

Seeing Jesus in Every Story

**“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;
and these are they which testify of Me.”**

John 5:39

Act 3

Abraham and Isaac: The Promised Son

Genesis 21–22

Prologue

What if you got an unexpected visit from the Lord telling you to pack your bags and leave your familiar life behind? Would you step out and start all over with no idea of where you were headed? A seventy-five year old man named Abram did. At the point where he enters our story in Genesis 12, all we know about Abram is that he was a tenth-generation descendent of Noah, born and raised in a pagan culture. His small family was close-knit and prosperous but life was not without disappointment. Abram and his lovely wife, Sarai were unable to have children.

When God called Abram, he was not the towering figure of faith that we know from history. He did not have examples of God-fearing men in his life, as Noah had. For reasons known only to Himself, God singled Abram out for blessing. Abram's family and friends must have thought he was an impossible dreamer—but it wasn't adventure he was after. Abram was following the promise God planted in his heart.

The back story . . .

As his story unfolds, Abram's journey of faith has highs and lows. He obeys the Lord and leaves his old life behind. When he arrives in Canaan, he memorializes God's promise with an altar built in the place where the Lord appeared to him. But not long after, a famine brings Abram to a crossroad of decision. He takes his family into Egypt and for a time, fear eclipses faith. Through Genesis 13-20 we can trace victories and blessings and God's continual reassurances of His faithfulness to Abraham. But along the way, Abraham's journey resembles ours. He struggles with patience and the pressures that come with walking by faith in a world that lives by sight. He believes God has a plan and yet he takes matters into his own hands. Through it all, God remains true to His promise.

We pick up Abraham's story at a high point in his life—the birth of his son, Isaac. It is a day and a dream he's waited twenty-five years to see. If this was only about God's grace in fulfilling a promise to one man, the story could happily end right here. But this is a story about faith and a promise God made to *all* people long, long ago in a garden. This is God's unfolding drama of Redemption.

Cast

Abraham and Isaac
Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael

Read Genesis 21:1–21 & Genesis 22:1–19. Briefly note what stands out to you at first reading. Be prepared to share one of your impressions with your discussion group.

1. What happy event was a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham? What conflict arose as a result of Abraham's earlier efforts to gain God's promise on his own?
2. In testing Abraham, what was God looking for? Put to the test, what did Abraham learn about himself? What did he learn about God?

Scene 1: A Son is Born – Genesis 21:1–7

Abraham yearned for the day when the hope in his heart would be cradled in Sarah's arms. In this scene, Abraham and Sarah celebrate the birth of their son Isaac.

1. Isaac's birth marked the beginning fulfillment of a promise that the Lord made to Abraham 25 years earlier. According to Genesis 12:2-3, what had the Lord promised Abraham?

Compare the following passages for additional insight. Note what stands out to you.

‣ Genesis 13:15–16

‣ Genesis 15:4–5

‣ Genesis 17:4–8

2. Sarah and Abraham were overjoyed at the birth of their son and named him Isaac, which means "laughter." What made this an appropriate name? Share all that comes to mind.

Explore key words and phrases

The word “**laughter**” has a prominent place in this story for reasons that may be obvious but are worth exploring. Briefly note the following references and consider the possible motivation or attitude behind the laughter in each instance.

- Abraham laughed (Genesis 17:15–17) because:
- Sarah laughed (Genesis 18:10–12) because:
- Sarah laughed (Genesis 21:6–7) because:
- Ishmael laughed (Genesis 21:9) because:

Additional thoughts and observations

- Have you ever laughed to think about God’s promises or plan in your own life? In what way was your laughter similar to—or different from—the above listed examples?

Scene 2: Two Promises, One Covenant – Genesis 21:8–21

In Genesis 16 when it seemed God had delayed His promise, Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands. Right from the start, Hagar’s pregnancy had been a source of strife with far-reaching consequences. This scene opens with fresh wounds from old conflicts.

1. What prompted Sarah to insist that Ishmael and his mother be sent away?

The text doesn’t specifically say that Ishmael’s laughter was directed at Isaac or what was meant by it—the focus is on Sarah’s strong reaction. As we would expect, the human dynamics in this relationship were complicated. You may want to scan Genesis 16 and briefly note what would give Sarah cause for concern.

2. Why was Abraham troubled by Sarah’s request?

- What did God tell Abraham to do?
- What did God tell Abraham that He would do?

3. How does God intervene for Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness? What does He promise to do for Ishmael?
 - Describe what is similar about this experience and an earlier encounter (Genesis 16) Hagar had with '*El-Ro'i*' which means "You-Are-The-God-Who-Sees."

Additional thoughts and observations

Disinheriting Ishmael could not have been easy for Abraham. In a sense, it was a small test of the major exam that was to follow. Was Abraham willing to relinquish Ishmael, this son of his flesh, as God had commanded? If he pressed God to bless the fruit of his own efforts, how would he ever learn to rely completely on God's perfect plan and timing?

- Have you ever tried to "help" God or hurry His plans for you? Briefly share (no need for specific details here) what you learned through that experience.

Scene 3: God Will Provide Himself a Lamb – Genesis 22:1–19

This scene brings us to Abraham's finest hour and the reason he is remembered as a model of faithful living.

1. At this point in the story, we know something that Abraham didn't know at the time. God was testing him. When God tests us, it is always for a good and perfecting purpose. Give some thought to this and do your best to explain both perspectives.
 - Was this test so Abraham could demonstrate his faithful obedience to God?
 - Was this test so that God could demonstrate His faithful provision to Abraham?
2. Who needed to be convinced of Abraham's willingness to trust and obey? Was it God, or Abraham himself? Share your thoughts.
3. In what ways does Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac remind you of Christ's sacrifice? In what ways is it different?

Intermission: Pause – Ponder – Pray

**For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life
you inherited from your ancestors.
And the ransom He paid was not mere gold or silver.
It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.
1 Peter 1:18–19 (NLT)**

As you memorize this passage, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a good cup of tea . . . satisfying as it is savored. So give yourself time to savor God's Word. Write the scripture in the space provided and meditate on what it says.

Ask the Lord to open your eyes and increase your understanding. Jot down what He points out to you; keep returning here and adding your thoughts throughout the week.

Ponder what this says about God. Consider His character, attributes, work, promises . . .

Think about what Jesus, the Spotless Lamb of God, accomplished for you. . .

Write your response to Him in worship and praise . . .

Epilogue: Seeing Jesus in the Story

Search to See . . .

As the son of promise, Isaac was the next in line to not only inherit his father's blessings but to play a significant role in God's plan of salvation that culminated in the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. Isaac needed a wife and Abraham had a plan to find him one that met all the criteria. Abraham sent his most trusted servant out to search for her with three conditions: (1) she must not be a Canaanite woman; (2) she must be chosen from among Abraham's own relatives; (3) she must be willing to leave her home and family and join Isaac in the Promised Land.

It was a daunting task and the questions raised by the servant were allayed only by Abraham's faith-filled prophetic reply: "The Lord God of heaven . . . will send His angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son . . ." (Genesis 24:7) Confident God had selected a bride, Abraham sent his servant far off to his home country to await God's provision.

In His providence, God brought Rebekah, born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother (24:15–16) to a well just as Abraham's servant was praying. Little did she know that doing a humble task for a stranger would result in her becoming the bride of a wealthy man who was in a covenant relationship with God. The servant paid the bride price and Rebekah declared, "I will go," leaving her family to dwell with Isaac in the land of promise. She would become the mother of Jacob, who would become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel!

1. Abraham was a man of complete faith and obedience. How is his trust in God an example in applying God's word to everyday situations? To reaching long range plans and goals?
2. Rebekah's family wanted her to delay and remain a while longer with them. She chose instead to respond with immediate obedience. What does this reveal about her heart?

Consider the Big Picture . . .

How does *Abraham and Isaac* play into the glorious telling of God's grace? Ultimately it's about redemption and our Redeemer! A few thoughts to consider:

- Abraham willingly offered his son; God offered His Son (John 3:16).
- Abraham laid the wood for offering on his son; Jesus bore the cross to Calvary (John 19:17).
- God spared Abraham's son; God did not spare His Son but gave Him for us (Romans 8:32).

The story of Abraham and Isaac also further presents us with a picture of the heavenly Father providing a bride—the church—as a *love gift* for His Son (Eph. 5:22–23). He is transforming us by His Spirit into a lovely "bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2).

Make it personal . . .

Rebekah loved her husband Isaac before she ever saw him. What does 1 Peter 1:7–9 reveal to you about your relationship with Jesus Christ?

- For you personally, what is the most significant insight you've gained from the story of Abraham and Isaac: The Promised Son? How will you apply this insight in your life?

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