

## Abraham Tested

cf. Genesis 22 vv. 1-19

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," replied Abraham, "but I'm in the bath just now, you couldn't pop back later?"

<sup>2</sup> God popped back again as he returned from the shops. Then God said, "Take your son, your *only* son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

When Abraham told his wife Sarah what God had told him to do she was furious. She said to him, "You are sure it was God and not someone from one of those Sects, they're always coming by encouraging us to join naked sex communes, or not eat chocolate or whatever."

"No, it was definitely God," said Abraham.

"Are you sure? Describe him for me," asked Sarah.

"Well, he was big, and *very* white, like he'd been washed all over in an non-biological washing-powder at a low

temperature. And he was sitting on a fluffy cloud and he wore this incredibly long flowing beard."

"It definitely sounds like God," Sarah said as she mused over the details. "You'd better do as he says then dear, but you can hardly tell Isaac that you're taking him into the mountains to kill him. We'll have to come up with a plan."

<sup>3</sup> Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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.

"Where are we going Dad?" asked Isaac.

"Ah! Well...," began Abraham, beginning to sweat. "You see, the thing is, em..., well it was your eighteenth birthday just the other day and since I was too busy planting a tamarisk tree at the end of chapter 21, em... to celebrate, I thought that maybe we could go up to, em.. Moriah and get you slaughtered, er.. toast you, er.. I mean get drunk, we could, er..., have a drink or two as, you know, father and son. Then we could have a bonfire, cook some lamb and some sausages, worship God, you know, er... that sort of thing. A

bit like a..., a..., a Scripture Union camp. Now wouldn't that be .... er, nice?"

"Are you alright Dad, I mean you sound like Hugh Grant in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*?" said Isaac.

"Yes, I'm fine, now can we go?" offered Abraham.

"But there isn't a pub at Moriah," questioned Isaac.

"Em..., yes there's a new one, em..., it's called the er..., Ram's Head." said Abraham sweating slightly and glad that he'd packed an extra underarm roll-on; this was going to be a nerve-wracking experience, he was sure of it. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He was glad that he'd brought his binoculars. <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 come back to you."

<sup>6</sup> Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac (which was a bit ironic since he was soon going to be placing his son Isaac on the wood!), and he himself carried the the fire (it was a box of Original Cooks's Safety Matches) as well as 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.

"I can't help noticing that the fire and the wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the bonfire?"

<sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the bonfire, my son. And if he doesn't then we'll just have to have a pub lunch." And the two of them went on together.

Meanwhile, back home in the tent, two of Isaac's friends, Darren and Alan, came round to play.

"Can Isaac come out to play?" asked Alan, once Sarah had answered the tent-flap.

"Oh I *am* sorry," said Sarah, "but you've missed him. His father has just taken him up the mountain to kill him."

Darren and Alan left in a hurry.

<sup>9</sup> When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.

"Well my, my," said Abraham to his son, Isaac, "it looks like you were right, there is no pub here after all. Look, hold still! I'm trying to tie you up."

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.

Isaac, to say the least, was a tad worried. "This is supposed to be my 18th birthday party NOT my stag night!"

<sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied. "I'll be with you in a minute I'm just sacrificing my son like you told me to."

<sup>12</sup> "No, no, no, no, no," said the angel (like that dog in the Churchill advert). "That is what I'm calling about. Do not lay a hand on the boy."

"Will a knife do? Can I lay that on him?" enquired Abraham.

"Do not do *anything* to him. I now know that you *really* trust God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your *only* son."

<sup>13</sup> Abraham looked up and there in a thicket (for they were in the middle of a cricket pitch) he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over, freed the ram's horns and let it go. "Now, back to the sacrifice," said Abraham.

"That ram was *for* the sacrifice," said the angel.

"Bugger!" said Abraham, and he and Isaac spent four hours thicketting. (Thicketting is like fishing but instead of

trying to catch fish in a net, with thicketting you attempt to catch male sheep with a hedge - it's quite a popular sport in New Zealand.)

He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Isaac was relieved! <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. Everybody else called it Burger King. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." If you say, "Double lamb cheeseburger with extra onions, lettuce and no gherkins." The LORD will reply, "You got it!"

<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time - this time it wasn't at peak rate and only cost the price of a first-class stamp - <sup>16</sup> and said, "It's good to talk!"

Then he said, "I swear by myself,.."

"Well that's a bad habit you'll have to stop," said Abraham.

"Let me finish," said the angel. "I swear by myself, declared 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 all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me in offering your only son. And it also gives me an idea for the plot of my new book which I'm provisionally calling "The New Testament".

<sup>19</sup> Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba. So that was good that he returned there wasn't it. Because if he'd returned anywhere else he'd have been lost and Sarah would still be waiting for him to come home. And talking about Sarah (nee Sarai) the Bible doesn't mention anything about her being pleased to see Isaac back safe and well, but I bet she was really very delighted.

And, for as long as they stayed in Beersheba, whenever Darren and Alan came round they always gave Abraham a funny look and stayed well away from him; and he never understood why.