



HG251: Mountain Top Experiences
Moriah: Mount Of Provision

Genesis 22:1-19

Home Group Study Notes

22 January 2023 - James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

You've been given a one month all-expenses paid trip,
but you have to go to somewhere you've never been.
Where would you go, and why?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Genesis 22:1-19

Home Group Sermon

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Introduction

Genesis 22, the story of the binding of Isaac, is dark, shocking, unexpected and unnerving. It creates diverse responses, from alarm and confusion to hope and relief. It can leave one thinking God is cruel or arbitrary, a whimsical deity who manipulates obedience, and who seems rather unjust. It generates many questions: If God knows everything, why did he need to test Abraham? Why did God command Abraham to do something so repugnant? If Abraham refused, would God's previous promise be void? Why didn't Isaac run?

The story is ancient, 5,000 years old, and so we, looking back from the 21st Century, must surely ask, 'How does there and then speak to us here and now?'

To help answer that question, we're going to narrow our focus to only a couple of aspects, namely the response of Abraham and the provision of God. From that 'there and then' will may see that in our 'here and now' God is for us, and is gracious, and is our provision.

This is a Test

First, this is a story about God testing Abraham. It says so in the first verse: 'After these things God tested Abraham' (Genesis 22.1 NRSV).

A little known fact about me is that I am a qualified diamond grader. Not only do I have the right name for jewellery, I also have expert training and some experience. In the past, you would bring me a diamond, and I would tell you if it was genuine, then about its proportions, dimensions and weight, and I would grade its clarity and its colour. I would make a determination about the gem. Then I would type up a report and give it a valuation. I would put it to the test.

Teachers test students. Toddlers test boundaries. Politicians test our patience! We test God! Isn't God best positioned to test people? In this story, God wants to know what Abraham is like. Is his trust genuine? Does he only believe when things are good? Yesterday he was faithful. Will he be faithful today? God wants to determine something specific about Abraham.

Let's pause. Fundamental to Scripture reading is our transformation into the likeness of the Living Word. So, as we read the 'there and then' of God testing Abraham in our 'here and now' we may ask ourselves, 'What are we really like?'

We immerse ourselves in a five thousand year old story, and engage with the presence and revelation of God. We think over all those markers that point to God's historic faithfulness, and see in our lives a mixture of faith and unfaith, of obedience and disobedience. The purpose of this question is not to immobilise us with guilt, but to get us to see the faithfulness of God, the God who brings order out of chaos, the God who from before time is for us. For you. The question's intent is to draw us closer into the heart of the Father so that in him we know who we are truly.

I Am Ready

A significant aspect of the testing is Abraham's response. God simply speaks Abraham's name, and he responds, 'Here I am.' The Hebrew word is 'hineni.' Abraham is saying to God, 'I am ready.' He says this before he even has an inkling of what God is going to ask. He is 'in' before he's read the terms and conditions. Why would he do this?

God is total mystery and otherness, the One who is beyond all comprehension, and yet speaks Abraham's name. God reveals himself, and in Abraham's previous encounters with him, he shows himself to be the God of promise and faithfulness, and it is this that elicits Abraham's blind obedience. He can say only, 'Here I am. Hineni. I am ready...'

We live in a 'Terms & Conditions' world. Would we jump into something blind? Would we risk everything before we knew the details of the venture? When God calls your name, will you say, 'Here I am'?

In our 'here and now' the story is set to shock. Abraham says 'I am ready' and God says, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you' (v2).

We would say: 'What? You command us not to sacrifice our children and then to sacrifice our children! What kind of God are you?' And we would do so because we know that the Law clearly says that child sacrifice is forbidden and beyond abhorrent (see Leviticus 18.21& Deuteronomy 12.31). We know that child sacrifice was one of Manasseh's crimes that led to Judah's exile in Babylon (see 2 Kings 21).

But the Law came after Abraham. He did not know the Torah, or about Manasseh. What he believed, in his 'there and then' (as did near everyone else in the Iron Age), was that unseen forces were at work in his world, and to keep them on side, you offered sacrifices, and a child was the most valuable offering you could ever make. So, Abraham wasn't shocked, for that was how religion in his 'there and then' worked. That was what the gods demanded, and Abraham wants to stay on the side of God...

Abraham, however, exhibits an intuition that there is something different about Yahweh in contrast to the other gods: 'Then Abraham said to his servants, "Stay here...The boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you"' (v5).

God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the child of promise through whom he would maintain his covenant (see Genesis 17.19), yet Abraham clearly held that God's purposes nevertheless included Isaac. In response to Isaac's question, "where is the lamb for burnt-offering?" (v7) Abraham gives his response of trust: "God himself will provide the lamb" (v8).

Isaac is on the altar. Abraham has the knife in hand ready to slay his beloved son. An angel of the LORD calls out, “Abraham!” And a second time Abraham says, “Here I am” (see vv9-11). And he is told, “do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God...” (v12). In his mercy, God then provides a ram to be sacrificed instead (v13). Perhaps that is the greater shock: God is not like the other gods; he doesn’t require child sacrifice, and he is the one who gives.

‘So Abraham called that place “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”’ (v14)

Moriah

Here and now, as we read this story, we do so being able to ‘see’ a further reality with greater clarity than Abraham. Its symbolism, its evocative imagery and hope draw us deeper into the heart of Father, Son and Spirit. And this ability to ‘see’ is because of where this story took place—Moriah.

At first, there is a darkness about Moriah. In our reading, it is the location for where Abraham is to sacrifice Isaac. Further along Israel’s history, David committed a great sin against God by conducting a census of the people. This resulted in God sending a destroying angel leading to the death of seventy thousand people. But when the angel comes to Jerusalem, God relents. David is on the threshing floor of Ornan when he saw the angel. He repents and God commands him to build an altar. David buys the threshing floor, builds an altar and makes an offering to God (see 1 Chronicles 21).

The darkness begins to abate, for years later, ‘Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David...on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite’ (2 Chronicles 3.1).

Moriah is the site of the Temple, which housed the glory of the Lord, where the people of Israel maintained their fidelity to the God who provides.

Yet there remains a further hope. Isaac was the child of promise according to God. He, and aspects of this story, represent an archetype of Christ. A cursory reading should pique our ability to see complementary themes in the Gospels, especially the lamb, the beloved son offered for sacrifice and the hope of resurrection. And so, in our ‘here and now’ we are transported from the seeming darkness of the ‘there and then’ of Abraham and Isaac into the radiant hope that is in Jesus the Christ.

God Enters the Mess

Moriah points us to the supremacy of Jesus the Christ, but in order for us to see this, we have to move beyond Moriah. We must leave the Temple and journey to Golgotha, which is outside the City, outside the Temple. And it is at Golgotha where, in the words of Paul, ‘the Lord Jesus Christ...gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father’ (Galatians 1.3-4 NRSV).

The powers of this present age are at work against the freedom and love that are found in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These powers obscure our vision, and lead us to act in ways that will always perpetuate the delusion, and in this blindness we do not see the love of God in Christ, and live in the fog of ‘not-good-enoughness.’

Yet it is on Moriah that there is vision: “On the mount of the LORD there is vision” (Genesis 22.14 JPS). God speaks to us, ‘Here I am. I am ready.’ God incarnate enters the mess, reconciling what religion could never do. Unmasking the poverty of the world’s delusion, God sees us in order that we not only see him, but that we know who we are truly.

The antidote to humanity’s chaos is found alone in the One who ‘was born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children’ (Galatians 4.4-5 NRSV). Jesus becomes one with us, and absorbs in himself all our blindness and unbelief. And it is on the cross, submitting himself to the full fury of human religion, that we are shown the glory of ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1.29 NRSV).

‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided’ (Genesis 22.14 NRSV). And what has been provided in Jesus Christ is this: the promise given to Abraham that through his offspring all the nations will be blessed is fulfilled. When we stand at Moriah, we move from the darkness of ‘there and then’ into the light of Jesus ‘here and now.’

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Emmanuel Church Text for 2023

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: It is not uncommon to hear people describe times of difficulty as a test from God. ‘God is testing me through this.’ Discuss how such circumstances may be more effective for growing in faith rather than a life seemingly without difficulty.

2: God tests, but does not tempt (see James 1.12ff). How do you discern the difference between testing and tempting?

3: Think about the word, ‘*hineni.*’ I am ready. Here I am. Have there been times in your walk with God that, like Abraham, you said, ‘Here I am,’ before knowing what God was asking of you?

4: God is not like the other gods. Discuss the difference between God and the gods of this age.

5: What are ways that Christian and/or denominational traditions get in the way of us being able to 'see' God?

6: Trust in God is radical and risky. Could your faith be described as radical and risky?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD

P 01277 632120 E Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org W Emmanuel-church.info
FB Emmanuel Church Billericay T EmmanuelCM12 YT Emmanuel Church Billericay

Part Of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry