

3:11, March 2, 1975 Jim WARE

## THE NIGHT VISION AT BEERSHEBA

Gen. 22:1 - 13

### INTRODUCTION:

I'm speaking to you about night scenes in the Bible.

These night scenes are coming more alive as we get into them week by week. Last week while I was preaching on the last night of Sodom, I understand during that time some of the things that I was describing as happening in Sodom were going on in our city. There was one call where an individual had been shot, and died instantly. There was another call during that same hour that there had been two more shootings in another place. The night scenes come alive. And then on Monday following that sermon, just before dark, a twister or tornado type of wind passed over this city. It dropped down very near our church - just a few feet from where I was standing, at the time I preached the sermon on the night scene at Sodom. And that wind twisted a huge elm tree off about six feet above the ground and tossed it over the street and bent up two automobiles and destroyed a fence.

On Wednesday night I had the people in Prayer Meeting to stand and sing the Doxology. For if that tree had come in the other direction, we would have not been holding services in the auditorium, but elsewhere. Because it would have destroyed the auditorium.

About a year ago, in 1974, in April - there was a tornado that moved down in Kentucky near Louisville. And the next morning there were 72 people dead. Many homes were destroyed, property that was ill-replaceable was gone. The hospitals were filled with the injured. You talk about destruction - God destroying a city

with fire and brimstone. Just in an instant - everything can look quiet and peaceful - then judgement strikes.

Now in order to help me along with this sermon tonight, while I was preparing this sermon in my study late one night this past week some of the men happened to be in working on some repairs. And so when they left the building, they were good samaritans and save a lot of electricity, and they pulled the switches and left my study in the dark. I went out immediately and asked them if I had to furnish my own candles in which to study and prepare my sermons with. And so these night scenes become alive for us and the one we are talking about tonight is when Abraham was a 120 years old - he received a startling command to offer his own son Isaac for a burnt offering upon a mountain in the land of Morish.

And the message came to him in a vision of the night.

#### I. THE NIGHT VISION - V. 1-2

He was in his home quiet in Beersheba and this night scene with everyone asleep - this vision and voice spoke only to him. In which himself could only hear. He was already an aged man beyond the average human life in time. And it was no easy thing for him - it was a bitter thing. It was a cup of sorrow. It is easy for a man to face a storm when he is young and strong - but when he gets older, the burden of age upon his shoulders, with a fire of youth that is dim in his eyes, things have changed.

Fifty years before, Abraham left the land of his father, with the love of adventure and the prospect of a long life. It was the first great act of obedience

to a divine command.

He is in his home - it is quiet. A place of rest. He had already set up an altar there to worship God. He had sunk deep wells in the solid rock - opening fountains of living water. The Arabs still bring their camels there to drink at that same spot where Abraham and his flocks decided centuries ago.

A great household - servants, herdsman, thousands of camels - sheep, goats, cattle, his flocks and tents covered a large area on the hills and the mountains of Judea.

He was very rich in silver and gold. The greatest man - and among the greatest in the East. He had received a son, Isaac - as the divine promise. He had left father and mother to come to this country. He had sent Ishmael to wander in the wilderness.

V. (2) - The voice in the night vision came like thunder from a cloudless sky. It was like the angel coming to Sodom - unannounced, everything was peaceful. And so in this incident he came with a (terrible command) like in Sodom - I want you to flee from this city. And here every word was a dagger in this father's heart.

Four times the emphasis falls upon the thing that would give him the greatest pain. Take now, thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest and offer him for a burnt offering.

This is the thing that would make his home desolate. This aged father to lose his son. Now if he had had many sons, it might have been different. But how much more the loss of the only one that he has remaining there in his life. It would take him to his grave with gray hairs of age and sorrow.

If Isaac had been a disobedient son and caused him a lot of grief and he had wept about it all - but he tenderly loved him.

If Abraham had been selfish, cold-hearted, caring little about his family or his home - then it would have been different. How cruel, how inhumane. How different.

If the voice had said, give me some silver, gold, and flocks - or servants and herdsmen, or leave this promise land and give it up. And go and spend your life in poverty, in exile. It would have been a hard lot for the old man. But it was nothing compared to what the night vision brought to him.

We know not what passed through his mind when he received the vision and the message. I would not be surprised if he had said, oh, my son, my son. Would God, I could die for thee. I am old and have a few years at the most, I must gather to my fathers and let the remainder of my days be filled with joy. But let not my son perish.

This seems to be a contradiction between the new command of the vision and the instructions received in the promise, that he already had.

It seemed unaccountable and strange to him that in the first dream or vision he was going to become a great nation. And now, it is going to be cut off.

## II. QUESTIONS OF THE MORNING - V. 3

Abraham is restless. He rises up early that morning in the cool air. He shoulders the awful scene of the unknown mountain.

He steps forth silently with the coming dawn. The stars are still out and he remembers that his fathers worshipped beyond the flood. And he remembers that the divine voice had called him 50 years ago and he had looked forward to this day when he could look at the stars. And if he was able to number them, so shall thy seed be. That was a command that came to him.

On the morning breeze on the mountains of Judah he felt again that wonderful promise. "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth - so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall our seed also be numbered." And he thinking about this - no wonder there was a question that one contradicted the other. Should he on this vision go childless and sorrow to his grave.

The heathen inhabitants of the land offer their own children in sacrifice to Molock and Baal. He is a true worshipper of God, shall be become one like them. The wind moans through the branches in the grove. And I imagine Abraham bows in prayer for more light I suspect he listens. But it is always that dreadful command - take thy son, thine only son, Isaac whom thou lovest. The cows are lowing - the day is coming on. If the journey is to be undertaken at all, there is no time for delay. If the command be from God, then it must be obeyed quickly. Abraham knows all of this. He would not tamper with his own conscience. He wanted to do his duty however hard.

He selects a couple of servants to go with him and prepare the wood for the sacrifice. They get things ready. And the beasts ready. And Isaac wakes up - he is invited to go along with him. Shall he tell the son where he is going.

There is another question, how can he conceal - how can he tell it. Not now - not here.

There is another question - shall he go and tell the mother about this. The

one who loves this son more than anything in the world. She must know about it in the end. The question is, shall he tell her now.

All of these questions and many others must have passed through the mind of Abraham as he started that early morning in the dim light with Isaac and the two men because of the voice that had spoken to him in the night.

✓ These questions are terrific.

First, it seemed directly against the law of God. Thou shall not murder.

Second, the feelings and natural affection were against him. Not a servant nor a lamb, but his own son.

Third, God gave him no reason for it.

Fourth, it seemed contrary to the promise.

Fifth, he was going to have time to reflect upon it - even three days, to ponder this question.

Sixth, how could he return to Sarah and the family with the son's blood sprinkled on his clothes.

Seventh, what would the Canaanites and the Egyptians say who dwelt in the land.

Eighth, I do not fully understand this dispensation of God. If you have a son,

what would you have done.

Ninth, there was some questions that come to you tonight - that call upon you for sacrifice. How much money will you sacrifice. How much of your time will you sacrifice. How much of your talent will you sacrifice. Now you think about these little odd things and you let little difficulties prevent you from sacrificing anything. Many of you will not sacrifice your time. You will not even take time on Sunday to worship God. Now these questions were questions that Abraham had to face.

### III. STEPS OF OBEDIENCE - V. 4

The Bible says that on the third day as they had journeyed, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off. That morning, Abraham took off from his home. He traveled to Hebron, Bethlehem, and on to Jerusalem. The same road is very much the same today. Over the grassy hills and the plains and the rocks. Small birds build their nests upon the ground.

The first days journey must have been oppressive to Abraham. I imagine he wondered when he should talk to his boy about the sacrifice. A 100 times that day I imagine that he begins to speak, but the struggle with his emotions are too much.

Night comes on again and they lay down to sleep. Isaac and the young men slept but it was a long night of torture for Abraham.

I imagine that first night out, Abraham said, oh if it is possible - let this cup pass from me.

All night he waited --- waited for a new voice to speak. The hours of darkness are always long and sleepless, but he renewed his journey the next day. And approached the hills. And he came to the oaks of Mamre. Now this is the place where he had prayed and interceded for guilty Sodom. But no angels appear now to hear his petitions when he prays for his only son. He continues to ascent the heights as he goes on his way. Another day passes as they journey among the hills and the valleys and the streams. But when night comes on again, Isaac sleeps, as a lamb ready before the sacrifice. The father suffers - he longs to hear the divine voice speak and say that it is enough. Thy son shall live.

But V. 4 tells us that on that third day - he saw the place afar off. As the morning breaks, there is no such message that comes. He must renew his journey and take that mysterious climb.

If Abraham had been anything less than the father of the faithful, it would have been easy for him to have yielded his feelings as an earthly father.

V. 5 - As the day begins, soon the mysterious signs and doubtless like the flame of the burning bush, he could see the distant heights.

V. 6 - He lays the wood for the offering upon the one that must be offered with a trembling hand. He takes the fire and the knife up the steep alone with his son.

V. 7-8 Isaac wonders about the victim but the father cannot tell him yet. The altar is built, the wood is placed, this is the dreadful moment. And there was no divine voice that speaks to stay the sacrifice.

He must tell his son, Isaac himself must be slain. He must consent himself to be offered now. I imagine Isaac could have resisted. He could have escaped the



hand of his old father. We do not know what his feelings were.

We are not told what surprised, horror, or fear, or distrust.

We might well have said, well, the old man has become insane. Does Isaac resist. Does he claim that his father has no right to take his life - just simply because he has had a vision at night.

These steps of obedience are very clear when you see them.

✓ First, he rises up early. He is ready to go to the task.

✓ Second, he gets everything ready for the sacrifice - the wood, etc.

✓ Third, he probably said nothing to his wife, lest she prevent it.

✓ Fourth, he went carefully to the place of sacrifice, Mt. Moriah. 2 Chron. 3:1. This is the place the temple was built. And this is the place where Calvary took place.

✓ Fifth, he left the servants some distance lest they prevent it. Christ left his disciples as he went to Gethsemane, you remember. He said, I am the lad that will go and worship. I wonder if we speak of the sacrifices we make as worship. Abraham did.

✓ Sixth, Isaac carried the wood.

✓ Seventh, he talks to Isaac as if it were a common sacrifice. But when the question comes, where is the lamb, and what Abraham's feelings were - we do not know.

✓ Eighth, we know the command was clear and the obedience was prompt. The altar was built. And Isaac was bound. And there were floods of tears upon Abraham as he kisses his son for the last time. And perhaps once for his mother, Sarah.

✓ Ninth, he lifts the knife into the air as we discover in the 12th verse.

V. 11 - At last the voice from Heaven comes. The voice that he had heard in the night vision at his home. And this angel cries that now I know thou feareth God. Seeing thou has not withheld thy son, thy only son, from me.

✓ V. 13 - This was a great act of faith which made Abraham shine forth like the sun. The divine word and surrender to the divine - there is nothing too precious for us to give to God. And we will never know the full value until we give it all to him. Give him your money and you will get more of all that money that is good for you than you will by keeping it all to yourself. Give him your time. And a day spent in his service is better than a thousand spent in pleasureable sin. Give him your talents, your efforts, your toil. Every act of duty done in his name will receive great reward. Give God your children and they will never be so dear to you as when they are holy dedicated to God. Give God your heart and the blessings of Heaven will begin in your soul. Give Him all your heart, soul, life, everything - and all Heaven, all things will be yours.

#### IV. A PRECIOUS SHADOW - V. 13

In concluding this night vision, we discover here that faith of Abraham, is a precious shadow of greater and better things to come. In fact, this is a shadow of the only begotten son. As we think of this story.

✓ First, in his birth - it was supernatural. The marvelous birth of Isaac was

promised to Sarah after she was past time for bearing.

Jesus Christ was supernatural - being born of a virgin. Because he had been promised.

Second, both of these were guiltless. Neither of them were criminals. Isaac was not a criminal. Nor was Jesus.

Third, both of these were submissive to their father's will. Isaac had not one word of protest or attempt to escape. Jesus was as a lamb led to the slaughter - obedient to the cross.

Fourth, both bore crosses. Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice. Jesus carried the cross, for the crucifixion.

Fifth, the idea of the third day - Isaac after three days journey, was laid on the altar for the sacrifice.

Jesus after three years ministry spent three days in the tomb.

Sixth, the idea of the resurrection. Isaac returned alive to Abraham - his father. Jesus returned alive to God - the Heavenly Father.

Seventh, the idea of the bride. Isaac received his bride after the sacrifice - Rebecca.

Christ will receive his bride the church after the sacrifice of the cross.

Eighth, the difference - Christ had knowledge of his death. Isaac was ignorant to his part. Christ was the son of a Heavenly Father. And Isaac was

the son of an earthly father.

There was also the contrast of the lamb - the substitutionary work. The ram was without sin. He died as a sacrifice. So Christ, without sin, died as our sacrifice. So here is a more awful sacrifice. The only begotten son, dreadful as it was - God actually surrendered his well beloved son to the crucifixion and no voice from Heaven came and said, do not nail him to the cross. Jesus said, angels were waiting to come down and relieve him if he should but call. But he did not. And all of this was for our sakes.

V. HOW MUCH HAVE YOU SACRIFICED

This prompts the question tonight. About your obedience to God. Is it the easiest, or is it the best. Abraham rose up - he was fearful of this duty assigned him. He would not turn or harden his heart, or waste any precious opportunity. He went about it with his whole heart.

Now there are hindrances that hold us back from obedience. Now Christ waits for the words - Follow Me. And this is the challenge and the time.

How many men and women do you know who are giving their maximum strength to the Lord. Paul put his life on the line for the name of Jesus.

Dr. Truitt tells about a school teacher going to China to a mission board. And she was turned back. And he had preached a sermon on the duty of God's people to go with their money and their lives, or both, to be witnesses for Christ. And she said, I am going to China. The pastor said, but your family. You must not discourage me she said, I will reach that decision when I come to it. She applied

to the mission board - you cannot go. You have T. B. You must go home, live in the open, and care for your health. She came back to the pastor to study again and her face was radiant. She said, I'm going to China. But I am not going the way I proposed. I am going to support a missionary all by myself. You know I have a modest income. I am going to live more economically and support a missionary in China.

For years she supported the missionary on the field. The man she supported, spoke before the Southern Baptist Convention once and told of the triumphs of the Gospel in China.

The day has arrived when every Christian must be at his post in service and in sacrifice.

Brethren, it is easy for us to talk about Abraham tonight. But what about your sacrifice.

Dr. John E. Clough, a missionary to India, said he was following the plow. And he came before the church and he told the Deacons that he would like to be a preacher. Now some of the Deacons said to him, John you could never preach. But you can be a good church member. Just forget the preaching and go back to the plow.

That desire burned within him. One day he met a Deacon - I've decided to forget but I cannot. He says I lie awake at night, I pray about preaching. The Deacon said, if the Lord has called me, he said to be a Deacon, a preacher - and if I study and pray, and do my best, won't he help to make up for what I lack. The Deacon said, alright come to the church next Saturday for the conference and tell them about it.

He told his story. And they said, let's give him a chance. One farmer said

I'll give 100 bushels of corn - another 80, another 40. With only a few cents per bushel they finally raised enough to send him to school for one year.

At the end of the year he came back and he preached his first sermon before the church. The spirit descended and the words were loose, and words burned like fire. The men were softened and the women sobbed. And they said, God knows best. John is God's man.

Some years later, that same John Clough gave a testimony to Baptists in India. 2,022 converts were converted at once - at one time under his ministry.

Now think of those humble farmers who prayed and sacrificed their corn and finally helped him to get an education.

Abraham blessed the world. Not by building a city. Or writing a book. But by sacrifice. Rom. 12:1.

I remember very vividly the night scene when I had preached upon the same subject and was called upon to sacrifice my own son.

I'm wondering tonight, how many people are truly giving the best they have to Jesus. The night scene at Beersheba was a time when a man was challenged in obedience to sacrifice something for God. What have you sacrificed. What are you willing to sacrifice.