

Abraham Makes a Good Choice

Abraham's CV-

Genesis 11:10 Sarai was barren

Genesis 12:7: God's promise - this land is going to your descendants

Genesis 13:2 Abram very rich, livestock, gold and silver.

Genesis 13:14-15. Promise shown.

Genesis 14 Slaughter of the kings. 14:18-20 Melchizedek

Genesis 15:2--3 Abram's wobble. God's answer 4-5 God's reassurance. v6 Abram believes.

Genesis 16:1-5 Sarai's love for Abram and her answer to his obsession. Abram 85 yo

5 years later. Genesis 17 Abram becomes Abraham and promise reaffirmed and more detail given.

Circumcision given. v 14 Not circumcised = not Jewish. vs: 19&20 Isaac promised in a year.

Genesis 18: The Lord's visit. Lord tells of plan for Sodom. Abraham negotiates, 50, 45, 40, 35, 20, 10 but no.

Genesis 21:1-7 Isaac is born. 8-31 Hagar and Ishmael booted.

Genesis 22 - God asks Abraham to offer Isaac.

This study focuses on sacrificial burnt offerings.

Some relevant verses -

Burnt offerings- Leviticus 21:1-5. Previously Genesis 4:4 & Genesis 8:20-21

Human sacrifice - Leviticus 20:2-3. Deuteronomy 12:31 & 18:10. There was a place that became synonymous with child sacrifice, the Valley of Ben Hinnom 2 Chronicles 28:1-3 & 33:6, not least Jeremiah: 7:30-31.

God ordered Abraham to make a human sacrifice, namely his precious son.

Genesis 22:2-10 Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Abraham absolutely loved and adored his son, Isaac. He'd waited a 100 years for him, imagine a hundred years! And even though he were over 100 years old he still managed to do the deed and get his wife pregnant, and she was over 90, (can you imagine, Bernie Ecclestone, in 20 years time!) Anyway, so you can imagine just how spoilt by his parents and totally adored and loved this boy was. And here was God saying to him, I want you to take the lad for a walk, kill him and burn his body on an altar as a sacrifice to me. And Abraham's response was, 'OK'. Not, awww do I have to? Or, are you sure? Or No: no it was straightforward and simple, yes.

Hebrews 11:17 Abraham had weighed up God's promise to him via Isaac. He knew God was testing him and so assumed that afterwards, God would raise Isaac from the dead. So he agreed. He orders his servants to stay back because he knew that they would intervene. He tricks Isaac into going along with this, not only going along with, but carrying the requisite stuff for the sacrifice. Abraham sort of lies to Isaac when asked about where's the sacrifice? He grabs Isaac when he's not looking, ties Him up, lifts him onto the altar.

James sheds some light into what's going on in Abraham's head. James 2:21. Justified by faith.

In the end, at the 11th hour God intervened, He stopped the killing of Isaac and afterwards God via one of His angels explained to Abraham, it was a test of his loyalty and faith and Abraham had

passed the test and God was truly delighted with him.

Two other heroes in this story, Isaac. Was not put off God for life.
And Jesus. This was like a prototype.

Compare and contrast. Abraham was asked to kill his only son as an act of obedience and worship to God. The Rich Young Ruler in the Gospels was asked to drop down a few rungs on the social ladder, Matthew 19:16-24. Both made instant decisions without hesitancy, negotiation or discussion, and both decisions had eternity determining consequences.

Let's read God's response to Abraham,

Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said:
"By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son — blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Genesis 22:15-19 NKJV

3000 years later, Jesus explained to the crowd that He was the bodily fulfilment of that promise to Abraham -

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." John 8:56 NKJV

Jesus was a direct descendant of Abraham. There's a family tree in Matthew chapter one, listing all the people in the lineage between Abraham and Jesus, starting with Isaac, mentioning King David and finishing with Jesus's father, Joseph. Later Jesus explains that as far as He's concerned, believers are adopted children of God, so we who have no genetic link with Abraham can now claim that God is our father thanks to Jesus who is the fulfilment of God's world changing promise to Abraham back in 3000bc.

In both of these, the rich young ruler and Abraham were being tested with a huge ask. I don't think Jesus was giving this man an order; no, He was giving him a choice.

Abraham was asked to kill off the one most treasured item in his life. It was never going to happen, it was a test. We know that because God pulled it just in time. Was Jesus really serious about asking this guy to put a for sale sign on literally everything he owned, donate and follow? I think that if this guy had said, 'OK, I'll just go and see the estate agents and the auction house,' Jesus is likely to have said: 'Where do you think you're going you big 'nana? I was just testing you.' We'll never know because he flunked the test.

Someone else who failed a test - Luke 22:54-62 Peter denies Jesus 3 times. Yes it was Peter that was the first disciple to enter the empty tomb. John 20:3-6. The lesson; learn from a failed test, don't give up and walk away.

The difference between the rich young ruler and Abraham is that Abraham knew the mind and will of God. He fully believed that he and Isaac would walk down together from that mountain. Life makes more sense when you really know God and His mind. So how do we get that level of understanding that we can suss out what God's plans are for us and follow His will, as opposed to thrashing around in the dark, hoping you're doing the right thing?

So God is continually assessing each of us, asking you, where does He rank in your priority list? Number 5? What's in front? Family, ambition and career, mates, Man United, wife? God admits that

He's a jealous God, He's not contented with being your hobby or interest, pastime, an acquaintance or anything else except Lord, God or Father. Having said that, look again at this account of the young man coming to Jesus. Yes, he'd failed the test but Jesus didn't send him away; no, the man walked away with his tail between his legs. He failed Jesus's test.

These are Jesus's tests. These are continuous standards rather than tests or an exam. The exam question is, do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, accept Him as Lord and do you profess to follow Him?

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Luke 14:26-27 NKJV (Just to clarify, that word hate is a relative term, God wants distance between Him and what's number 2 in your life).

And earlier in Luke -

But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:62 NKJV

In the Old Testament -

“You offer defiled food on My altar, But say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the Lord is contemptible.’ And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably?” Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 1:7-8 NKJV

God does not want what's destined for the knackers' yard. He wants to be your number 1.

So, let's compare these two characters in these two accounts in the Bible.

Both were seriously minted. However Abraham was far richer than the young man that met Jesus. He was in agriculture in a big way, livestock. His staff tally was in the hundreds, so when a marauding army kidnapped his nephew, Abraham was able to put together an army from his staff and chase after, overtake and defeat the kidnappers. The one thing he lacked that he badly wanted was a son and after a many decades wait, God finally gave Abraham the son he so desperately wanted. But God being a jealous God wanted proof that Abraham's love for Him superseded his love for His son, and He got it. God rewarded Abraham in several ways, firstly He came good on His promise regarding descendants. Three of the world's major religions claim descendancy from Abraham, not just Judaism but Christianity and also Islam through his other son Ishmael.

In addition to that, God gave Abraham a title. In the UK we're familiar with honours and titles. If you give the right political party a couple of hundred grand and they win the next election you'll be more than likely be called a Sir or a Dame, make that a few million quid and you're in the House of Lords. Well Abraham was awarded a title, better than that, God named Himself 500 years later, introducing Himself to Moses and many others as: The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now that really is a title!

Jesus talked several times about Abraham whilst He was on Earth in very fond terms. He let it slip that Abraham's role is to welcome newbies into Heaven, Luke 16:19-31.

Compare all that with our nameless rich man. He had a nice lifestyle with a few servants, dinner

parties, friends. Front row at the synagogue, good career - an influencer! Twenty, maybe thirty or forty years later the sand runs out in his egg timer - that's it. Well, you don't even want to think about what then happened to him. That big huge mansion with a bathroom, pool, huge garden, servants' quarters, stables, well that's probably 40 foot under a high-rise apartment block in Tel Aviv. If you want a posh word, it's ephemeral - according to the Cambridge dictionary, an adjective, lasts only for a short time.

Finally, Jesus sums up in a paragraph what I've been labouring for the last hour, He says:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21 NKJV

So let me leave you with a big question: what's the top three most important things in your life?