

Obedience tested

• Abraham's faith was real but how far will he obey God?

• Greatest blessing – then greatest test

Enlargement

• Enlarged - to believe even in resurrection

• Enlarged to catch a glimpse of what God would do in Jesus

• Passing the test leads to seeing more of God

• The promise enlarged – great numerical increase

In Genesis 22 it is not the **reality** of Abraham's faith that is being tested. Long before Abraham's being called to sacrifice his son he had shown that his faith was real. '*Against hope but in hope Abraham believed in order that he would become a father of many nations...*' ¹. Everything had seemed against Abraham. Yet he was confident that the child would come and that he would indeed be the father of many nations. Abraham's faith was real enough. What is being tested is how far he will go, how far his faith will take him in obedience to God.

This test came just after a great blessing, '*After these things*' ¹. Abraham had just received his encouragement concerning his inheriting the land when this great test came. It should not surprise us if the greatest testing comes after the greatest blessing.

This test led him to reckon that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead ¹. God had said that Abraham's line would go forward through Isaac, yet here was God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son. One can see the things that Abraham would be asking himself: 'How can my line of descendants go forward if God is asking me to sacrifice my son? How can God keep His word if He is asking me to sacrifice Isaac?' He came to the conclusion there was only one way in which it could be done. It must mean that God would raise Isaac from the dead. This is the point of Hebrews 11:19. It was through the way Abraham faced this trial that his faith was enlarged. Because he was willing to obey God it had the effect of enlarging his faith and leading him to believe even in the resurrection. This is why in Genesis 22:5 Abraham says '*We will return*'. He expected Isaac to come back. He was believing that after he sacrificed his son God would have to raise Isaac from the dead. He was believing in resurrection.

Abraham's faith was enlarged in another way. The New Testament says that Abraham saw Jesus' day ¹. He caught a glimpse of the coming of Jesus. When and how did this happen? Surely it was here more than anywhere. Abraham takes his son and he is willing not to withhold him but to deliver him over to sacrifice. He is about to make the sacrifice when suddenly God provides the sacrifice instead! A lamb dies in the place of one who was condemned. The sacrifice that God provided was the substitute for the one who was about to die. In this event Abraham surely glimpses dimly what God would do. He had been through the experience of not sparing his own son. God had provided a sacrifice, but one day God would provide His own Son to be the lamb of sacrifice. Abraham saw the basic ingredients of the death and resurrection of the Son of God when he experienced the near-death of Isaac, and got Isaac back from the dead.

When you are tested by God and you pass the test you will discover more of God. You will see more of God's ways. You will see into the heart of God and will discover His sympathy and find out how much He is willing to stand by you. Above all you will see Jesus as the One who dies for you.

Finally God enlarges the promise more than ever. He again puts the promise of great numerical increase to Abraham. His seed will be vast, like '*the stars of heaven*', like '*the sand... on the seashore*'. The promise is finally sure and settled not just because of Abraham's faith

¹ Romans 4:18

¹ 22:1

¹ see Hebrews 11:19

¹ John 8:56

but because of Abraham's obedience. His salvation was by faith only. But it was by faith and patience that he got to this high level of obedience, and because he obeyed God's voice he inherited God's promises.

Abraham 'entered into rest'

• But not from 'retirement' from the life of faith

• Tempted to withdraw from his call to Canaan

• The author's personal testimony

• No turning back – Abrahams' future was in Canaan

So Abraham has 'entered into rest' but there are even further steps of faith that have to be taken. 'Entering into rest' is not a synonym for finishing one's life work. There is more for Abraham yet! Abraham is now elderly. Was it now time to 'retire' from the life of faith? He had accomplished the supreme calling of his life. At this very point, Abraham is tempted to withdraw from his call to Canaan. Abraham is not beyond temptation and at this point he gets a hint that he might like to return home to Haran. For many years he had not been in contact with his relatives but now someone reported to Abraham that his family in Haran in far-away Mesopotamia were doing well ¹. He had nephews and nieces in Haran that he had never seen. It was a piece of information he would soon make use of – the Rebekah of 22:23 became his son's wife – but it must have come to him as a temptation. He had no land in Canaan. He was elderly. The promise of a seed had been achieved. He knew from now on the progress of 'the seed' could not be stopped.

¹ 22:20–24

These insignificant verses have always meant a lot to me personally. I was born in Britain but have spent most of my life in Africa. Years ago I received an invitation to become pastor of a church in Britain. It was a large and influential church and for various reasons I found it a very tempting offer. One verse of Scripture held me from turning aside from what God had called me to do. I happened to be working through Genesis and I had reached Genesis 22:20–24. It did not seem a very inspiring passage but I read Hebrews 11:15 'If indeed they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return!' I knew it was the voice of God for me, and I said 'No' to the congregation in Britain. I have stayed in Africa ever since.

It was a time in Abraham's life when he was thinking of that country from which he went out, and he had opportunity to return! He kept in touch with his distant relatives but he did not go back to Haran. His future was with Canaan, not with Mesopotamia.



slices.org.uk

Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



These specially reformatted chapters "Slices of Bread" produced by Sovereign World Trust are available in three categories as set out below

Slices for the Nations	Slices for Sponsors	Slices for Everyone / Slice of the Week
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For pastors, libraries and colleges in those parts of the world where resources are scarce and unaffordable In the fullness of time the whole series will be made available free of charge Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or available to download from the Slices web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those in more prosperous circumstances who can afford to contribute to the development of this material and its distribution with a small monthly donation The same material as Slices for the Nations Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or by download from the Slices web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those who wish to sample the material or dip into it from time to time, a proportion of the PTTB series is available free of charge Slices for Everyone (as a download) or Slice of the Week (attached to a weekly email) The remainder of the PTTB material is available to Sponsors and those eligible to receive Slices for the Nations

To subscribe please contact: slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk stating which category fits your situation. Further details are at www.slices.org.uk
 Details of the availability of *Preaching Through The Bible* books and how they may be purchased can be found on www.ibtr.org.uk