

ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE

Rev. Harold C. Cranch

Lesson: Genesis 22: 1-19

The story of Abraham is full of wonderful pictures of his great love for the Lord, and his willing trust to obey whatever the Lord asked him to do. Abraham had lived in the land of the Chaldees, in a city named Ur. He was surrounded by people who worshipped idols. They offered sacrifices, and used dances and songs in their worship. But Abraham tried to serve the true God. So when the Lord called him to go forth from this place of idolatry and false worship he willingly obeyed, although he did not know where the Lord would lead him. He took his family, his servants, his flocks and herds, and all of his possessions, and followed wherever the Lord told him to go. In this way the Lord tested his willingness to follow Him, for the Lord had an important place for Abraham in building a new church. He said that through him and his children, and their children, the world would be blessed. Later on we can see how this came about, for through the church established by Abraham's descendants the Lord gave the Old Testament part of His Divine Word, which was to be a spiritual guide for all men, forever. Also, through the Jewish people, who were descendants from Abraham, the Lord Himself was born into the world so that men could see, and love, and understand Him, and could follow Him in the life which leads to heaven. These were the blessings that the Lord wanted to give to people through the descendants of Abraham. But first, Abraham had to be tested. He had to be willing to serve the Lord, and love the Lord above all, throughout his life. So the first test was when he was called upon to leave all of his former friends and companions in Ur of the Chaldees, because the Lord called him to do this. And Abraham was faithful and did all that the Lord commanded him.

Later on Abraham was tested again. Abraham was then called Abram. The servants of Abram and Lot fought together to see whose flocks and herds should have the better pastureland. This was a second test for Abram, to see if he had sufficient wisdom and good will to solve this problem. Again, Abram passed the test. Unselfishly he told Lot to choose the land he wanted, saying that they must reach an agreement lest their servants should continue fighting. So Abram took Lot up into a mountain, and asked him to select which part of the land he wanted for his own. He gave Lot first choice, and he took what was left.

Then the Lord gave him the most severe test of all. Abraham and Sarah had looked forward with great longing for a son. Finally Isaac was given to them according to the Lord's promise. He had told them also that through Isaac He

would raise up a great nation of those who would worship Him alone. But now the Lord commanded Abraham to take his only son Isaac up into the mountains, and there offer him as a sacrifice to the Lord. Really the Lord never requires such a sacrifice of us. We know that He would not permit anything to happen to Isaac for He had already promised that from Isaac would come a great many descendants who would form that great nation. Nevertheless, Abraham thought that he had to give up his only son, Isaac, to show his love for the Lord. Although this grieved him, he knew that he must love the Lord who had cared for him, and blessed him in every way, more than he loved his family. So he prepared for his journey. He took wood for the sacrifice, and the firepot, and loaded these things upon an ass, and he set out with Isaac his son, and two of his servants toward the distant mountains. For three days they traveled, and when they came to the foot of the mountain, Abraham said to his servants, "Stay here, while I go and make a sacrifice to the Lord." Then he and Isaac took the wood and the firepot, and the sacrificial knife, and started up the mountain. And Isaac said to his father, "We have made all ready for the sacrifice, but where is the lamb, that we may offer it?"

Abraham answered, "The Lord will provide the Lamb."

Then, when all things were ready, and Abraham had built an altar and laid the wood upon it, he took his son and bound him, and laid him upon the wood. As he raised his knife ready to sacrifice his son, his heart filled with grief, he heard the voice of an angel, who said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by his horns in the bushes. And he released his son Isaac, and went and caught the ram, and offered him as a sacrifice. You can well imagine that Abraham's heart was light and happy, and how he gave thanks to the Lord for His great mercy and providence. He had been willing to give up his only son, but he was very happy that the Lord did not require this sacrifice, but provided the ram instead. So Abraham proved faithful in the most severe test of all, being willing to give up his only son in obedience to the Lord's command.

You can see what a wonderful faith and love Abraham had. He knew that the Lord God provided everything for him. He knew that all that he had really belonged to the Lord. He was willing to obey the Lord even though it took from him what he loved most of all. He could not understand, but he did know that if the Lord asked him, what he asked must be good in some way, even though he could not understand how it could be good. And because he had such a love for the Lord and such a trust in the Lord's goodness and mercy, he was willing to obey even though he did not fully understand. The important thing was that he should love the Lord so much that he was willing to do anything that the

Lord asked. Because he was faithful and true, the Lord could make him the father of a great nation.

So it is with us. We too must learn to love and trust the Lord so much that whatever He asks us to do, we will do. Even if He asks us to do something that we dislike to do—even if He asks us to give up something that is very important to us, we must be willing to do it. Like Abraham, we must acknowledge that the Lord will not ask any thing of us that is not good for us. He loves us constantly, and will not make us do any evil thing. If we love the Lord that much, trusting in His mercy and providence, obeying His commands as we are given to see and understand them, then the Lord can use us for a great and wonderful work. Through us He can help other people, and bring a blessing to all people. And as we obey Him and are faithful in our lives, the Lord can give us happiness here on this earth, just as Abraham found such great happiness after his test, and He can prepare us for a life of eternal happiness in heaven.
Amen.