

Genesis Bible Study 13

God Will Provide

taken from

***Salvation for the Social Order: For Those Who Haven't Read the Bible
and for Those Who Think Religion is Merely a Private Matter***

by Philip E. Friesen

Reading: Genesis 22

Principal Question: Can Abraham be trusted?

Note

Trust is the product of experience, and grows over time as two friends deepen in relationship. Abraham has underestimated God more than once.¹ Will he now trust God when everything important to him is at risk? And can God trust Abraham? In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve proved untrustworthy to manage God's garden. By contrast in this chapter, will Abraham prove trustworthy enough to partner with God?

Discussion

1. Read the story. What questions do you have about this story?
2. How are the stories of Ishmael and of Isaac alike?²
3. After reading all these chapters about Abraham, do you think Abraham is:
 - God's loyal servant. Why?
 - God's loyal friend. Why?
 - Both a servant and a friend. Why?
4. What do you think of God's message to Abraham in Genesis 22:15-18? Does any of this message sound familiar?³
5. Do you think this story reads:
 - More like a myth.
 - More like a biography.
 - Like a mixture of myth and biography.
 - Like something completely different from either myth or biography.
6. Do you understand the literary characteristics of each genre- myth and biography? Ask your teacher about this if you do not know.

¹ In Genesis 12 and Genesis 16.

² In chapter 21, Ishmael is about to die from thirst, and God provides water. In Genesis 22, Isaac is about to die in sacrifice, and God provides a substitute animal.

³ See Genesis 12:2-3, Genesis 15:5, Genesis 17:2, Genesis 17:19-22.

Interpretive Notes

The story of Genesis 22 is difficult, because it involves ritual human sacrifice. In Abraham's culture, the way to give a child to God was to kill the child and roast the body, just as ancient people (and some today) would give an animal to God in sacrifice. In this story two things happened:

1. Abraham formally gave his son to God.
2. God rejected human sacrifice, providing an animal instead. After this the Hebrew people were forbidden to make child sacrifices. In this important respect they were different from their neighbors.

All Hebrew boys were ritually circumcised. This was their way of offering a child to God. This ritual was introduced in Genesis 17. Since we skipped that chapter, you may want to read it now. This ritual is still practiced by both Jews and Arabs in the 21st century. While its origin was in Africa before Abraham's time⁴, it became the unique tribal marking for both Jews and Arabs. Many Christians practice a ceremony of baptism or dedication to offer their children to God instead of circumcision.

Now, let's look at the story again from Ishmael's point of view. Ishmael has been treated unjustly. At one time he was the heir of a great estate. Then suddenly his own father rejected him, and he became homeless. How can Ishmael recover his lost status in the family? There is only one way – Isaac must die. God may accept a sheep as an appropriate substitute, but Ishmael certainly will not. He will want a piece of Isaac's inheritance.

This family saga is still playing in the Middle East today. I suspect that past injustices are locked in the subconscious memories of the human race, and that wars and bloodshed will continue until all injustices are acknowledged, and then forgiven.

In the New Testament, God gave Jesus to die for Abraham's sins and for the sins of the entire world. God created a world where evil and suffering are always possible, but for which God sent his eternal Son to die. If we believe in him, he will give us an eternal inheritance, which cannot be stolen or lost, and he will heal the pain of abuse and injustice in our lives. Only God can heal families broken as Abraham's was. You will see this healing begin in the story of Joseph, which follows.

This explanation may be difficult for you. In fact you may find it completely offensive. If you have a different explanation, that is fine, provided that you read the entire story. It will not be fair to make a judgment until you have read the end of the story. This story will show how God really does bring good out of evil. Just keep reading.

⁴ It is likely that Abraham first learned this practice by contact with the Egyptians.

Content Question for English Comprehension

Write 3 questions about this story to ask other students in the class.