

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Isaac**

#### **Lesson 1: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

##### **Reading**

Genesis 21:1-8.

##### **Miracle Birth**

If there was ever a miraculous birth, it was Isaac's. His mother Sarah was barren and over 90 years old before she became pregnant and his father Abraham was a 'mere' 100 years old.

They had longed for a child for decades but nothing happened. Yet one of the hardest things to have lived with was the promise from God that they would have offspring that would be more numerous than the stars in the sky.

They had even resorted to trying to help God achieve His plan by allowing Abraham to sire a child by Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant. That had been both successful and a disaster. Successful in that Hagar produced a son, Ishmael. Disastrous in that it was not within the plan of God, and led to jealousy, hatred and eventually vehement animosity. Hagar and Ishmael were expelled from the family and were never included in the promises of God and the subsequent lineage of Abraham.

Just imagine for a moment being Abraham and Sarah. The long-awaited promise from God had proved right and trustworthy. What joy and wonder would have been theirs. God had chosen Isaac's name and it means – laughter – and Abraham and Sarah would have been basking in that joy.

We are all very protective of our first child, aren't we? It's a first for us and so we do everything 'by the book' and rush forward at every cry and listen for every murmur. How much more vigilant would Abraham and Sarah have been? I doubt if Abraham left his side, except for emergencies and refreshment breaks – and then he would be back on 'duty' as soon as possible.

No doubt they would be showing him off to all their friends and the merchants passing by. Yes, his was a miraculous birth and a very privileged childhood. He was the apple of Daddy's eye and Mother's pride and joy.

As he grew up I'm quite sure he was like Abraham's shadow. There beside him watching all he did, listening to all he said and taking in all the details of his growing responsibilities.

He'd also be learning all that Abraham knew of God – the Creator of the world and the One who walked beside Abraham and had brought him to this place and promised the great things of the

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 1 continued: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

future. Abraham would have told him of the promises and his part in their fulfilment and, above all else, the need to trust God and to follow His instructions to the letter.

Yes, he would learn his destiny; the reason he was born and of his miracle birth.

#### **Isaac would say to us today...**

Every birth is a miracle. No matter who your parents are or how old they are, find out what your purpose is on earth – then do it with God's help.

#### **Prayer**

*Father, thank you for my parents. Thank you that my birth was a miracle and You treat me as a miracle baby. Help me receive Your love and grace and to mature and fulfil the plan and purpose for which You brought me into this world. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Psalm 139; Jeremiah 1:1-10; Luke 1:5-17.

#### **Questions**

What is your life's mission?

What are your spiritual gifts?

What goals have you set for this year?

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 2: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

#### **Reading**

Genesis 22:1-14.

#### **Obedient Son**

This passage of Scripture is one of the hardest to understand. Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? The gods of the surrounding nations may demand that, but Jehovah would find that abhorrent. So was Abraham mistaken?

God had delayed Isaac's birth so long that both Abraham and Sarah were as good as dead when he was finally born – so why demand his life now? If Abraham did sacrifice Isaac, how on earth would all the promises be fulfilled? Isaac was the only way the promises could be realised - short of yet another miracle – and what would be the point of that? It was totally illogical. What was God up to? Or indeed, what was Abraham up to?

Then there was Isaac. He was no longer a baby or indeed a child. By now he was a grown man. Commentators suggest anywhere from a teenager to someone into their mid-30's with a consensus around 25 – 30. The Scriptures certainly suggest a fit person who was able to carry the wood for the sacrifice.

Why was Isaac so compliant? Surely he could have told Abraham 'where to go'? He would have been a whole lot stronger and fitter so any struggle would certainly have meant Isaac would have gone free. There is no record of any struggle, argument or disobedience – just willing acquiescence? Why?

For some reason he was being tested just as much as Abraham. Maybe God wanted to make sure that Isaac didn't just live on a second-hand faith. He had to find out first-hand that God is a good God; One you can trust and whose promises are everlasting.

Isaac trusted both Abraham and God. He went through all the emotions associated with the fearsome demand. I'm sure he had doubts about his father, His Heavenly Father and the action they were all taking; yet he was obedient to the very end. How did he deal with the potential mistrust and hate towards Abraham? How did he deal with the utter disgust in a God who made such vitriolic demands? How did he deal with the fear of pain and finally death?

Probably in a similar way to the Son of God. Both Isaac and Jesus heard the plan and knew they were to be sacrificed –not for their sins but to satisfy a Holy God.

Both walked up the same hillside – Moriah to the place of sacrifice. Both as sheep led to the slaughter without saying a word. Their trust in their Heavenly Father must have been tremendous – their obedience without question and their submission complete.

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 2 continued: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

Isaac helped build the altar, lay 'his' wood upon it and then allowed Abraham to tie him up and lay him on top of the altar. No shouting, scoffing, pleading or screaming – simply resigned to the point of the knife. As with the Son of God – it wasn't the rope that kept Isaac on the altar any more than it was the nails that kept Jesus on the cross – no, it was love for Father, and surrender and obedience to the Father's will.

However, there are differences - firstly, Isaac was 'saved' by a ram – pointing forward to *the Lamb of God who (took) away the sin of the world* and was not substituted; secondly, Jesus didn't die for His sins but for yours and mine – and Isaac's.

Isaac was delivered – miracles always follow obedience. The blessings poured forth on both Abraham and Isaac and eventually upon us as well. Thank God for Isaac!

#### **Isaac would say to us today...**

You will only experience the miracles of God first-hand when you are totally submitted and obedient to His will.

#### **Prayer**

*Father, the greatest expression of obedience we know was that of Jesus, who gave His all to fully complete Your will. Please help me to become more and more like Jesus, whatever the cost. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Psalm 2; Hebrews 1:1-13; 1 Samuel 15:7-26; Isaiah 53:6-7.

#### **Questions**

What does it mean for you to be totally submitted and obedient to God's will?

Why is submission so important?

Why is obedience so important?

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 3: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

#### **Reading**

Genesis 24:1-4 & 52-67.

#### **Arranged Marriage**

The record of this event is wonderful, isn't it? It follows hard on the heels of Sarah's death. She lived to be 127 years old. Abraham would have been devastated – they had been through so much together – and she was a fabulously beautiful woman – both externally and more importantly internally.

Isaac doted on both parents but particularly missed his mother's tender love and compassion. She was always there for him through all his growing up and entrance into manhood. He would have felt part of him died when she passed away.

Abraham was determined that his son and heir would not marry a local pagan girl – although that might have seemed sensible for securing territorial rights and possessions. No, his son would marry a girl from his own tribe - a Semite.

However, by this time Abraham was even older... Being unable to travel himself, he enlisted the aid of his most trusted servant – Eliezer of Damascus. Simple task – just go and find the perfect wife for my son and heir – the heir to all the promises of God – and try not to be away too long!

Eliezer asked, "*What if she doesn't want to come? Do you want me to take Isaac back there?*" "*No way,*" replied Abraham. Then he added that God would go before him and sort the wife out for him.

Eliezer had learned a thing or two from Abraham over the years. One was not to argue; the other was far more significant - that Abraham had a relationship with God that was as unusual as it was simple and yet absolutely indispensable.

Thus it was that once Eliezer arrived at Nahor he decided to *cheat* and thereby fling himself upon the grace of God. He prayed a very specific prayer – a bit like the one Gideon was to use later – and to his utter astonishment, God answered it before he had finished praying!

Instead of listing all the qualities he would look for in a wife and asking God to make sure the girl satisfied at least 80% of the 'shopping list', he asked that when he asked her for a drink, she would not only give it to him but offer to water his camels as well.

Good thinking. How many camels did he have? How thirsty would they be after all his travels? How much did each one need to have its thirst quenched? Any girl prepared to do all that must be some girl indeed. Her name was Rebekah.

Not only did she do all that, but to cap it all, she was prepared to drop everything, leave her folks

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 3 continued: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

behind and return with Eliezer at once. Indeed, some girl.

Isaac was out in the fields meditating. (Makes you think of Jesus up in the mountains, doesn't it?) He saw her entourage coming and went to meet her.

In typical submission to his father, he accepted Rebekah and took her as his wife. The Scripture said – *he loved her* – after she became his wife. What does that suggest? His love was from a choice he had made. He accepted her as his wife and so loved her. And the record goes on to say so... *he was comforted after his mother's death*.

The choice was made and the blessings and benefits followed. How often we see that love grows in a God-ordained marriage – because the two decided to love one another... more.

#### **Isaac would say to us today...**

Love is a choice. If you want what is best in life, ask God to reveal His spouse for you. Then accept your spouse and decide to be totally committed to him/her for the rest of your life.

#### **Prayer**

*Father, thank You that You are into marriage. Please forgive me for taking my spouse for granted so often. Help me cherish him/her as a gift from You and to make sure we develop our wonderful relationship together. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Matthew 19:3-12; Hosea 3; Song of Songs 4.

#### **Questions**

How do you understand the 4 Greek words for love – Agape; Philia; Storge & Eros?

What does - *Love is a choice* - mean?

What are the hallmarks of a marriage 'arranged/made in Heaven'?

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 4: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

#### **Reading**

Genesis 25:19-26.

#### **Supportive Husband**

It takes a while for barrenness to show. It is quite obvious that Isaac loved Rebekah, but it is also suggested from the record in Scripture that their love continued to grow throughout their married life.

It is quite probable that for the first few years of their marriage they just enjoyed each other's company. They would have a lot of discovery to make about each other and about sharing their hopes and dreams. Isaac would have spent many hours telling Rebekah of all his experiences and what God had promised about their future.

However, marriage is also the way of continuing the family line; sooner or later Isaac and Rebekah would have started trying to have a family. You can understand their sadness at finding out that Rebekah was barren.

Barrenness was a valid reason for divorce or at least the acquisition of more wives and or mistresses. Just imagine the pain Isaac would have felt realising that the wife who had been arranged for him was infertile.

She wasn't his choice – she had been 'forced' on him and had proved to be a dud! So what did Isaac do – scream, mope, become sullen and distant? No, he interceded for his wife. Wow, what a man!

He managed to see beyond his own needs and despair to see the pain in Rebekah's heart. Instead of dancing up and down in frustration and selfish misery, he sought help. Where did he go? To his Father God.

The One who had provided his miracle birth. The One who had rescued his life from death, there on the mount of Moriah. What name did Abraham give God that day? Jehovah-Jireh. What does that name mean? God will provide!

Yes, God provided a ram, a substitute sacrifice that day. But He also gave Isaac his life. He provided the answer that Abraham and Isaac needed. He answered their unuttered prayer by providing the miracle Himself.

If God could *provide* Isaac, and if God could *provide* a ram – could God not do it again and *provide* a son through Rebekah? Isaac would not stand by and do nothing. He would approach and ask His Heavenly Father for help.

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 4 continued: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

His heart overflowed with compassion and he prayed to God for her. And God heard his prayer and *provided* two sons!

Isaac stood in the gap for his wife. He was going to do everything he could to see her reach her destiny in God. What about you? Will you do the same?

#### **Isaac would say to us today...**

If you want to be married to a princess – treat her like one. Understand her needs and desires and then intercede on her behalf before God.

#### **Prayer**

*Father, Your Word tells us that Jesus gave up everything for His Church and that is the way You want us to love and serve our wives. Please help us reflect Jesus in our marriages more and more. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Proverbs 31; Ruth 3; Ephesians 5:22-33.

#### **Questions**

How well do you treat your spouse?

When did you last go out on a 'date'?

What could you do to improve your relationship?

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 5: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

#### **Reading**

Genesis 26:1-33.

#### **Hardworking Farmer**

Isaac wasn't perfect. He was human, just like you and me; however, like King David, he had a heart after God. After God told him not to go down to Egypt despite the local famine, Isaac kept his family in Gerar, in Philistia.

However, like his father Abraham before him, he lied to the Philistines about Rebekah, telling them she was his 'sister' rather than his wife - hoping that the same deceit that Abraham had used would save his life – regardless of the humiliation and possible danger to Rebekah.

Ironically, his deceit was uncovered by his behaviour with Rebekah. Loving her so much he could not restrain his passion; his actions were seen and correctly interpreted. He was summoned by King Abimelech and reprimanded. However, God made sure that the result was that both Isaac and Rebekah were protected by the King's decree, that neither of them should be molested for fear of the death sentence.

Again God was gracious - and as with Abraham - instead of being punished, Isaac continued to dwell in the land and became extremely wealthy through hard labour and good farm management – *and* the Lord's blessing.

Being a diligent farmer, he not only sowed liberally but also went around unstopping the wells Abraham had dug which the Philistines had filled in. When Abimelech told him to move on; he didn't argue but graciously did so, continuing to restore the wells the Philistines had ruined – renaming them the names Abraham had originally called them.

The Philistines pursued him until he reached Rehoboth, when at last he felt freedom to move around as he pleased. He eventually arrived at Beersheba and settled there. There he met with God who reiterated the Covenantal promise.

In the end Abimelech arrived to strike a mutual non-aggression Treaty. The thing that had impacted the Philistine King the most was that Isaac had shown so vividly that he trusted and served the living God. That was evident in both his working as unto God and the obvious fact that the Lord was continuing to bless him in every way.

As we read in Proverbs 16: 7 - *"When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies live at peace with him."* - maybe it was Isaac's life that was the inspiration behind this verse.

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

Lesson 5 continued: Isaac – The Faithful Man

As we consider Isaac's lifestyle, we see a man with a quiet confidence in God. He never forced his way on anyone else but rather went quietly about his work and life's mission, seeking to live in peace and harmony with those around him.

Rather than seeking conflict or responding to false accusations or irrational demands, he meekly departed in peace. So far as we read, he never held a grudge or demanded retribution. He was a man of peace; secure in himself and in his position in God. In the end, his hard work, and his gentle and meek spirit paid dividends.

### **Isaac would say to us today...**

Life is hard. There is no easy way to real success. Put in the hard yards, trust the future to God and you will reap the harvest due to you.

### **Prayer**

*Father, the cry of this world is economise and spend for today. Help us remember that we are born for eternity and that what we do on earth is just the prelude to our eternal destiny. Help us to invest generously and wisely in Your Kingdom, so we receive a bumper harvest for Your glory. Amen.*

### **Additional readings**

Matthew 13:1-23; Matthew 25:31-40; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

### **Questions**

Why do we think life is supposed to be easy?

Why do we need to be generous in order to reap a great harvest?

How are you sowing into the Kingdom of God and His harvest?

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 6: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

#### **Reading**

Genesis 27:18-40.

#### **Spiritually Astute Father**

I guess we could look at Isaac's life and feel that although it started so well it ended in tragedy with Isaac being betrayed by both Rebekah and Jacob. Yet, if we stopped there we would be mistaken.

Never forget God is pleased to call Himself – *The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob*. God saw Isaac's heart and gave him his true desire – to continue the outworking of the promise given to his father Abraham and confirmed to him at the time of the famine... *I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on the earth will be blessed.*

He wanted nothing more than to impart his spiritual blessing to the one who would be the leader of the next and subsequent generations. He was not primarily wanting a meal of venison – he wanted to mark a very significant day by creating an unforgettable atmosphere, which would stick in his son's memory forever.

Whilst this was not the moment of his departure from this life, the time had come for him to release his son into the role for which God had brought him into this world. He was a grown man and would from that moment on be considered the definite heir-apparent.

The normal course of events would be that he would get a wife and establish himself and his own dynasty, and consequently the intercourse between father and son would diminish and become spasmodic and increasingly rare.

Before that took place, Isaac wanted to establish in his heir's mind the importance of who he was in God. He was to be the next in line to the promises of God and he wanted to pass that blessing on personally and specifically to him.

He had imparted all he knew by being a role model every day, but there was one last thing to do. He wanted to completely discharge his duty to his heir, knowing from that moment on the baton had been passed on successfully, and God would honour that action so he, Isaac, could rest confident in the knowledge that God would do the rest.

Oh how thrilled he would have been to have completed the task. As we read the blessing again, we see that he didn't skimp, did he? It's of little surprise that when Esau eventually returned and asked for the blessing, Isaac had to say – *there's nothing left – I gave Jacob everything.*

We find that hard to understand in the West, as we would just repeat what we had said before; but

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Lesson 6 continued: Isaac – The Faithful Man**

for a Jew, words are like arrows – once they have left their mouth, they go to reach their target.

Yes, Isaac blessed Jacob with everything – the full spiritual blessing. And with that Isaac completed his role in life and successfully passed on the baton to the next generation. It's an example for us all and our children to follow.

#### **Isaac would say to us today...**

There is more to life than what you see in front of you. Yes, include those things in your Will but never forget you have a responsibility to pass on a spiritual heritage to your children, whilst at the same time committing them to God's omnipotent and omnipresent care.

#### **Prayer**

*Father, help us to realise the significance of a Godly spiritual heritage. Help me model true Christianity to my children so they realise they too need a personal and vibrant relationship with Jesus. And help me to bless them spiritually whilst releasing them to Your loving care. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Genesis 26:1-6; Genesis 48:11-22; 2 Timothy 2:1-7.

#### **Questions**

Why is it important to bless our children?

What spiritual heritage will you pass on to your children?

How and when should we release our children to God's care?