



Abraham and Isaac

God Provides Blessings

About the Story

Several generations have passed since the story of creation, and several stories have shown what sort of creation this is. Adam and Eve broke the rules and were cast out of the Garden of Eden; Cain killed his brother Abel and was marked for it; the tower of Babel was built and destroyed; and the great flood destroyed everyone except Noah and his family. God made several covenants with humanity, including promising to Noah that the earth would never be destroyed by water again.

Finally, in Genesis 12, God turns to a relationship with a single family and determines to bless the entire world through them. God chooses Abram and his wife Sarai, and sends them on a journey, promising them land and offspring to bless them. But Abram and Sarai are already old and childless when they set out, and only grow older. And the land they are promised is occupied by the Canaanites, so they cannot have it yet. Instead, they continue to wander, amassing wealth but no children.

Frustrated, they attempt to take matters into their own hands. Abram has a son with his wife's servant, Hagar. But God assures them that this son, Ishmael, is not the son of the promise. Sarai, in a fit of jealousy, casts Ishmael and Hagar out of the family to fend for themselves in the desert. To reiterate and reinforce the promise to Abram and Sarai together, God establishes a new covenant, marked by circumcision, and changes their names to Abraham and Sarah. Both are said to have laughed when they heard that they would become parents well into their old age, and so when the child was born (in today's passage), they named him Isaac, which means, "He will laugh."

Now, in chapter 22, God has asked Abraham to bring his only son, the one who was to fulfill the promise, and offer him as a sacrifice. Child sacrifice was not entirely uncommon in the ancient world, and the Canaanite gods often made such demands. Many who have read this story have struggled with its implications about God. However, the point is not the demand that God makes but the contrast between Abraham's God and the gods of the Canaanites. When God provides a ram for the sacrifice, Abraham learns that not only does God provide, but also that this God is different from others.

The Point:

God can provide even in impossible situations.

Abraham is caught between his love of God and his love for his son. Trusting in God's promises, he obeys the impossible command, and brings his son for sacrifice. God stops Abraham, relieves him of the choice, and provides not only a ram for sacrifice, but also a renewed relationship both with God and with Isaac.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, God blessed all of creation, proclaiming it good at every step. In today's lesson, God focuses the blessing on one particular family. Next week, the focus on that one family will continue with Abraham's descendant Jacob, who will wrestle with God and receive a blessing. In that blessing, God reiterates the promise to Abraham, that all the world will be blessed through him.

Opening Prayer

Providing God, you gave Abraham everything he needed, from promise to progeny. Be with us now as we listen to the ancient stories of the faith. Help us to hear your promises in our lives, and to see where you provide. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Into the Story

Check in with each other, sharing a story about yourself or your family. Since this may still be a new group, try to pick a story that shares something important about yourself and your background. If possible, weave a vivid tale with names, settings, and other details.

Learning the Story

God asks Abraham to bring his son Isaac as a sacrifice. When Abraham obeys, God provides another sacrifice in Isaac's place.

Read Genesis 21:1-3 – Promise Fulfilled

- ❓ Why do you think Abraham's age is important to the story?
- ❓ How many times are Abraham and Sarah named in these verses? Why do you think that is?
- ❓ Why do you think these verses are so repetitive? What purpose does this serve?
- ❓ When have you had a promise fulfilled after long waiting?

Read Genesis 22:1-5 – Promise Threatened

- ❓ What would your reaction be to God's command in verse 2? How does this fit with the God that you have learned about before?
- ❓ What do you expect Abraham's response to be? Does he do what you expected?
- ❓ Imagine together what Abraham's state of mind was as they walked.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: Origin Stories

Origin stories are used to help explain why things are the way they are. They might explain natural events, social customs, or religious rituals, but they always use narrative to provide an historical grounding. They often give a framework for an event, an identity, or a theology. For example, Abraham is the forefather of the people of Israel, and his story provides background both for their identity as a people, and for their special relationship with God. Today's specific story also gives an historical rationale for the practice of animal sacrifice, which differs from the human sacrifice offered to other gods.

- ❓ Feel free to express your true feelings about this story. Why would God demand such a thing? What would you like to say to God in response to this demand?
- ❓ Have you ever felt called by God to do something that seemed horrible to you?

Read Genesis 22:6-10 – Promise Sacrificed

- ❓ Who carried the wood for the burnt offering? Why, do you think?
- ❓ Imagine together Isaac's state of mind as they walked.
- ❓ The text does not tell us how old Isaac is. How would the story change if he were a small child? A tween? A teenager? A grown man?

Read Genesis 22:11-14 – Promise Restored

- ❓ What stops Abraham's hand?
- ❓ What phrase(s) repeat throughout the story? What effect does this repetition have on the story?
- ❓ What animal is provided for the sacrifice? Why do you think that animal was used?
- ❓ Imagine together Sarah's state of mind when she found out what had happened.
- ❓ Why do you think this story has been so pivotal to so many people, including Christians, Jews, and Muslims?

Bible Connections

- ✚ Solomon builds the temple on Mt. Moriah (2 Chronicles 3).
- ✚ God's Son gave himself as a sacrifice (Mark 15; Matthew 27; Luke 23; John 19).
- ✚ Abraham is an example of faith (Romans 4:1-25).

Supplies

- ✚ Paper
- ✚ Pens or pencils

Living the Story: Worship

As Abraham offered praise through sacrifice, his descendants continued the practice by making offerings in the temple at Jerusalem. We have received that practice today through the offering of our money and other gifts in our worship. Together as a group, write a worship liturgy for the collection of an offering. Include these portions: invitation to give, details about how the offering should be gathered together, where the offering should be placed, and a prayer for the congregation to say together, dedicating their gifts to God. As part of your discussion, decide what gifts would be expected. Will people be giving money, food, or other goods? Or might they give of their time and talents? Try to think broadly about what offerings might be appropriate. If you are part of a worshipping community, see if the liturgy might be incorporated into your community's regular gathering.

Closing Prayer

Gather in two facing groups. Pray the following prayer as a call and response, alternating lines.

One: You call us, O God, and we respond:

Two: *Here I am, Lord.*

One: You lead us in times of comfort and in times of distress.

Two: *Here I am, Lord.*

One: We often wonder where you are when we are lost or confused.

Two: *The Lord will provide.*

One: We struggle to see your hand in our lives.

Two: *The Lord will provide.*

All: Give us strength to say, “Here I am, Lord,” and to believe, “The Lord will provide.”

At Home

- ✚ Ask some of your relatives about the stories in your family. Why do you celebrate birthdays or holidays the way you do? Why do you live or worship where you do? How do these stories relate to the stories of God’s people?
- ✚ Write a poem or a short story describing Sarah’s perspective on this story.
- ✚ Make a list of things that you have sacrificed for your faith.

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read Genesis 21:1-3; 22:1-14

God commands Abraham to sacrifice the son of the promise, but provides a replacement to sacrifice instead. Make a gift to a charity that is important to you.

Monday—Read Genesis 24:1-14

Abraham sends a servant to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac. Write a script for the conversation you expect the servant to have with Isaac’s prospective bride.

Tuesday—Read Genesis 24:15–33

Abraham’s servant meets Rebekah at a well and is introduced to her family. Draw a picture of the scene at the well.

Wednesday—Read Genesis 24:33-51

Abraham’s servant makes an offer of marriage for Rebekah on behalf of Isaac and her family agrees. Write a marriage contract for the betrothal between Rebekah and Isaac.

Thursday—Read Genesis 24:52-67

Rebekah sets off with Abraham’s servant, and becomes Isaac’s wife. Create a blessing for Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage.

Friday—Read Genesis 25:19-28

Rebekah’s twin sons, Esau and Jacob, compete with each other even before birth. Write a journal entry about your relationship with someone you do not get along with.

Saturday—Read Genesis 25:29-34

Jacob cheats Esau out of his birthright. Talk to a family member about a rift in the family, past or present.