

The faithful of old— studied by the young

Isaac: the son of promise

Seb Greenwood

THOUGH ISAAC'S birth is recorded in Genesis 21, there are several mentions of Isaac before. In Genesis 17:15-19 we read of God's promise to Abraham about the coming seed. God informs Abraham that He will bless his wife Sarah (Sarai at the time), that she will have a son, and that "kings of people shall be of her" (v. 16). God repeats His promise with further information. God commands Abraham to name his son Isaac, and informs him that His everlasting covenant will be established with Isaac and his seed. There is no explanation as to the physical way in which Abraham and Sarah would produce this chosen seed; God simply tells Abraham that it will definitely happen. In today's society, with God's very existence being questioned, it is comforting to know that God will deliver His promises. Isaac was born, just as God said he would be. If God tells us something through His Word, it will come to pass.

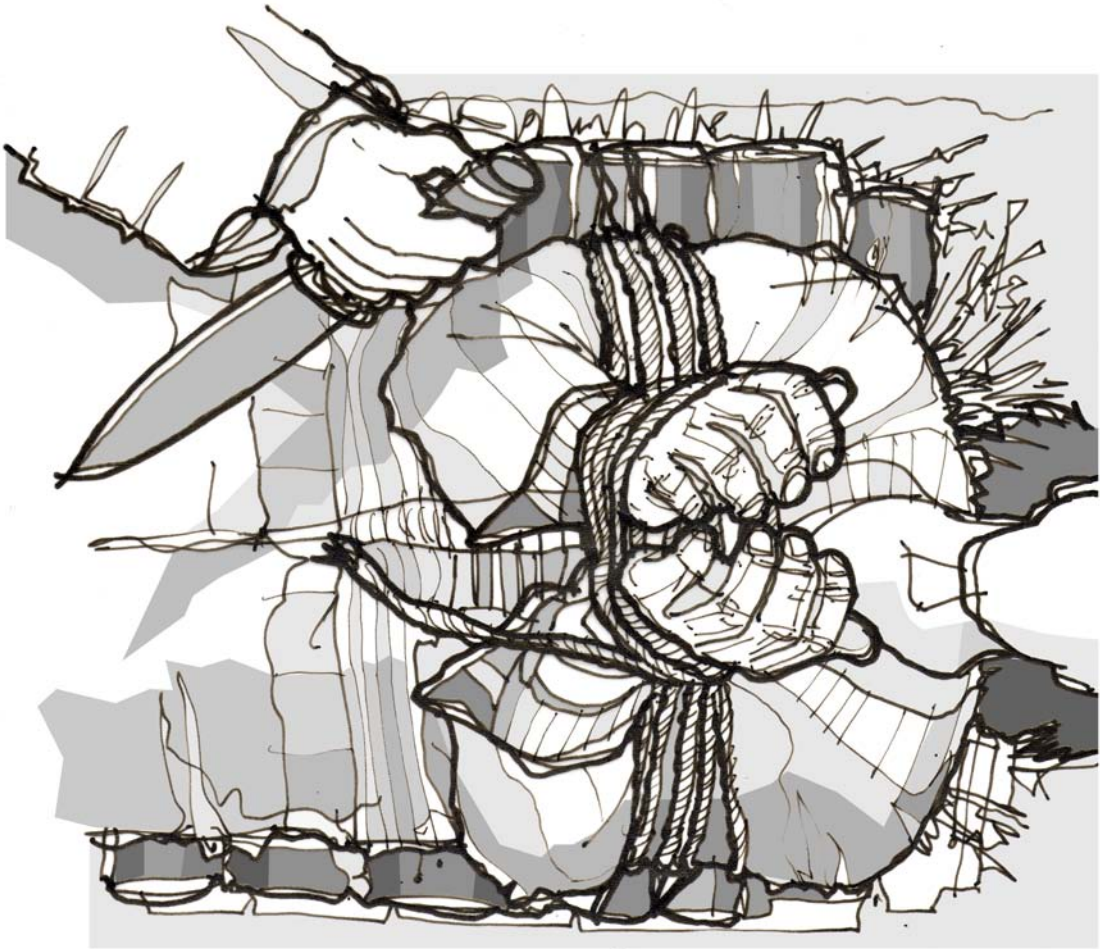
Isaac's name

The name Isaac means 'laughter', and it comes from a word found in Genesis 17:17, where we are told that Abraham "laughed". There is an interesting cross-reference to consider here. In Romans 4:19,20 the apostle tells us that Abraham, "being not weak in faith . . . considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God". This, therefore, clearly informs us that Abraham was faithful to God's promise. The laugh was a joyful one, full of glory to God; and this may well be the context in which Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day (see John 8:56). Verse 24 of Romans 4 goes on to say that faith in God is imputed to us for righteousness. We should thus take this example of faith from Abraham and use it to inspire us in our own faith. If we do, then God will count it to us for righteousness.

Now let's focus on Sarah's laugh. In Genesis 18:12 we read that "Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?". We can clearly see that this was not a laugh of joy or of happiness, but a laugh of disbelief. In addition to this, in verse 15, Sarah denies laughing, as she was afraid, which makes it very clear that she was not laughing for joy. Surely here is the reason behind Isaac's special name. Our Father sums it up when He (rhetorically) asks Abraham, "Is any thing too hard for the LORD [Yahweh]?" (v. 14). The answer is quite clear: no, there is not. However, by naming Abraham's son Isaac, God has given Sarah a constant reminder to have faith in Him and His promises, and has given us an example of Abraham's faith that we should try to follow.

We too need to have faith in the God of Abraham, Who wants us to receive these precious promises; for He loves us so much that He provided "His only begotten Son" (Jno. 3:16). The Scriptures make it plain that if we belong to Jesus then we become part of Abraham's seed and fellow-heirs of the promises; for "if ye be Christ's", says the Apostle Paul, "then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). We all sin and are worthy of death. So we might ask ourselves, How can we be heirs according to the promise? Ephesians 2:8 answers that question: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God". So during difficult times, where we really struggle with our human nature, and we feel down and depressed because we are constantly encountering struggles in our lives, we must remember: by faith we can be saved, and nothing is too hard for Yahweh.

Out of interest, in Genesis 26 we have the account of Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looking out of a window and seeing Isaac "sporting with Rebekah his wife" (v. 8). This word "sporting" is the same word as "laughed" in 17:17. So this word



Pictures: Mark Pennington

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clearly has connotations not only of laughter but also specifically here of a relationship between a man and a woman. Another reason therefore why God chose the name Isaac was surely to remind us of the glorious relationship between a man and a woman, which of course points forward to the wonderful marriage between Christ and his bride, the ecclesia. It is our hope to be a part of that future glorious (eternal) bride; so when we read Isaac's name let us look forward to when God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns to the earth to establish an everlasting Kingdom, and we, his bride, will be joined together with him for evermore, to show the glorious character of Yahweh to the whole world.

Isaac's birth

Genesis 21 records the birth of Isaac, and verse 2 says, "Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son

in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him". We can take great encouragement from this verse, and in particular the use of the phrase "at the set time". It is actually a reference back to 17:21 and 18:14 (where the same word is used in the phrase, "At the time appointed"). A similar phrase is used in the New Testament regarding God's set time to judge the earth and establish righteousness throughout the world. In Acts 17 we read that God "hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead" (v. 31). We can thus gain exhortation from the understanding that God works to set and appointed times. The Lord God is in control of this world, and if we remember this it should help us on our walk to His Kingdom.

The obedient son

In Genesis 22 we have a pivotal moment in Abraham's life, but also in the life of Isaac. We see quite vividly here that Isaac is indeed a powerful type of Christ, prefiguring what the Saviour would be prepared to do many years later at Calvary. The table below provides some parallels between Isaac and Christ.

makes it clear that, even before our births, God planned for us to be conformed to the image of His Son, who in turn was in the image of his Father. This is astonishing: God desired to manifest His glorious character in us even before we were born (see Ephesians 1:5 as further evidence)! We must remember this, and think of the faithful example of Isaac, who trusted in his father.

Isaac as a type of Christ		
Birth foretold by an angel	Gen. 17:19	Lk. 1:31
A name selected by God	Gen. 17:19	Mt. 1:21
Miraculous birth	Gen. 18:13,14	Lk. 1:35
"thine only son Isaac"—"His only begotten Son"	Gen. 22:2	Jno. 3:16
"laid it upon Isaac his son"—"he bearing his cross"	Gen. 22:6	Jno. 19:17
No resistance	Gen. 22:9	1 Pet. 2:23
Yahweh-jireh ['the LORD will provide']—God provided His Son	Gen. 22:14	1 Tim. 3:16
Prayerful entreaty of God	Gen. 25:21	Lk. 22:41,42; Heb. 5:7

One particular point worth highlighting here is the willingness that Isaac showed in obeying his father on Mount Moriah. Isaac did not struggle, nor did he question what his father was doing. He totally submitted, even in preparation for death. Look at 1 Peter 2:23 to see what Christ did; he behaved in the same way: "when he was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him That judgeth righteously". Therefore in Isaac's obedience we have a great example of faith too. He keeps the fourth commandment of the Law, and, despite the fact that it seems like a doomed situation for him (to say the least), he honours his father in every word.

We young people would do well to follow this example, particularly when we consider the small things (in comparison) our parents ask of us. Of course, there is also a spiritual lesson for us all. God is our Father in heaven, and we must regard Him as our parent, and respect Him completely and utterly. Sometimes we may struggle to understand the way in which He does certain things, and we can certainly sometimes feel abandoned by Him. However, we should never feel like that. We must remember that, if God loves us, He will chasten us (see Hebrews 12:6). Indeed, God has a plan for each and every one of us. Romans 8:29

The importance of prayer

No dialogue between God and Isaac is recorded until we arrive at Genesis 25:21, where we are told that Isaac intreated Yahweh for his wife because she was barren. This word "intreated" seems to be associated with a pleading, and is twice translated as a form of 'prayer' in the book of Job. How often do we take our problems to God in prayer? We can often see or feel things going wrong in our lives, and we can easily bemoan our sorry situation. When this happens next time, Isaac has showed us what we should do: we should "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). And, in response to Isaac's prayer, the narrative continues, "the LORD [Yahweh] was intreated of him [Isaac], and Rebekah his wife conceived". As a result of the faithful prayer of Isaac, Rebekah conceived. The lesson is that God hears our prayer and He will answer it; but for that to happen we have to pray in the first place. (However, His response might not be what we were expecting.)

The promises

Throughout the Genesis record it has been made clear that Isaac is Abraham's heir, yet it is not until Genesis 26 that the promises are specifically verbalised to Isaac. And there is something interesting to consider in the opening of this



'The LORD will provide'—God provided His Son.

chapter. There is a striking similarity between the situation of Isaac receiving the promises and that of his father Abraham when he too received the promises. Recall that in Genesis 12 God commanded Abram to go away from the country he was in and leave his father's house. The result of Abram heeding God's Word is found in verse 2 and onwards: the promises were given.

A similar situation occurs in Genesis 17: God commands Abram to "walk before" Him and be perfect (v. 1), and again the result is that Abram received the promises, and his name was changed to Abraham. So, when we come to the promises to Isaac in chapter 26, it is no surprise that God commanded Isaac to do something, and as a result of his obedience he subsequently received the promises. Moreover, Isaac was told by God not to go down to Egypt, but to dwell in a land of which God would tell him (v. 2). Of note, in Scripture we see that Egypt is a symbol of sin; for instance, in Isaiah 31:1 we read that we should not "go down to Egypt", but rather trust in "the Holy One of Israel". The message for us is therefore clear: we should not succumb to sin, but we

should war against the flesh (see 2 Corinthians 10) and be "obedient children" (1 Pet. 1:14). If we choose the Land over Egypt then we too will receive the promises; but the decision is up to us, just like it was with Abraham and Isaac.

Galatians 4 teaches us more about the life of Isaac, and it poses an interesting question for us in verse 23. Do we want to be like the offspring of Hagar—born after the flesh—knowing that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50)? Or do we want to be of Sarah—of Jerusalem—and be, like Isaac, a child of promise? The answer is an obvious one. In the previous chapter we are informed that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, in order "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). Hence, through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, we can free ourselves from the bondwoman of sin and be a servant of Christ and heirs according to the promise. This is the choice we must make.

Many of us may have already taken this step and been baptized into Christ, and we must be

mindful of the responsibilities we have as one of Christ's servants. 1 Peter 2:21 tells us that Christ left us a perfect example, and obviously Christ's example is one that we ultimately cannot live up to.

However, by grace we are saved through faith. We must never lose sight of this simple gospel

message. And for those of us who are not yet baptized, we have in Isaac an amazing example of faith and works, and we learn that through association with Jesus Christ we, like Isaac, can be part of God's family. We should laugh too, and rejoice as we walk together towards our Father's Kingdom.

“Behold the man!”

The titles and descriptions of Jesus of Nazareth

10. A righteous man

Greg Palmer

THE TITLES CONSIDERED in this article reveal to us that Jesus is a perfectly righteous man. Although burdened with the same nature of flesh and blood as us, he did not sin. His judgements are right. Who among us would have dismissed the rulers clamouring for capital punishment with the words, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone” (Jno. 8:7)? Who among us would have condemned the Pharisees so openly? While being merciful, he maintained the full measure of the righteousness of his Father, of Whom it was said, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). God has appointed His Son to be the judge on His behalf; shall not Jesus therefore do right? In considering these titles and marvelling at the righteousness of the Son of God, let us also rekindle our desire to be righteous like him.

Just One

This title is found twice in the book of Acts, in 7:52 and 22:14. The title means, ‘He who is declared to be right’. The context of the record on both occasions is similar. In Acts 7 Stephen uses the title to point out to the Pharisees (of whom Saul of Tarsus was one) that Jesus was right and they were not. In fact they were so wrong that they condemned and killed him. They continued being wrong by putting Stephen to death and persecuting the brethren, which Jesus took to be persecuting himself (9:4,5).

Saul continued as the principal instrument of their unrighteousness until arrested by the Lord on the road to Damascus. Recounting the words

of Ananias, in Acts 22:14 Paul states, “And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth”. The personal message was that Jesus was right and Saul was wrong. Saul had to face that fact, and hear the voice of the righteous Son of God.

The first act of obedience to Christ is to declare him to be right. This was too much for the Pharisees to take, because in so doing they would have made a declaration of their own unrighteousness. There is no better way to declare that Jesus is right than to believe and follow him.

Jesus Christ the righteous

These words occur in 1 John 2:1: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”. The word “righteous” is the same word as ‘just’. What a magnificent blessing to have as an advocate a man who is titled “Jesus Christ the righteous”! Do we have any doubts about his mediation? Is it possible for him to be unfair or biased? Of course not! The advocates in today's world are sometimes given titles or names to express their character. Names such as ‘fox’ or ‘weasel’ are not uncommon. How can a matter be decided rightly with such an advocate? Both Yahweh and we can safely trust in this mediator to be completely fair and representative of both because he is Jesus Christ the righteous. Would that such a title might be given to us!