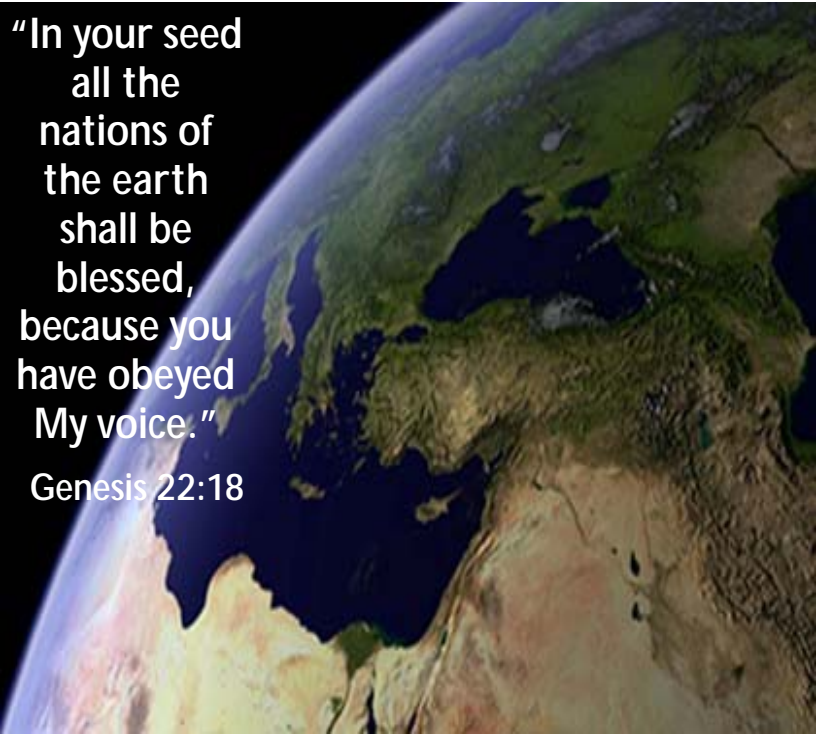




Sowing the Word

"In your seed
all the
nations of
the earth
shall be
blessed,
because you
have obeyed
My voice."
Genesis 22:18



Genesis 21-22

March 4th, 2009

So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of
God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to
understand the reading.
(Nehemiah 8:8)

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Helpful Study Resource:

Explore the Book by J. Sidlow Baxter

Commentary:

The commentary used with permission throughout
this booklet is:

With the Word Bible Commentary

by Warren W. Wiersbe.

ISBN 0-8407-9108-9

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Notes for Booklet

Chapter 21 Highlights and Helps by Pastor Jim

The Lord Visited Sarah

This chapter begins with this phrase and it is wonderful that it does so. What we see in this chapter, is the work and faithfulness of God. The Lord did for Sarah, as He had spoken. This is a supernatural work of His faithfulness. The timing is at the perfect and set time which God had spoken – His Timing.

Cast the bondwoman out

This was truly an emotional and difficult scene for Abraham. Yet it provides for us a needed spiritual picture. Paul puts it this way in Galatians:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband." Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.
(Galatians 4:22-31)

There is much in all of this...but the picture God puts for us here is a separation from the works of the flesh, even legalism. There is a need to do this spiritually – to cast off the works of the flesh and law. Yet it is

important to note that such a casting off in our lives is not easy. For Abraham it was displeasing, difficult – but it was right. For us it is hard to do, to leave our past at times, or works that we have invested much in – yet there is a sense of moving totally to grace, that it is God's work...all God.

Chapter 22 Highlights and Helps by Pastor Jim

God tested Abraham

It is important to understand that God does test His kids. Yet, His tests are not meant or intending to make us fail. God makes it clear in James 1:13, that He never entices us to sin, He never tempts us. Tests are different. A test from God is not meant to make us fail, but to show us where we are – to reveal something spiritually. In school, that is what tests ought to be about – not just for kids to cram for and aim for grades. But in reality, a test is meant to reveal how much is really understood, how good the child is doing. So, spiritually – God's tests reveal our heart.

Abraham Obeyed

This chapter is an amazing chapter of Abraham's obedience. God calls him to give up his son...the son he loved...the son that God's promised are locked in...and he does so, immediately. Wow. When Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, again God speaks to him, and again...we see wonderful and immediate obedience

First Words!

One spiritual principle that is interesting to look for in the Bible is sometimes called "The Law of First Mention". What this means is that often, the first time a word is used in the Bible helps shape that word for the rest of the Bible and for all our lives. It is an interesting thought, one worthy of consideration, without being dogmatic about.

There are two key Biblical words that are used for the first time in the Bible in this chapter. The first is love. The first time we see love mentioned in the Bible, it is God speaking of Abraham's love for his son...his only son whom he loved. It is very simple to see the greatest love pictured in this verse when we consider John 3:16.

The other key words used in this passage is worship. This whole chapter foreshadows the cross and what Jesus would do on the cross. It is a picture of worship and where worship becomes real.

This account as types of the Cross

Only Son

Whom You love

He (God) Split the wood

Third day, far off...interesting – about three days, but it was a far off

We will go

We will worship – the Cross as worship...

We will come back – resurrection

Abraham laid wood on Isaac, God laid Cross on Christ

He, Abraham, took fire, and knife – fire of judgment, knife of death

God will provide Himself a lamb (didn't here, gave a Ram)

The place – Golgotha

Abraham bound and laid on alter

The Lord will provide – it will be provided!

It is in this that all nations shall be blessed

The Pursuit of God

by A. W. Tozer

Chapter 2 : The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:3

Before the Lord God made man upon the earth He first prepared for him by creating a world of useful and pleasant things for his sustenance and delight. In the Genesis account of the creation these are called simply 'things.' They were made for man's uses, but they were meant always to be external to the man and subservient to him. In the deep heart of the man was a shrine where none but God was worthy to come. Within him was God; without, a thousand gifts which God had showered upon him.

But sin has introduced complications and has made those very gifts of God a potential source of ruin to the soul.

Our woes began when God was forced out of His central shrine and 'things' were allowed to enter. Within the human heart 'things' have taken over. Men have now by nature no peace within their hearts, for God is crowned there no longer, but there in the moral dusk stubborn and aggressive usurpers fight among themselves for first place on the throne.

This is not a mere metaphor, but an accurate analysis of our real spiritual trouble. There is within the human heart a tough fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets 'things' with a

deep and fierce passion. The pronouns 'my' and 'mine' look innocent enough in print, but their constant and universal use is significant. They express the real nature of the old Adamic man better than a thousand volumes of theology could do. They are verbal symptoms of our deep disease. The roots of our hearts have grown down into things, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended. God's gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.

Our Lord referred to this tyranny of things when He said to His disciples, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.' (Matt. 16:24-25).

Breaking this truth into fragments for our better understanding, it would seem that there is within each of us an enemy which we tolerate at our peril. Jesus called it 'life' and 'self,' or as we would say, the self-life. Its chief characteristic is its possessiveness: the words 'gain' and 'profit' suggest this. To allow this enemy to live is in the end to lose everything. To repudiate it and give up all for Christ's sake is to lose nothing at last, but to preserve everything unto life eternal. And possibly also a hint is given here as to the only effective way to destroy this foe: it is by the Cross: 'Let him take up his cross and follow me.'

The way to deeper knowledge of God is through the lonely valleys of soul poverty and abnegation of all things. The blessed ones who possess the Kingdom are they who have repudiated every external thing and have rooted from their hearts all sense of possessing. They are 'poor in spirit.' They have reached an inward state paralleling the outward circumstances of the common beggar in the streets of Jerusalem; that is what the word 'poor' as Christ used it actually means. These blessed poor are no longer slaves to the tyranny of things. They have broken the yoke of the oppressor; and this they have done not by fighting but by surrendering. Though free from all sense of possessing, they yet possess all things. 'Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Let me exhort you to take this seriously. It is not to be understood as mere Bible teaching to be stored away in the mind along with an inert mass of other doctrines. It is a marker on the road to greener pastures, a path chiseled against the steep sides of the mount of God. We dare not try to by-pass it if we would follow on in this holy pursuit. We must ascend a

step at a time. If we refuse one step we bring our progress to an end.

As is frequently true, this New Testament principle of spiritual life finds its best illustration in the Old Testament. In the story of Abraham and Isaac we have a dramatic picture of the surrendered life as well as an excellent commentary on the first Beatitude.

Abraham was old when Isaac was born, old enough indeed to have been his grandfather, and the child became at once the delight and idol of his heart. From that moment when he first stooped to take the tiny form awkwardly in his arms he was an eager love slave of his son. God went out of His way to comment on the strength of this affection. And it is not hard to understand. The baby represented everything sacred to his father's heart: the promises of God, the covenants, the hopes of the years and the long messianic dream. As he watched him grow from babyhood to young manhood the heart of the old man was knit closer and closer with the life of his son, till at last the relationship bordered upon the perilous. It was then that God stepped in to save both father and son from the consequences of an unclesaned love.

'Take now thy son,' said God to Abraham, 'thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.' (Gen 22:2) The sacred writer spares us a close-up of the agony that night on the slopes near Beersheba when the aged man had it out with his God, but respectful imagination may view in awe the bent form and convulsive wrestling alone under the stars. Possibly not again until a Greater than Abraham wrestled in the Garden of Gethsemane did such mortal pain visit a human soul. If only the man himself might have been allowed to die. That would have been easier a thousand times, for he was old now, and to die would have been no great ordeal for one who had walked so long with God. Besides, it would have been a last sweet pleasure to let his dimming vision rest upon the figure of his stalwart son who would live to carry on the Abrahamic line and fulfill in himself the promises of God made long before in Ur of the Chaldees.

How should he slay the lad! Even if he could get the consent of his wounded and protesting heart, how could he reconcile the act with the promise, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called'? This was Abraham's trial by fire, and he did not fail in the crucible. While the stars still shone like sharp white points above the tent where the sleeping Isaac lay, and long before the gray dawn had begun to lighten the east, the old saint had made up his

mind. He would offer his son as God had directed him to do, and then trust God to raise him from the dead. This, says the writer to the Hebrews, was the solution his aching heart found sometime in the dark night, and he rose 'early in the morning' to carry out the plan. It is beautiful to see that, while he erred as to God's method, he had correctly sensed the secret of His great heart. And the solution accords well with the New Testament Scripture, 'Whosoever will lose... for my sake shall find...'

God let the suffering old man go through with it up to the point where He knew there would be no retreat, and then forbade him to lay a hand upon the boy. To the wondering patriarch He now says in effect, 'It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there. I wanted to correct the perversion that existed in your love. Now you may have the boy, sound and well. Take him and go back to your tent. Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.'

Then heaven opened and a voice was heard saying to him, 'By myself I have sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.'

The old man of God lifted his head to respond to the Voice, and stood there on the mount strong and pure and grand, a man marked out by the Lord for special treatment, a friend and favorite of the Most High. Now he was a man wholly surrendered, a man utterly obedient, a man who possessed nothing. He had concentrated his all in the person of his dear son, and God had taken it from him. God could have begun out on the margin of Abraham's life and worked inward to the center; He chose rather to cut quickly to the heart and have it over in one sharp act of separation. In dealing thus He practiced an economy of means and time. It hurt cruelly, but it was effective.

I have said that Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was still his to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds, and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, but he possessed nothing. There is the spiritual secret. There is the sweet

theology of the heart which can be learned only in the school of renunciation. The books on systematic theology overlook this, but the wise will understand.

After that bitter and blessed experience I think the words `my' and `mine' never had again the same meaning for Abraham. The sense of possession which they connote was gone from his heart. Things had been cast out forever. They had now become external to the man. His inner heart was free from them. The world said, `Abraham is rich,' but the aged patriarch only smiled. He could not explain it to them, but he knew that he owned nothing, that his real treasures were inward and eternal.

There can be no doubt that this possessive clinging to things is one of the most harmful habits in the life. Because it is so natural it is rarely recognized for the evil that it is; but its outworkings are tragic. We are often hindered from giving up our treasures to the Lord out of fear for their safety; this is especially true when those treasures are loved relatives and friends. But we need have no such fears. Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed.

Our gifts and talents should also be turned over to Him. They should be recognized for what they are, God's loan to us, and should never be considered in any sense our own. We have no more right to claim credit for special abilities than for blue eyes or strong muscles. `For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?'

The Christian who is alive enough to know himself even slightly will recognize the symptoms of this possession malady, and will grieve to find them in his own heart. If the longing after God is strong enough within him he will want to do something about the matter. Now, what should he do?

First of all he should put away all defense and make no attempt to excuse himself either in his own eyes or before the Lord. Whoever defends himself will have himself for his defense, and he will have no other; but let him come defenseless before the Lord and he will have for his defender no less than God Himself. Let the inquiring Christian trample under foot every slippery trick of his deceitful heart and insist upon frank and open relations with the Lord.

Then he should remember that this is holy business. No careless or casual

dealings will suffice. Let him come to God in full determination to be heard. Let him insist that God accept his all, that He take things out of his heart and Himself reign there in power. It may be he will need to become specific, to name things and people by their names one by one. If he will become drastic enough he can shorten the time of his travail from years to minutes and enter the good land long before his slower brethren who coddle their feelings and insist upon caution in their dealings with God.

Let us never forget that such a truth as this cannot be learned by rote as one would learn the facts of physical science. They must be experienced before we can really know them. We must in our hearts live through Abraham's harsh and bitter experiences if we would know the blessedness which follows them. The ancient curse will not go out painlessly; the tough old miser within us will not lie down and die obedient to our command. He must be torn out of our heart like a plant from the soil; he must be extracted in agony and blood like a tooth from the jaw. He must be expelled from our soul by violence as Christ expelled the money changers from the temple. And we shall need to steel ourselves against his piteous begging, and to recognize it as springing out of self-pity, one of the most reprehensible sins of the human heart.

If we would indeed know God in growing intimacy we must go this way of renunciation. And if we are set upon the pursuit of God He will sooner or later bring us to this test. Abraham's testing was, at the time, not known to him as such, yet if he had taken some course other than the one he did, the whole history of the Old Testament would have been different. God would have found His man, no doubt, but the loss to Abraham would have been tragic beyond the telling. So we will be brought one by one to the testing place, and we may never know when we are there. At that testing place there will be no dozen possible choices for us; just one and an alternative, but our whole future will be conditioned by the choice we make.

Father, I want to know Thee, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all Those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival. Then shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for Thyself wilt be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Q & A With Pastor Phil

Why did God tell Abraham to cast out Ishmael ?

One of the most interesting chapters in Abraham's life is the story of Hagar and Ishmael. As you read through the narrative, it raises a variety of emotions especially when you try to view it from the differing perspectives of the people involved. Chances are you can relate to one of them in some way. In many ways it is a tragic story, and yet one that is ripe with lessons for our benefit. In chapter 21 of Genesis, Sarah calls for Hagar and Ishmael to be cast out. Abraham is reluctant to do such a thing, but God speaks to Abraham and tells him to heed the voice of his wife. Hagar and Ishmael are then sent away and depart into the wilderness. These actions raise at least one honest question. Why did God call Abraham to turn his back on his son?

What Went Wrong?

The events that led up to Ishmael's birth and later departure remind us that even those strong in faith can be moved to trust in carnal means. In chapter 15, God told Abraham that his heir would come from his own body. However, Sarah was barren and was already in her seventies. It is here where Sarah resorts to a culturally accepted practice. She gives her Egyptian slave, Hagar, to Abraham in an attempt to acquire children by her. Abraham agrees to the idea and Hagar conceives. Before we become too harsh in our criticism, it is important to remember that we are not immune to making such decisions. To Sarah it seemed to make sense. We have the benefit of reading the entire account over a span of a few chapters. They had to live it out over long years of waiting. I believe strongly that there are very few today who would have fared any better in the same situation. Nevertheless, it is an important warning. Abraham and Sarah sought to bring about a spiritual work through carnal means. In the end, God doesn't accept it. We who labor in the Kingdom of God must take it heart. God's work must be done God's way. Today we are tempted to lean on culturally accepted methods to bear fruit. We can rationalize and justify our actions because it seems to make sense. It might even appear to work for a while. Abraham was content with the birth of Ishmael. God, however, was not. God was faithful to keep His promise to Abraham, but Ishmael would not be its fulfillment.

Reaping the Consequences

Abraham and Sarah would have to deal with the painful consequences of their actions. It would not be limited to the two of them. Obviously Hagar and Ishmael were affected as well. There were immediate contentions between Hagar and Sarah. We might wonder how she did not anticipate the strife and jealousy that followed. It serves as a powerful reminder that our desires can impair our judgment. After the birth of Isaac, Abraham is faced with the painful reality that the two sons cannot exist side by side. At the time when Isaac was weaned, there was a customary feast and celebration. Ishmael, now probably between 15 and 17 years of age was heard scoffing. Sarah calls for Hagar and the boy to be cast out. This would in no way completely solve the issue. The descendants of Ishmael would become very numerous. It is widely believed that the nomadic Arabian tribes descended from Ishmael and spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. They would become intermarried with the Edomites, the descendants of Esau (Gen 29). It is also interesting that Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold by his brothers to a company of Ishmaelites (Gen 37). In the same account the traders are also called Midianites so it should be noted that there is likely a connection between Ishmael and Midian. Both the Edomites and Midianites were enemies of Israel and they fought with them throughout their generations. Furthermore, the Arab Israeli conflict that rages on today has its roots in the rivalry between Ishmael and Isaac. Let us be fully aware that our actions, both good and bad, have continuing consequences.

Letting Go

When Sarah called for Ishmael to be cast out, it displeased Abraham. Abraham loved his son. When God reveals to Abraham that Sarah will conceive and bear a child in her old age, he immediately pleads that Ishmael would live before God and fulfill His promises (Gen 17:18). Abraham was intent on maintaining his relationship with Ishmael. Certainly we can understand the dilemma. What kind of parent turns their back on their child? And yet, this is exactly what God would require. God speaks to Abraham and tells him not to be displeased and to listen to his wife. God then gives Abraham the reason this must be so – for in Isaac your seed shall be called. There could be only one heir. In Genesis 16:12, God gives us a glimpse into Ishmael's future:

He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

Ishmael's character was unbridled and his legacy would be one of conflict. His animosity for Isaac was evident even while Isaac was a toddler. Had Ishmael not been dismissed, he would have remained a constant threat to Isaac.

God's Care

Abraham was obedient to the Lord and sent away Hagar and Ishmael. In doing so, he provided only a skin of water and some bread. These provisions soon failed and Hagar assumed that Ishmael would perish. But God intervened and opened her eyes to a well and their lives were preserved. Abraham could not be a father to Ishmael. We see in this passage the great limitations of his provision. Nevertheless, where Abraham could not, God was with Ishmael (Gen 21:20). This compassion, first shown to Hagar (Gen 16) and then to Ishmael is a wonderful reminder of God's grace. Although Abraham is called to send Ishmael away, God's care is unwavering and He fulfills His promise to make Ishmael a great nation.

A Deeper Meaning

Paul uses this story to give us a deeper understanding of the Christian life. In Galatians 4:21-31 we are shown the symbolism. What we are drawn to are two differing covenants: Hagar which represents the covenant of the law and Sarah the covenant of grace. Paul was dealing with people who were tempted to go back under Judaism and he sought to steer them away from legalism and toward a life under grace. We may not be faced with the same scenario, but the principle applies to us as well. Isaac represents a supernatural birth. It was miraculous that a ninety year old woman could conceive. The Christian life is also supernatural. It is a radical transformation. Every true believer experiences a new birth. In contrast, Ishmael was born by natural means. Secondly, it is noted that Ishmael's scoffing is interpreted as persecuting (Gal 4:29). The natural man doesn't understand the things of the spirit and as a result Christians have always been persecuted. In context, this probably is speaking about the persecution dealt out by false teachers against true believers. A third application is to follow in Abraham's actions. He cast out the slave woman and her son. The two lives are incompatible. We cannot serve God in the power of the spirit while simultaneously engaging in a works based religion. God calls us to live a life of faith based upon His promise. To do so means we must "cast out" that which is carnal.

With the Word Bible Commentary

Genesis 21

Family joys (1–7). God kept His promises, followed His schedule, and did not fail. This time, Sarah's laughter was open and sincere, not hidden and skeptical (Gen. 18:12). The name *Isaac* means "laughter," and the boy brought much joy to the aged couple. Through him, joy has come to the world. God makes "everything beautiful in its time" (Eccles. 3:11).

Family sorrows (8–21). Abraham reaped the sad consequences of forgiven sin. He had lived with Ishmael for perhaps seventeen years, and he loved the lad, so the parting was painful. There comes a time when we must "cut off" the past and make a new beginning. The apostle Paul saw this as a picture of law and grace (Gal. 4:21–31). For Abraham's sake, God blessed the lad and made him a great nation.

Family testimony (22–34). Abraham's unsaved neighbors could tell that he was a man whom God had blessed. Abraham didn't try to lie his way out of this problem; he boldly told the truth and trusted God to work. The possession of water is an important thing in the East, and people will fight over wells. God's people must be careful in their relationships with "those who are outside" the faith (Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12).

Life is a balance of joys and sorrows, problems and blessings. We must learn to accept what God gives us and walk by faith.

—Wiersbe, W. W. (1997, c1991). *With the word Bible commentary* (Ge 21:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

With the Word Bible Commentary

Genesis 22

Offering Isaac on the altar was the hardest test Abraham ever faced, but he came through victoriously because he trusted God (Heb. 11:17–19). He had experienced resurrection power in his own body (Rom. 4:19–21), so he knew what God could do. It was a test of *faith*, far more difficult than the previous tests involving Lot and Ishmael.

It was also a test of *hope*, for God's plan of salvation for the world was wrapped up in Isaac. If Isaac died, how could the Jewish nation be built and the Savior be born? But Abraham had a living hope because he trusted in the living God (1 Pet. 1:3).

Certainly it was a test of *love*. In verse 2, you find the first use of the word *love* in the Bible. Abraham loved his son, but he loved God more. Isaac was God's gift to Abraham, but the gift had to become a sacrifice to God. If the gift becomes more important than the Giver, it becomes an idol.

After He tests us, God reveals Himself to us in a new way (John 14:21–23). The name *Jehovah-Yireh* means “the Lord will see to it” or “the Lord will provide.” The ram was God's provision for Isaac, and Jesus Christ is God's provision for the whole world. In this experience, Abraham saw Christ by faith and rejoiced (John 8:56).

Why this “family news” in verses 20–24? To introduce us to Rebekah who will become the bride of Isaac (chap. 24). Isaac was a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1–2), and God was working out His perfect will for him..

—Wiersbe, W. W. (1997, c1991). With the word Bible commentary (Ge 22:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

