

# Genesis 22 - Abraham Tested

I would like this morning to share with you a family story from the life of Abraham that we find in the very first book of the bible - Genesis.

It is interesting to note that three world religions all honour Abraham as their father or ancient patriarch and that he is seen as a model of faith in one God.

In Islam they trace their ancestry back to Abraham and Ishmael.

In Judaism the 12 tribes of Israel all trace their ancestry back to Abraham through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. In Bible he is declared to be the father of faith and the spiritual ancestor of Jesus. Abraham receives a call from God and many promises as recorded in the first book of the bible Genesis.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.  
Gen 12 v 1-3

Before we look at the story of Abraham; I just want to ask you, for a few moments, to consider what is the most precious thing that you have in your life. Whether it is a possession or a person; I wonder what you would consider it to be? I then wonder how you would react if I were to ask you to give it to me and that you would never see it again?

For us as a family over this last year we have been faced with accepting the loss of Janine as her battle with cancer finally came to an end last December. Janine and I had talked much about her future and I know that she was sure of where she was going and indeed more concerned

about those who would be left behind. For all that when the time came it was still awful, and I felt very much as if part of me would be forever missing. For the girls it's been tough too and eleven months on we are slowly coming to terms with things although we still have both good and bad days.

Indeed this time of year is very significant as it would have been Janine's birthday yesterday and to be honest I still face tearful moments especially when certain songs get played - for Jess and her sisters they are having to face their teenage years and growing up all without their Mom.

I wonder how challenging would it be if you were to be faced with the loss of a loved one this year?

Well in the story of Abraham's life God has promised him that he will be the father of many nations. As we heard last time the fulfilment of the promise had been long delayed.

But at last when Abraham was 100 and Sarah over 90 and was well past the time when she would have expected to have children Sarah had become pregnant and a son had been miraculously born. They had called him Isaac "he will laugh".

Well as we move on with the story of Abraham's life we come to the a time when the bible says that God tested Abraham in Genesis chapter 22. Here God speaks to Abraham and asks him to give up this precious son - to take him on a journey and then to offer him as a human sacrifice.

As I considered the start of this story - I found it so challenging. I really wonder what Abraham thought as he heard from God. But I was even more stunned when I saw Abraham's response; all I could think was - WOW - there seems to be no questioning from Abraham - here he is with the child of God's promise - his only Son and heir - and yet without any sort of delay Abraham gets up and immediately does what God has asked him to do.

I do wonder how we would have reacted faced with a similar challenge from God - would we have wanted to pray about - ask God to think again - maybe share with Martin and ask His advice before we started out on what God had asked?

But as we follow on with the story - I really wonder what Abraham told Sarah? I know I would not have wanted to

have to tell Janine that God had told me to give up one of our children as a sacrifice - I know there would have been an explosion and she would not have been happy about the concept.

We don't know, as it's not recorded - but part of me can't believe that Abraham would have gone off without sharing with Sarah what God had asked him to do. So it could have been a very poignant moment as they set out. Maybe Sarah stayed hidden crying in her tent as she didn't want to upset Isaac?

And so the story continues to unfold -

It wasn't to be a quick 5-minute walk but a three-day trek of around 50-60 miles to get to the place God had directed him. So there was lots of time for Abraham to have thought about what God had told him to do. Indeed you have to wonder what sort of things Abraham and Isaac talked about too.

Eventually they arrive at "Moriah" the place God had told them to go. Abraham makes camp and directs his servants to stay with the donkey. He loads the wood for the fire from the donkey onto Isaac's back. He himself brings the knife and the means to start the fire. The two of them, father and son then set off together to complete their journey.

Interestingly enough we suddenly hear Isaac's voice next as he finally asks his father the question he has been mulling over - we don't know exactly how old he was but I can imagine him as a teenager but obviously very obedient and willing to submit to his father's every request. He basically asks why they have forgotten to bring a baby sheep to be killed as the sacrifice and then burnt.

I was quite stunned by the simplicity of Abraham's reply - "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." - was this wishful thinking, was this a father seeking to not scare his son - well the story doesn't tell us.

I wonder how Isaac felt about the reply - I sense that Abraham hadn't told Isaac what God had asked of him. Was Abraham's reply one of faith or one of hope - I wonder? The result was they walked on together to continue their journey to the place God had called them to go.

For me the next bit of the story is the most challenging, here we have Abraham putting aside all of his hopes, his feelings and being prepared to do **ALL** that God had asked of him. He holds nothing back, we see the altar built no doubt the heavy stones had to be man handed into place and then Abraham places wood on top. He ties up his son and places him willingly on the sacrificial altar. The knife has been sharpened, the fire is ready, and Abraham in full obedience goes to kill his precious son Isaac.

And then there comes a SHOUT from heaven "Abraham, Abraham!" - a shout that comes from someone called here "The Angel of the LORD" - not an Angel BUT "The Angel" it is believed that this term refers to Jesus before his birth as a baby in the NT. At the sound of the voice Abraham immediately stops what he was doing and because he knows the voice he replies simply "Here I am"

The Angel of the Lord continues by telling Abraham the GOOD NEWS - God's purpose in the testing had been achieved - Abraham had shown that he would not hold anything back from God even his son.

So Abraham must breathe a huge sigh of relief, he would untie his son and remove him from the altar.

I see a huge father and son hug at this point?

As he catches his breath his eyes are directed to some thorny bushes nearby in which a male sheep has become entangled. So instead of killing his son, he is able to offer an acceptable sacrifice of a male sheep. The sheep is killed and then burnt as an offering to God as part of Abraham's worship.

Here Abraham's earlier words come true as God himself has provided the sacrifice. Indeed as we read on in our story Abraham then declares "Jehovah Jireh!" **The LORD Will Provide**

We then have a marvellous conclusion to our story as once more the Angel of the Lord calls out to Abraham from heaven - from God's very presence and declares to Abraham afresh God's promise to him again.

"I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Gen 22v15-18

So what briefly can we learn from the story (will be reviewing)

We see the Jesus at work in the Old Testament as The Angel of the Lord doing the father's will and communicating with Abraham

We see Abraham as a loving father willing to give up his only son - for me a glorious picture of God the father's plan of salvation in that he was willing to give up His only son Jesus to be sacrificed on the cross so that we could know that all our sins have been dealt with, that we can know we are forgiven and that we can know and declare that as we accept Jesus we are adopted as the very children of GOD.

We have in Isaac a picture of Jesus too - here was someone willing to do what the Father asked - and my Jesus - knowing what was before Him still came, was still born as a helpless baby and lived here on earth for 33 years and then willingly went all the way to the cross to die for you and for me. So that all our sins, all the things we have done wrong according to God's rules are dealt with once and for all. So that we can be forgiven and become once more part of God's family as we accept what Jesus has done.

In the story we also see God's miraculous provision just at the right time.

As I look back on the past few years - he has been with me all the way, he has provided in both the good and the bad times. He was right there in the midst of those very desperate times too last year - often Janine and I would agree that he had sent the right person to help us just when we were at a point of our most desperate need.

As I look back on my forty years as a Christian I know he has been there for me each and every day and for that I give thanks.

I am encouraged that as we walk through this life with all its challenges my God is truly Jehovah Jireh - my provider.

I wonder is He truly yours too?

During Janine's illness we constantly declared that **God is Good - All the time.**

Today I once more repeat it and stand firm on that fact and declare it **afresh!**

And I wonder would you agree - are you aware of God presence each day - if not why not seek Him afresh today.

## Genesis 22 (NIV) - Abraham Tested

<sup>1</sup> Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

<sup>2</sup> Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

<sup>3</sup> Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup> He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

<sup>6</sup> Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, <sup>7</sup> Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

<sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

<sup>9</sup> When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

<sup>12</sup> “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

<sup>13</sup> Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram<sup>[a]</sup> caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring<sup>[b]</sup> all nations on earth will be blessed,<sup>[c]</sup> because you have obeyed me.”

<sup>19</sup> Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba