

The Victory of Faith



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 25

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 20:1–25:10.

MEMORY VERSE: “I know that you [Abraham] have respect for God. You have not held back your only son” (Genesis 22:12, NIV).

ONE OF THE GREATEST CHRISTIAN BOOKS IS THE *SCREWTAPE LETTERS*. British writer C. S. Lewis pictures a senior demon named Screwtape, who writes many letters to a junior demon named Wormwood. The letters are filled with advice on how to destroy the soul of a young man who is Wormwood's target.

In one part, Screwtape gives Wormwood the following advice about the young man. “Talk to him about ‘moderation’ in all things.’ Get him to think that religion is good for him if he does not go all the way. Then you can feel quite happy about his soul. A ‘half-way’ religion is as good as no religion at all.”—Adapted from C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper), 2001, p. 46.

What a powerful thought as we continue our study of Abraham with the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. This is one of the most meaningful stories in the Bible. Abraham might have his faults and failures. But he was a man of faith. His religion was the foundation (basis) of all that he was. He was a man whose religion went all the way. He was ready to sacrifice his son at God's command.

Moderation in all things? Let us take a look.

¹moderation—taking the middle road; not going too far one way or another.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 26**TELLING A LIE THROUGH SILENCE (Genesis 20)**

Soon after Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Abraham moved to a place near the border of Egypt, about eighty miles southwest from Hebron. Then he traveled north to Gerar. Gerar was located in a fertile² valley southeast of Gaza. The city-state of Gerar was ruled by a Philistine³ named Abimelech.



What does Genesis 20 tell us about how human Abraham was?

There are several interesting parts to this story. One part is the relationship between God and Abimelech.

What does Genesis 20 tell us about Abimelech's knowledge of God? What recent event⁴ might have gotten Abimelech's attention about how real the true God is?

Think how easily Abraham could excuse his actions. If he were killed, the promise of a great nation coming from him would be lost. God's promise (already given to him many times before) should have told him not to be afraid (Genesis 20:11). Also, was Abraham really lying? After all, Sarah was his sister, or half sister. So by simply telling everyone "everywhere we go" (Genesis 20:13, NIV) that she was his sister, Abraham was not lying . . . was he?

But we can tell a lie easily by what we do not say. Abraham was trying to stick to the letter of the law while missing the principle⁵ behind the law.

Someone once said that even "facts" come with interpretations and preconceived ideas.⁶ In what dishonest ways do you sometimes interpret the "facts"? Is there something you need to make right

²fertile—able to grow a lot of fruit, vegetables, and grains.

³Philistine—a citizen living in a small country named Philistia located southwest of Israel.

⁴event—thing that happens.

⁵principle—a basic rule of life upon which other rules and laws are based.

⁶preconceived ideas—ideas based on assumptions or guesses, not facts.

because you twisted the facts by not speaking the truth?

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 27

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC (Genesis 21:1-21)

After so many years, the child of the promise was born (Genesis 21:1-3). Abraham and Sarah named him Isaac. The name *Isaac* means “he laughs.” The name is a reminder of Abraham’s laughter of disbelief (Genesis 17:17) when God told him he and Sarah would have a child. Except for one letter used in Hebrew for the word *and*, Isaac’s name is spelled exactly as the Hebrew in Genesis 17:17, which reads, “and he laughed.” The name also showed the joy that Abraham and Sarah would have with the birth of the promised child.



Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac

Unfortunately, life was not all joy and happiness in Abraham’s home. What follows is a painful example of what it means to live with the results

of sin. The sin was forgiven. But the results were still painful for Abraham and Sarah.

What sad events followed Isaac’s birth? Genesis 21:9-21. How did God make it less painful for Abraham to send his son away?

Ishmael had lived for about seventeen years with Abraham. How could Abraham send him away? What a sacrifice! What a price Abraham had to pay for his well-meaning mistake! How sad, too, that Sarah first told Abraham to go to Hagar, then she told him to send Hagar and Ishmael away.



Hagar and Ishmael leave home.

It is very difficult for us to understand how Abraham could have sent Hagar and Ishmael away. But Abraham’s experience should show us that

it never pays to distrust God. Disobedience leads to pain and suffering, both for the one who sins and for those closest to the one who sins. Certainly, when Abraham first took Hagar as a wife, he never thought Hagar and Ishmael would have to leave.

What is the next hard decision you have to make? Will your decision have bad results? How can you be sure you are following God's will in making your decision?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 28

MOUNT MORIAH (Genesis 22)

What message do you find for yourself in Genesis 22?

This story is very touching. It is also about the Messiah (Jesus). This story shows Jesus' death. Jesus is God's Son. It is a difficult story to understand. Can we understand Abraham's need to show his faith after so many failures? Can we ever understand Abraham's need to be willing to die to self? Can we even understand that what was important for Abraham was an opportunity to obey God's command to sacrifice his beloved son? No way! This story should show us that with what limited faith we have, we will never fully understand the questions we as sinners are dealing with in the great controversy (war) between good and evil.

Danish author Søren Kierkegaard wrote that Abraham "left behind his worldly understanding, and he took along his faith." What does that mean to you? How often are you called to leave behind your worldly understanding and move only on faith? How are you to do that?

This story focuses on Abraham. But we must not forget Isaac's part, too. Ellen White made it very clear in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (p. 152) that Isaac could easily have run away. But he surrendered without any complaint. He even tried to help his father do what he must do. Isaac's willing surrender pointed to the future surrender of Jesus, God's Son. Once more in the area of Moriah, on a hill called Golgotha, a Father (God) was to surrender His life in His Son (Jesus). Looking forward by faith, Moses wrote, " 'On the mountain of the Lord it [Jesus' sacrifice] will be provided [given]' " (Genesis 22:14, NIV). We can say with joy and thanksgiving, "On the mountain of the Lord it has been provided."

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 29

FAITH AND WORKS (Hebrews 11:17-19)

We remember Abraham's past distrust of God's promises. So, what new ideas does Hebrews 11:17-19 add to our understanding of Abraham's distrust?

The story of Abraham and Isaac is wonderful. We can learn many lessons from it. But it should be clear that the kind of faith the New Testament talks about is more than just accepting a set of doctrines.⁷ Those doctrines may be correct. But they will not save us. Many of the lost will be those who knew some truths about God. They even did things in His name (Matthew 7:22, 23). The story of Abraham and Isaac shows that faith means obeying God. The story shows that only a faith shown in works is a saving faith.

What is the main message in James 2:17-26? Also read Romans 3:28; Romans 5:1; Galatians 2:16, 17 to keep everything in balance.

We are saved by faith. But a faith that is shown in actions is a faith that lets God work through us. Notice what happened after the angel stopped Abraham. The “angel of the Lord” then pointed twice to Abraham’s obedience as the reason why God blessed him (Genesis 22:16, 18). Abraham had shown he was trusting and trustworthy.⁸ For this reason, God was able to bless him. The point is that through obedience out of faith on our part, God is able to give us the blessings He has promised. So, faith

and works cannot be separated in the believer’s life.

What is in your life that you might need to sacrifice to show you already have been justified⁹ through faith in Christ?

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 30

THE END OF AN ERA¹⁰ (Genesis 23:1–25:10)

Abraham had returned to Canaan. There Sarah died. Despite her faults, Sarah was included among those whose faith looked forward to dwelling forever in a “better country” (Hebrews 11:11-16).

What does Hebrews 11 say to us about why Sarah should be listed there?

Three years after Sarah’s death Abraham prepared for Isaac’s marriage. Isaac trusted God’s leading and his father to find the right wife. For Abraham, the marriage of this son was very important.

Why did Abraham advise Eliezer to choose a wife from Abraham’s relatives rather than from the daughters of Canaan? Genesis

⁷doctrines—church beliefs.

⁸trustworthy—to be trustworthy means you are a person who can be trusted.

⁹justified—when God forgives a person and makes that person righteous (holy) by cleansing from sin.

¹⁰era—a period of time that begins and ends with an important happening.

24:3, 4; Deuteronomy 7:3, 4; 1 Kings 11:4; 2 Corinthians 6:14.



God answered the servant's prayer about a wife for Isaac.

Isaac was Abraham's only legal heir. Then Abraham died at the age of 175 (Genesis 25:18). Ishmael and Isaac buried Abraham in the tomb where Abraham had buried Sarah (Genesis 25:9, 10).

Before going ahead with the line of faithful people, Genesis lists the people who will become forgotten (Genesis 25:12-18). The Bible focuses on the children of Abraham who would keep alive the faith and knowledge of the true God.

You have read everything about the life of Abraham. What is the one point about his life that is most important to you? What is the one lesson from Abraham's story that can help you in your walk with God?

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 1

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 145–155, 171–176; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, comments on Genesis 20:1–25:18.

“God's instruction to Abraham about the holiness of marriage was to be a lesson for all people throughout history. These instructions say that the rights and happiness of the marriage relationship are to be carefully guarded, even at a great sacrifice. Sarah was the only true wife of Abraham. No other person had the honor to share Sarah's rights as a wife and mother.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147.

“At the chosen place, Abraham and Isaac built the altar and laid the wood upon it. Then, with trembling voice, Abraham told God's message. It was with terror and amazement that Isaac learned about his own death. But he did not run away. He could have escaped if he had chosen to do so. Abraham was old and very sad and tired from the struggle of those three terrible days. He could not have stopped Isaac from running away. But Isaac had been trained from childhood to trust and obey God. When God's purpose was shown to him, Isaac willingly surrendered. He shared Abraham's faith. He felt honored to be called to give his life as an offering to God. He tried to lighten his father's grief and to encourage him to tie the rope that held him on the altar.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White,

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 152.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ How might Ishmael's "sacrifice" have helped prepare Abraham for the sacrifices and troubles that would come next? What principle can you find here that could help us understand what it means to live by faith?
- ❷ As a class, discuss Isaac's sacrifice. How do we understand this story by modern standards?¹¹
- ❸ What advice do you have for someone in the faith who is thinking of marrying outside the faith? About what would you warn them to be careful?

¹¹standards—rules for living.