identified with the earthly Jerusalem in Paul's day. Sarah symbolizes the New Covenant of grace, identified with the heavenly Jerusalem. Ishmael was born of the flesh & was the son of a slave. Isaac was "born of the Spirit" & was the son of a freewoman. The two sons, then, picture the Jews under the slavery of law & the true Christians under the liberty of grace. Paul's argument is that God commanded Abraham to cast out Hagar (the Old Covenant) because His blessing was to be upon Isaac. All of this fits into Paul's argument in Gal. 3-4 that Christians today are not under the law.

**C. Man's way vs. God's way.** The best way to solve any problem is God's way. Hagar had lost heart, because she had forgotten God's promise in 16:10. God did sustain them & keep His Word. If we obey Him, He will always open the way & solve the problem.

#### **II. A Test from the Neighbors (21:22-34)**

Believers must be careful in our relationships with the unsaved (Col 4:5; 1 Thes4:12; 1 Tim 3:7). Abraham had a good testimony before his unsaved neighbors, & the conflict over the well could have ruined it for good. Abraham agreed to settle the problem in a businesslike way—"Let all things be done decently & in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). Abraham & his neighbors exchanged the proper gifts & made the proper sacrifices for sealing a covenant. The place where the covenant was made was called Beersheba, (the well of the oath); it became a place of prayer & communion for Abraham. The tests that we face in the neighborhood or business must be settled in a Christian way. (Rom. 12:17-18)

#### **III. The Test from the Lord (22:1-24)**

Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God tests us to help bring out the best. (Jas 1:12-15). Many tests come from the Lord, & the greatest blessings can accompany them. God never tested Lot in this way. Lot lived on such a low level that Sodom & the world tested him. It is the saint that walks closest to the Lord that God tests the greatest for His glory.

**A. The typical lesson.** This event is a wonderful type of Christ, the only Son who was willing to give His life to please His Father. Both Isaac & Christ were promised sons; both were born miraculously (of course, Christ was born of the Virgin Mary & was sinless); both brought joy to the heart of the father; both were born at the set time. Both were persecuted by their brethren & both were obedient unto death. Isaac questioned his father, & Jesus asked, "...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46) Of course, Christ actually died, while Isaac was spared. However, in God's sight Isaac had "died". Heb 11:19 says that "in a figure" (that is, symbolically) Isaac was raised from the dead. Verse 19 indicates that Abraham returned to the waiting servants, but nothing is said about Isaac. This too is a type; for the next time we see Isaac, he is receiving his bride! (24:62ff) Even so Christ gave Himself on the cross & went back to heaven, & one day will come forth to receive His Bride, the church.

**B. The practical lesson.** True faith is always tested. Of course, God did not want Isaac's life; He wanted Abraham's heart. Isaac was dear to Abraham, & God wanted to ensure that Isaac did not become an idol Abraham's life. It was possible that Abraham was trusting Isaac to fulfill the promises & not trusting God.

How did Abraham go through this test? For one thing, he rested on God's promises (Heb. 11:17-19). God had promised Abraham many descendants, & this promise could not be fulfilled unless Isaac lived or God raised him from the dead. Abraham knew that God would not lie, so he rested in His unchanging Word.

"Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light." Abraham obeyed without delay. If we do the one thing God tells us to do, He will reveal the next step when the right time comes. God's answers never arrive a minute too late! God supplied a ram just when one was needed. This is why Abraham called the name of the place "Jehovah-Jireh—the Lord will see to it!"

**C. The prophetic lesson.** This event took place on Mt. Moriah (22:2), the place where the temple was eventually built (2 Chron. 3:1). Isaac had asked, "Where is the lamb?" but God had supplied a ram. The answer to his question came in the Person of Christ: "Behold! The Lamb of God!" (John 1:29) Abraham had said, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (v. 14); Christ was seen in the temple, & then slain on Mt. Calvary. See John 8:56 also.

**D. The doctrinal lesson.** James 2:14-26 discusses the relationship between faith & works, & James uses this event to illustrate his main point: true faith is always proved by obedience. Note the accurate translation of James 2:21—"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" Abraham was not saved when he offered Isaac, for he had been saved years before when he trusted God's promise (Gen. 15:6). James is not telling us that we are saved by works or by sacrifices, but that the proof of saving faith is an obedient life (Rom. 4:1-5 & Gal. 3:6ff).\*\*\*\*\*

*Vs 21:1-7 Who could believe that Abraham would have a son at 100 years of age — & live to raise him to adulthood? But doing the impossible is everyday business for God. Our big problems won't seem so impossible if we let God handle them.*

*Vs 21:7 After repeated promises, a visit by two angels, & the appearance of the Lord himself, Sarah finally cried out with surprise & joy at the birth of her son. Because of her doubt, worry, & fear, she had forfeited the peace she could have felt in God's wonderful promise to her. The way to bring peace to a troubled heart is to focus on God's promises. Trust him to do what he says.*

*Vs 21:18 Ishmael became ruler of a large tribe or nation. Ishmaelites were nomads living in the Desert of Sinai & Paran, south of Israel. One of Ishmael's daughters married Esau (Gen 28:9). The Ishmaelites were hostile to Israel & to God (Psa 83:6).*

*Vs 21:31 Beersheba, the southernmost city of Israel, lay on the edge of a vast desert, but the area had several wells.*

*Vs 22:1 God tested Abraham, not to trip him & watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey God & thus to develop his character. Fire refines ore to extract precious metals & God refines us thru difficult circumstances. When we are tested we can complain, or we can try to see how God is stretching us to develop us.*

*Vs 22:3 That morning Abraham began one of the greatest acts of obedience in recorded history. He traveled 50 miles to Mount Moriah near the site of Jerusalem. Over the years he had learned many tough lessons about the importance of obeying God. This time his obedience was prompt & complete. Obeying God is often a struggle because it may mean giving up something we truly want. We should not expect our obedience to God to be easy or to come naturally.*

*Vs 22:7,8 Why did God ask Abraham to perform human sacrifice? Pagan nations practiced human sacrifice, but God condemned this as a terrible sin (Lev 20:1-5). God did not want Isaac to die, but he wanted Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in his heart so it would be clear that Abraham loved God more than he loved his promised & long-awaited son. God was testing Abraham. The purpose of testing is to strengthen our character & deepen our commitment to God & His perfect timing. Through this difficult experience, Abraham strengthened his commitment to obey God. He also learned about God's ability to provide.*

*Vs 22:12 It is difficult to let go of what we deeply love. What could be more proper than to love your only child? Yet when we do give to God what He asks, He returns to us far more than we could dream. The spiritual benefits of His blessings far outweigh our sacrifices. Have you withheld your love, your children, or your time from Him? Trust Him to provide (Gen 22:8).*

*Vs 22:13 The ram offered on the altar as a substitute for Isaac is a parallel to Christ offered on the cross as a substitute for us. Whereas God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, God did not spare his own Son, Jesus, from dying on the cross. If Jesus had lived, the rest of humankind would have died. God sent his only Son to die for us so that we can be spared from the eternal death we deserve & instead receive eternal life (Jn 3:16).*

*Vs 22:15-18 Abraham received abundant blessings because he did not hold back, but obeyed God. First, God gave Abraham's descendants the ability to conquer their enemies. Second, God promised Abraham children & grandchildren who would in turn bless the whole earth. People's lives would be changed as a result of knowing of the faith of Abraham & his descendants. Most often we think of blessings as gifts to be enjoyed. But when God blesses us, His blessings are intended to overflow to others.*