

The Story of Hope #6

Worth a Thousand Words

Genesis Ch. 11-22
Story of Hope Section 11-12
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When we moved to Barangonan it didn't take long for us to hear the name Serena. She is the god who controls the ocean and she is feared. We soon learned that if you don't make the right sacrifice of blood to Serena she will come for you or your family. Even children know the saying, if you don't give her blood she will take it. When they offer Serena a sacrifice the islanders view it as a vivid pictorial reminder of the way that Serena steals their possessions, kills their families and destroys their lives.

Today we are going to encounter the themes of **God, Man, Sin, Death, Christ, Cross,** and **Faith** woven through the life of a man named Abraham. Through this story God continues to add detail to His rescue plan as He paints a picture of the rescuer that is worth more than a thousand words.

When Noah and his family left the ark, God commanded them to multiply and fill the earth. Initially, this seems to happen, but as time unwinds man has other thoughts. Gathering in plain called Shinar, they begin to build a city with a tower that would reach to the heavens. In direct defiance to God, they desire to avoid dispersion and create a name for themselves. God then acts in compassion, knowing the endless bounds of the evil in man's heart, by confusing their language. One language becomes many and man is scattered across the face of the earth. At this point we have to ask ourselves, "How is God going to Rescue mankind?" It seems that at every turn man's only desire is to rebel against the God who loves them.

Genesis 11 acts as a hinge between the first 10 chapters and the rest of the book, and the hinge pin that connects the two is a man named Abram. Abram, whose name is later changed to Abraham, is a descendant of Noah's son Shem. While living in a place called Haran, God speaks to Abraham and tells him to leave his country, his family, and home.

In chapter 12, God makes a multi faceted promise to Abraham. This promise is like a bell that keeps being rung throughout Abraham's life. Each time it is repeated its note rings with heightened clarity. First, God promised that He would make Abraham's name great. Unlike those who gathered in the plain of Shinar trying to make their own name great, God was going to bestow that title on Abraham. Secondly, God promised Abraham descendants. In fact, the phrase that God uses is, "a great nation". This great nation would have a homeland that God would provide. Not only would God provide a land, but he would protect Abraham by blessing those who blessed him and cursing those who cursed him. Finally, through Abraham's great family all the other families of the earth would be blessed.

God's plan to rescue the world will now be focused on this family, but it is not because of anything special Abraham or his family did. In fact throughout his life, each time God shares this marvelous promise, Abraham falters. Not only does Abraham falter, but it seems as if he puts God's very rescue plan in danger. However, God remains faithful to Abraham and his family. Each time they falter, God rescues.

After many years God gave Abraham a son. This son of promise, Isaac, would be the beginning of the great nation in which all the families of the earth would be blessed. Abraham's heart must have beat out of his chest as he held his son for the first time. Sarah, his wife, giggled with joy as she marveled at what God had done. Then, as if in a nightmare, God asks Abraham for his son. God asks Abraham to kill Isaac and burn him on a pile of stones as a sacrifice. Contrary to his past behavior, Abraham obeys God and straps his son to an altar believing that if Isaac died, God would raise him from the dead.

As Abraham lifted his knife, the angel of the Lord cries out for him to stop. Instead of Isaac being killed, God provided a substitute. A ram, caught in a thicket, replaced Isaac on the altar. Through Abraham's life, we can vividly see this marvelous picture that God paints, further illustrating what God's rescuer and His rescue plan would be like. As we sift through the story of Abraham, there are many points to hold onto. Here are three.

God is Faithful. Stretching from the Tower of Babel to Abraham, man repeatedly proves himself to be unfaithful. Twice, Abraham tries to give his wife away. Sara, not waiting on God to fulfill His promise, gives Abraham her slave as a way to produce an offspring. In contrast, God faithfully fulfills His promise to Abraham through his son Isaac. God can be trusted to do what He promises.

Righteousness Comes through Faith. Abraham believed God and God counted it to him as righteousness. This theme of righteousness by faith or belief is simply stated in the middle of chapter 15 but as we progress in God's story this thread will become more visible. Note that God says this of Abraham before he is asked to sacrifice Isaac. There was nothing Abraham had done except to simply believe that God would fulfill the promises that He made.

The Ram Died as a Substitute Sacrifice For Isaac. The one without sin died in place of the one with sin. Isaac was placed on the altar to be killed, but God provided a substitute. Instead of Isaac dying a ram was killed in his place. This story is not about God asking a man to kill his son. Instead it is a vivid picture how God rescues. Not only did God rescue Isaac, but he provided the way in which Isaac was rescued.