

What's the Message – Lesson Fifteen

Today's study is Lesson Fifteen – Fulfillment, Separation, and Testing.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that the Lord will open your ears and your hearts so that you may see and comprehend the importance of the items we discuss today, and the role that they play in your lives. Amen.

Last time we studied the specific promise of the birth of a son to Abraham and Sarah, as foretold in chapters 17 and 18 of Genesis. Today we look at three major events, all of which are connected to the promise God made to Abraham back in chapter 12, particularly the promise that Abraham would be the father of a great nation.

Chapter 21 begins with these words: *“The Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as He had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.*

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. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.”

So the first step toward the building of a nation – “as numerous as the stars” – was accomplished, as promised. Which leads us to the second event, which starts with these words in verse 8: *“And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, ‘cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.’ ”*

So both Hagar and Ishmael were cast out into the desert with only one sheepskin bag of water to last them. To Hagar it meant a sentence of death for both of them, . . . but when it seemed that life was at its cruelest and darkest, God intervened. Beginning in verse 17, it tells us:

“ And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, ‘What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation.’ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.”

We move now to the third event, arguably the most moving of all the events in Abraham’s life. This story begins in chapter 22 with these words: *After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” Then the Lord said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”*

Imagine yourself in Abraham’s position. God has promised to make you a great nation, and has finally in your old age given you a son. Now that same God is telling you to sacrifice this very son! How could the promise ever be fulfilled if you did this? Could you bring yourself to obey such a command?

But Abraham did. Just like when God told him to leave Ur and his family and go to an unknown country, Abraham obeyed God this time also, and he went to the place of which God had told him.

So teacher, now we have the basic facts of these three events, but what is the message for us, what are the lessons we should learn?

In your introduction to this lesson, you made the statement that all three of these events in the life of Abraham were connected to the Covenant God made with him in chapter 12. At that time we stated also that this Covenant was the key to understanding the entire Old Testament. In this study we see more of how developments in later years do tie back to that Covenant.

Let's consider first the birth of Isaac. Note that this birth occurred at a time when both Abraham and Sarah were past normal child-bearing years, so that it would be recognized as a super-natural event, accomplished by the will of God. The lesson for us is that God is able to do more than we can imagine, and that we can be confident He will fulfill His promises to us.

Second, we see the separation of Ishmael away from Isaac. Isaac was to be the heir of the promise, and he and his descendants were to fulfill the purpose that God had set forth; namely, that they were to be a blessing to the world. Ishmael, on the other hand, would not be forgotten, for he was also a son of Abraham and would grow into a great nation – but one with a far different role.

And third is this extreme testing of Abraham, a test that very few, if any of us – if we are honest with ourselves – could pass. But Abraham trusted God's promise and had faith that somehow God could make even this challenge turn out for the good. And the bottom line, the primary lesson we are to learn, is spelled out clearly for us in verses 16 through 18 of chapter 22, and we read:

“Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore . . . and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

In other words, God wants us to do three things: first, trust in Him and have complete confidence in His promises; second, obey Him unconditionally; and finally, be the blessing to others that He has called us to be.

Our next lesson will delve more into examples of the role and purpose of separation.

This series has been developed and written by our director of teacher training, Mr. D. A. Senter, and is copyrighted by Lamb of God Lutheran Church in Flower Mound, Texas. Your narrator is Dale Gaus.

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