



THE OFFERING OF ISAAC

Reading: Genesis 22

“In Isaac shall thy Seed be called” (Genesis 21)

Strengthened by God (Hebrews 11:11), Sarah conceived and gave birth to the promised seed Isaac, whose name means “laughter”. The joy of the occasion is immortalised in the words of Sarah, “*God hath made me laugh so that all that hear will laugh with me*” (v6).

As Isaac grew, tension developed when Sarah saw Ishmael mocking her son and she asked that Abraham send Ishmael and Hagar away, “*for*”, she said, “*the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac*” (v10). The matter distressed Abraham, but God confirmed that Sarah was right, saying, “*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*” (v12).

This statement clearly confirmed to Abraham that the great promise of the seed to come (the Lord Jesus Christ) was to be through Isaac (Galatians 3:16; 26-29). It was upon the basis of this statement that Abraham’s faith was strengthened to help him to succeed in the greatest test of his life, when God asked him to take Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice (Genesis 22).

“Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest” (Genesis 22:1-14)

In this chapter we witness the greatest test of faith that Abraham faced. “*And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham*” (v1). The word “*tempt*” is more correctly rendered “*try*” or “*test*” (Hebrews 11:17). God does not tempt man to sin, in the sense of enticing him; but God does test a man’s faith to see whether it is enduring (James 1:13-15).

Abraham Offers his Son Isaac

Abraham’s willingness to obey God, when he was asked to offer his son Isaac, is an outstanding example of loving obedience and faith. This supreme trial of faith for Abraham points forward to God’s offering of His “*only beloved Son*”, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Abraham and Isaac, as father and son, went together to make the offering God had asked of Abraham. Isaac willingly cooperated because he understood the significance of God’s promises and shared his father’s faith. He realised that ultimately the true “*seed*” would come who, through the shedding of his blood, would provide the way for the forgiveness of sins. Without the sacrifice of that “*lamb*”, the promised blessing for all nations which God had made to Abraham could not be fulfilled.

Isaac’s life was spared when God called to Abraham saying: “*Lay not thine hand upon the lad...for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me*” (Genesis 22:11-12). God told him to offer instead a ram caught nearby in a thicket.

There are many parallels here with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as he cooperated with his Father and laid down his life. Some of these are set out in the following table.

Abraham and Isaac	God and Jesus
“ <i>Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest</i> ” (Genesis 22:2)	God said of Jesus, “ <i>This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased</i> ” (Matthew 3:17)
“ <i>Get thee into the land of Moriah</i> ” (verse 2). This is where the temple was built in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 3:1)	Jesus was crucified at Jerusalem
“ <i>Offer him there for a burnt offering</i> ” (verse 2)	“ <i>Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour</i> ” (Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 10:5-10; Isaiah 53:5-7)
“ <i>Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son</i> ” (verse 6)	“ <i>And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull...where they crucified him</i> ” (John 19:17-18)
“ <i>My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering</i> ” (verse 8)	“ <i>Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world</i> ” (John 1:29)



God Offers His Son Jesus

When the hour came for Jesus to face the terrible ordeal of his sacrifice, he drew near to his Father in prayer: *“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”* (Luke 22:42). It was His Father’s will that he lay down his life as the *“lamb of God”* to bear away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The Father and Son together worked through that dreadful suffering, knowing there was no other way to redeem mankind from sin and death. Jesus willingly cooperated in his Father’s purpose, recognising that before immortality and the Kingdom of God could be a reality, sin must be dealt with (Isaiah 53:5-7; Hebrews 10:5-10).

Jesus knew the joy that would ultimately be his if he was faithful to his Father’s will: *“For the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2). The Psalmist had written, *“For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (the grave); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”* (Psalm 16:10-11).

There are two particular passages in the New Testament where this incident of Abraham offering his son Isaac is explained.

1. *“By faith Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac”* (Hebrews 11:17-19)

Paul is very clear as he explains that Abraham, in full confidence of faith, made all the preparations necessary for offering Isaac. Since God had said, *“In Isaac shall thy seed be called”* (v18), there was no doubt in Abraham’s mind that God would raise him from the dead. He was confident that God, who had given life to the deadness of Sarah’s womb so that she was able to give birth to Isaac, would also bring Isaac back to life again so that the promises might be fulfilled in him. In fact, when God provided a ram instead of Isaac, it was as if Abraham received his son back from the dead. Paul says that *“in a figure”* he received Isaac as if he had risen from the dead.

Our faith in the resurrection must be as unshakeable as Abraham’s. We believe that the *“seed”*, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, has been raised to life and that through him the promises of God will be completely fulfilled (Romans 4:24-25).

2. *“Was not Abraham our Father justified by works?”* (James 2:20-24)

When God showed Abraham the stars of heaven and said, *“So shall thy seed be”*, he believed God and so he was justified (declared *“righteous”*) by God because of his faith (see notes on Genesis 15, Lesson 9). In the same way, when we believe God’s word and are baptised into Christ, our sins are forgiven and we stand justified (or *“righteous”*) before God. As God put Abraham’s faith to the test in a very practical way, so He will test us to see if our actions are likewise motivated by faith. In Abraham’s case his trial centred upon Isaac, his only beloved son. With unflinching faith he obeyed God’s command to offer his son and his faith was seen in action. James says, *“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”* (v22).

“In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:15-19)

We now come to the last recorded words that God spoke to Abraham. We have followed the life of Abraham over a period of 45 years from the age of 75 years when he left Haran in obedience to God (Genesis 12:1-3), through to the incidents of Genesis 22 when it is calculated he was about 120 years old. During this period Abraham’s unswerving faith has been seen, and was confirmed in this great and final trial in the offering of his son.

God testifies His acceptance of Abraham’s faithfulness in the following words:

Verse 16

“By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord...” Paul refers to these words, pointing out the certainty of their fulfilment because of this oath that the God of heaven and earth has taken upon Himself (Hebrews 6:13-17). **The promise to Abraham will be fulfilled.**

“because thou hast done this thing...” As James said, Abraham’s faith was demonstrated by his obedient actions (James 2:21-23).



Verse 17

“Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies” We again note that the “seed” promised is singular. “His” is the 3rd person **singular** personal pronoun and refers to Christ (Galatians 3:16,26-29).

Verse 18

“In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” We recall that when Abraham was called from Ur he was told, **“In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”** (Genesis 12:3). Now he is shown that this blessing is to be extended to all people through **his seed**. This blessing comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ by baptism into him (Galatians 3:26-29). The blessing involves the forgiveness of our sins and, as a result, favour with God (Acts 3:25-26).

Abraham Buries Sarah his Wife (Genesis 23)

The sad events of this chapter tell of the death of Sarah at the age of 127 years. Isaac was now a man of 37 years. As we read through this chapter we are impressed with the fact that Abraham remained *“a stranger and a sojourner”* in the land of Canaan (v4). It was necessary therefore for him to buy a portion of land that he and his sons could use for a place to bury their dead.

Abraham negotiated for a portion of land near Hebron called the *“cave of Machpelah”* (v9). This land became the burial place of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah (Genesis 49:29-33). It is important to note that Abraham never had possession of the land which God promised to him. This promise is yet to be fulfilled when Christ returns and raises the dead. Then Abraham and his seed will inherit the land for ever (cp Acts 7:5; Hebrews 11:13-16).

A Wife for Isaac (Genesis 24)

In this chapter we see the concern that Abraham showed in selecting a wife for Isaac, his son. He committed the outcome of this matter to God (v7). We also note that his servant who was sent on this errand also continually sought God’s help in prayer (v12-14, 26-27, 52). The result was that Rebekah returned with Abraham’s servant to be Isaac’s wife.

Here we have the comforting reassurance that God overshadows and directs the lives of those who commit their ways to Him and sends His angels to superintend their lives (Hebrews 1:14; Psalm 34:7).

Esau and Jacob—the Sons of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25-36)

Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, Esau the firstborn and Jacob. These two sons became the fathers of two nations. Esau became the father of the Edomites and Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28; 35:10), became the father of the nation of Israel. In reading through the history of the lives of Isaac and Jacob we note that the promise to Abraham, regarding the land and his seed through whom all nations were to be blessed, was restated to these two patriarchs.

God Repeats the Promise to Isaac (Genesis 26:3-5)

“Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee and unto thy **seed**, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the **oath** (Genesis 22:16-18) which I swore unto Abraham thy father. And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries, **and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”** (cp Genesis 12:3; 22:18).

God Again Repeats this Promise to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14)

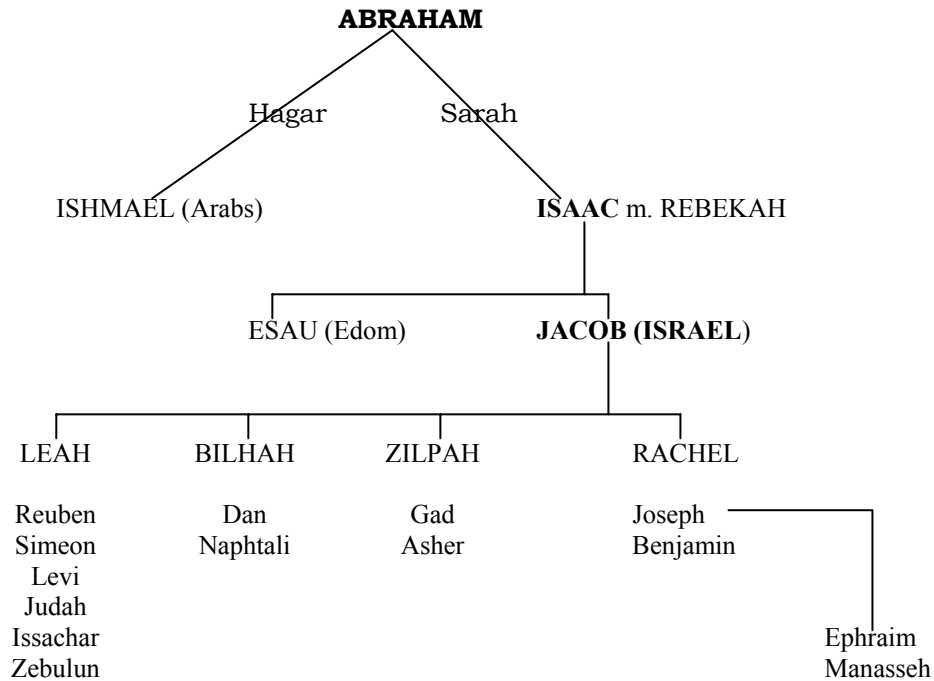
“I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy **seed**; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: **and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed”** (cp Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:3-5).

The “seed” that was promised to Abraham did not find its fulfilment in Isaac or Jacob, but as we have seen from the New Testament it referred to the Lord Jesus Christ. Through him all nations can share the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.



Jacob, Father of the 12 Tribes of Israel (Genesis 28-30)

Jacob was sent back to the family of Rebekah in Padan-aram to seek a wife from his mother's family. There he took two wives, Leah and Rachel, and from them and their handmaids came his 12 sons, who were the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. A summary of the family tree from Abraham to Jacob and his sons is set out as follows:



We will note through the subsequent history that Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were counted as sons of Jacob (Israel) (Genesis 48:5-6), and that Levi was selected to be the tribe that officiated as the priestly tribe, serving in the matters of worship to God (Numbers 18:1-6).

Summary Points

- (1) The offering of Isaac by Abraham was the greatest exhibition of his faith in God, for which he was blessed (**James 2:21-24; Hebrews 11:17-19**).
- (2) The promise that all nations will be blessed in the seed of Abraham (**Genesis 22:16-18**) was also restated to Isaac (**Genesis 26:3-5**) and to Jacob (**Genesis 28:13-14**).

Lesson 11 - Questions

1. When Abraham took Isaac to offer him to God this pointed forward to a greater offering to be made. What offering was that?
2. What motivated Abraham to obey God and offer up Isaac?
3. What was the oath that God made to Abraham?
4. Who is the "seed" through whom all nations of the earth shall be blessed?
5. What is the blessing that those baptised into Jesus Christ will receive?
6. God restated the promise He made to Abraham to two other men. Who were they?
7. The sons of Jacob became the heads of the tribes of Israel. How many sons were there?