

Anglican Church Noosa
Genesis 21:1-7 & 22:1-19
Fulfilment and Test
The Patriarchs – Call | Covenant | Cost
Rev'd Chris Johnson – August 30, 2026

I want you to imagine an athlete who has trained for years and years with one great goal in mind – to win a gold medal at the Olympic Games. Finally, the day arrives, they achieve their goal, they win the gold medal. They stand high on the podium; the medal is placed around their neck; the national anthem plays, the tears roll down their cheeks and they experience the fulfilment of their life's dream.

Then, before they've even had time for photographs, an official comes up to them and says, "I'm sorry there's been a mistake. You need to hand the medal back."

The athlete would be devastated. All their hopes and dreams dashed!

I hope this might give us a small insight into the rollercoaster ride of Abraham in today's story from Genesis 21, 22. Abraham receives the child promised to him, Isaac; but then in the very next chapter is asked to give him back.

So let's look at the story so far.

In Week 1. Genesis 12 - Abraham is promised he will become a great nation. This will happen through the birth of a special child.

In Week 2. Genesis 16 - 10 years later Abraham and Sarah despair that God doesn't seem to be keeping his promise. They take matters into their own hands and Ishmael is born. But then surprise, Genesis 18 -three visitors bring a message from God. In twelve months' time, Sarah will be pregnant. She laughs at them in disbelief.

So today we come to Genesis 21:1,2 *"Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah, as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant."*

So she gives birth to Isaac. She again laughs, but this time, laughter of joy and delight. The child of promise has been born and she is delighted.

So what on earth is going on in Genesis 22? when God says to Abraham in v2, *"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."*

Here is the child they had waited so long to have. Here is the child God had promised. All their hopes and dreams dashed. Personal hopes yes, but also hopes of God being glorified through this child. Hope in life itself. All dashed!!!

What sort of God would demand such a thing of a father? Is Richard Dawkins correct in calling this child abuse? Should we put Abraham on trial for even considering such an action? Should we put God on trial? These are the questions.

On a surface reading from our modern 21st century viewpoint these reactions and questions are quite natural. But let's dig a little deeper and try to understand this story on its own terms.

Isaac is the child of promise – God's promise.

Against all hope or expectation, he is born.
-Despite Abraham and Sarah's unfaithfulness.
-Despite Abraham and Sarah's age.
Isaac is a miracle, a gift from God.

The test of Genesis 22 is whether Abraham will continue to recognise that Isaac is the child promise. Not just his son whom he loves very much, but the child of promise. Abraham has to recognise –Isaac belongs to God, not him. Isaac is part of a much larger plan God has in mind. He is not just there to fit in with Abraham's plans. Isaac belongs to God.

This is the big test for Abraham, having received Isaac from God will he cling to the gift or willingly hand him back to God and cling only to God?

I think all Christian parents have to face this same question. Do you claim ownership of your children or do you acknowledge them as belonging to God? I think most of us here this morning would recognise that God only gives us our children for a short time to guide, train and encourage in the ways of God. We then have to be willing to let them go and set them free into adulthood, for them to chart their own course in life.

And at this point, I want to put in a disclaimer. This story is a unique piece of salvation history. It is not given as an example to follow. In other passages, we read the God detests child sacrifice. This story is given uniquely to test Abraham's faith and whether he was willing to give up the child of promise.

What Abraham is being asked to do is strange. It is weird. But the reason it is here in the Bible is to show Abraham's faith. And it shows Abraham had a remarkable faith in a number of ways.

I want to make three points about Abraham's remarkable faith.

1. Absolute obedience

It is interesting that we are not told what Abraham's emotions were throughout this episode. God recognises that he deeply loves his son Isaac,
"Take your son, your only son whom you love – Isaac."
God tells us Abraham had a deep love for Isaac.

He would have wanted to see Isaac grow up and wanted to enjoy a beautiful relationship with his son. This is going to be an extreme test, a lonely test, a personal test, a great test of faith. Abraham obeys God's command without any questioning. In other places Abraham will question God, as we saw last week he questioned God about why he still remained childless, 10 years after the promise was given.

He questions God over the judgement on Sodom in Chapter 19.

But in this case there is unquestioning military like obedience. Perhaps because the request was so extreme, he just knew that God would have to come through, and God would provide or God would be the one discredited.

Abraham trusted so implicitly in the goodness of God he obeys without question. It is possibly this story more than any other which has gained Abraham the title of the great man of faith.

These words, *"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love."*
Do they sound familiar?

In the New Testament we find similar words for Jesus at his baptism and transfiguration.

-At his baptism the voice from heaven says, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

-At the transfiguration the voice from the cloud says, *"This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Abraham's beloved son points us to another beloved son; the unique Son of God whom himself would be the substitute lamb.

The agony Abraham must have gone through contemplating the sacrifice of his beloved son, is a pointer to the agony the Father must have suffered watching his beloved Son on the cross.

Abraham is actually being given the most amazing privilege of experiencing just a little of the sacrificial heart of God. Think about that for a minute, in being willing to give up his son, he is touching something deep in the heart of our heavenly Father who gave up his Son. It is Abraham's obedience which takes him into what would have been a profound experience of God.

So the first point about Abraham's faith is that what we see here is absolute obedience. In the end it is the only way to know God.

Second point about Abraham's faith.

2. It involves worship.

Back in the ancient world the accepted way to show homage to God was to offer sacrifice. So we read in v3 Abraham cut enough wood for the burnt offering. The strange request to sacrifice his son actually calls him to worship in this way. Despite its strangeness Abraham will worship - worship offering sacrifice.

But did you notice the plural 'we'? In v5 Abraham says 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."* Abraham is confident God will not go back on his promises.

Not just the promise of a child in general, but specifically in Ch21:12 God says, *"It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."* Abraham believes that God will keep that promise. He will find a way to preserve Isaac through whatever is going to happen. Maybe it is as the writer of Hebrews proposes in 11:19, *"Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death."*

Coming back down from the mountain everything would have seemed the same to the two servants who were waiting. But in fact everything was different. Abraham's relationship with his son was now totally consecrated to God. Abraham was free from trying to impose his wishes and desires on Isaac. Abraham was free from needing Isaac to meet his needs. Isaac belonged totally to God and Abraham would faithfully bring him up as the child promise. It is a very liberating place for Abraham to be.

And it is the same for us. Only in worship which is a total consecration of ourselves to God do we find freedom. The world tells you freedom comes through the pursuit of pleasure and looking after number one. The New Testament says it is through being a living sacrifice. Only as you go out from here today and give your life away sacrificially to others, will you find the worship that is perfect freedom?

Abraham's obedience involves sacrificial worship and so should ours.

3. Confidence the Lord will provide

This aspect of Abraham's great faith is seen in verses 7 and 8, and 14.

V's 7,8 Isaac asks his father, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham replies, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son."

In v14 after the transaction has taken place we read, "Abraham called that place, ***The Lord will provide.***" Abraham had complete trust in God's goodness and that God would provide for him whatever happened.

What we see here of course is a very clear pointer to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. When Abraham said, "God will provide the lamb." little did he know that's exactly what God would do in first century Palestine when the eternal Lamb of God would die for the sins of the world.

In the New Testament, it is John the Baptist who points to Jesus and says, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" John may have been pointing to the Passover lamb or the lamb in Isaiah 53:6 and 7. But equally he could have been thinking about the lamb God provided for Abraham.

Here is substitutionary sacrifice very clearly enacted for us in the Old Testament. The lamb dies in the place of Isaac. God provides the sacrifice.

And in an ironic twist, he will provide the sacrifice in the New Testament as well. Only this time it will be God's Son. And this time the execution will proceed. "God is so loved the world he gave his only Son."

So when Abraham said, "*The Lord will provide the lamb*"

-he was speaking a great truth to Isaac.

-He is also speaking a great truth to believers down through the centuries and -to us today as well.

So while Abraham couldn't have known the full implication of his words,

"*The Lord will provide a lamb*", it does show us a man exercising a prophetic ministry. And as with all prophets, it takes great faith.

So on this occasion Abraham was a prophet and a great man of faith.

If you look down to v14 you will see Abraham calls the place, "The Lord will provide".

It was Hudson Taylor the pioneer missionary to China who made this little phrase well known using the King James Version, "Jehovah Jireh".

He said, "Oh how sweet it is to live in direct dependence upon the Lord who never fails us! He is our Jehovah Jireh."

Hudson Taylor staked everything on the promise that the Lord would provide.

-He knew the Lamb of God who died for his sins to provide forgiveness.

-He knew God's provision for the spiritual and practical needs of his mission.

Jehovah Jireh – the Lord will provide.

My application for us is simply this, firstly, know that the Lord has provided for your salvation. Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the sacrificial lamb who was not

spared, but given up for us all. So put your faith in him, and make it a faith of obedient trust like Abraham.

Secondly, exercise that faith as Noosa Anglican goes through this time of transition. I've had a few people expressing concern about what the future holds. It is only natural to be anxious when there is some uncertainty ahead. But remember this is God's church and God will provide. God is Jehovah Jireh. Your ultimate trust has to be in him not in any minister.

Look again at this wonderful story of Abraham and renew your faith. This story is like the pencil sketch of a great artist beginning a masterpiece. The sketch is beautiful in its own right, however it is nothing compared to the finished masterpiece.

The finished masterpiece is the Father, whose Son was not spared, but was the sacrificial lamb who died for your sins and my sins. Put your faith in Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who provides.

Let us pray

Lord we stand in awe of Abraham and his faith. Please grant us the faith that Abraham had.

We ask for

- absolute obedience,
- sacrificial worship and
- confidence in your provision.

Thank you Lord that you are our Jehovah Jireh – the Lord our provider.

You have given to us so generously in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We stand in awe and praise your Holy name. Amen.