

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Names of God in the Old Testament: El Olam and Jehovah Jireh

When my wife and I require a national newspaper we usually buy a *Daily Telegraph*. One of the sections that my wife enjoys reading is the birth announcements to see what names people are using. Many of the names are what you may call traditional and are probably names that have been in the family for generations. Other newspapers often give an indication of the latest "name" craze which very often depends upon the latest pop star or some other celebrity. I am not sure whether people, in our western society, consider the meaning of names these days. There are still some social groups in the world who take seriously the naming of children as to both the meaning of the name and the naming after some family member of a previous generation. This is found in the Bible especially in the Old Testament; names were important and sometimes indicated the character of the person.

Names are tremendously important when we consider the names of God. They are descriptive of what is true of God. Our talk this morning will cover the two descriptive names of God, "The everlasting God (El Olam)" and "The LORD who sees and provides (Jehovah Jireh)" from Genesis 21 and 22 respectively.

### The Everlasting God (El Olam)

In Genesis 21 there are a number of issues before we reach the point where Abraham worships "The LORD, the everlasting God (El Olam)". In order to better appreciate this high point in the life of Abraham we need to consider these issues.

The birth of Isaac was a very special occasion for both Abraham and Sarah. God had repeatedly promised that they would have a son. In general terms we find the promise in chapter 12. In chapter 15 the promise becomes more specific in that Abraham will father an heir. However, it is not until chapter 17 that the promise becomes specific to both Abraham and Sarah. The life of faith is long and not easy but through all the events and trials we are brought closer to the God who cares and who seeks our spiritual wellbeing. After many years, two very old people; Abraham 100 and Sarah 91 years, have the joy of seeing God fulfil His promise in their lives and Isaac is born.

In accord with what God required (see chapter 17), Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day. Sometime later, when Isaac is weaned, Abraham celebrates with a great feast, but there is discord in the household. Ishmael, the son by Abraham and a slave girl Hagar, is seen to be mocking the whole event. The events leading to Ishmael's birth was one of the low points in Abraham's life of faith. Abraham and Sarah try to hurry on God's promise by taking matters into their own hands. Surely it would be just as acceptable to God for Abraham to have a surrogate wife? They were impatient with God; nothing was happening. Are we like this? Faith states that God is in control, but this can make us feel uncomfortable as we like to be in control.

So we find that Sarah's joy is marred by Ishmael's attitude and this was not acceptable. Sarah demands that Hagar and her son be removed from the house forever, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." Naturally speaking, Abraham is upset as Ishmael after all is his son. What a dilemma for Abraham! However, God comes to the rescue and instructs Abraham to do as Sarah has said and refocuses Abraham upon God's promise that, "In Isaac your seed shall be called". Joy is restored to the family household.

We now see the compassion of God being clearly shown even in this situation. God instructs Abraham that He will take care of Ishmael, "Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed." Why did God protect Ishmael in this way? As we read the Bible, we find that Ishmael's descendants become antagonists of Isaac's descendants. Would it not have been better to let Hagar and her son die in the wilderness?

This whole situation was not the fault of Hagar or Ishmael. As a slave girl, Hagar was given to Abraham as a kind of second class wife. But, as a slave wife, she had rights. Ishmael being Abraham and Hagar's son also had rights but could be excluded especially now that Isaac was born. However, Ishmael's descendants teach us that we cannot escape our responsibilities and these may well have long term implications.

In verses 14-21 we see God's protection and provision for Hagar and Ishmael. Although they may have both considered the whole situation unfair they can clearly see that God is not unfair. An angel visits Hagar, shows her the

well of water so that they will not perish in the wilderness and God's promise is reiterated to her that her son will become a great nation. However, even though they are both blessed in this way, it does not appear to have had a response in their hearts to turn and believe in God.

All this time Abraham is living in the land of the Philistines. Although now living a separate life from the inhabitants surrounding him, Abraham is under observation. In verses 22-32 we find Abimelech, who appears to be the ruler of the Philistines, and his commander, Phicol, come to make a treaty with Abraham. They make a wonderful observation about Abraham: "God is with you in all that you do." This is a very challenging observation. Can it be said of me, of you, that "God is with you in all that you do?" Is my life, actions and words, observable as a testimony to God? Is my lifestyle an imitation of the life of Jesus? Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."

There were obvious difficulties between Abraham and Abimelech and these needed to be resolved, but Abraham was willing to make a pact of nonaggression. As Abraham was living as a kind of guest in the land of the Philistines, it was only right that he would behave in an appropriate manner. So they both enter into a formal agreement which binds Abimelech just as much as it binds Abraham. If either party broke the agreement then it was no longer a binding covenant.

After Abimelech leaves, Abraham is left alone and he now turns to his God. It is good to remember God when events turn out for good. Answers to prayer require a thank you to God.

"Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God", verse 33. Why did Abraham plant a tamarisk tree? Some translations have "planted a grove". However, according to the Hebrew word, it should be rightly translated "tamarisk tree". The tamarisk tree is unusual for a number of reasons. It has very thin, tiny leaves and is normally found in coastal areas. The tree has a root system which goes many metres deep to find fresh water. It is not a tree to provide shade and the wood is of little value. The tamarisk tree has the ability to survive in extreme conditions. If the roots go deep for fresh water, then it reminds believers of the need to be well rooted to find the spiritual refreshment that is only found in Christ. In this way believers survive in wilderness conditions.

The tamarisk tree is planted in Beersheba, the place where Abraham had dug a well. This was the same well over which Abraham had to rebuke Abimelech, seeing the Philistines had tried to take possession. So when the treaty was made, Abraham lays claim to the well by providing seven lambs to Abimelech as witness of ownership, see verses 25-32.

Now Abraham calls on, "The LORD the Everlasting God." The name LORD is sometimes translated Jehovah which means "the existing One or the One who always exists." This was dealt with in an earlier broadcast. This is doubly emphasised by the name, "The Everlasting God". So if we put the two thoughts together concerning the meaning of these names we have, "The existing One the God who is Eternal". This is the mighty God to whom Abraham now turns to worship. Abraham has much to give thanks for: God's promise has come true; Isaac is born; God has promised to bless Ishmael and make him a nation of people; and regarding the Philistines Abraham has now a covenant of peace. Truly God is good and with His people in all the circumstances of life.

### **The LORD will provide (Jehovah Jireh)**

A number of years pass between the events of chapter 21 and chapter 22. Isaac is a young man and no doubt will be both assisting his father in the management of the herds, as well as learning something of the character of his father.

Chapter 22 opens with the words, "Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." There are two things to notice in this verse, first "God tested" and Abraham's immediate response to God. God was seeking to test the faithfulness of His servant. This test was to be very challenging because to all appearances it destroyed God's promise as centred in Isaac.

When God speaks do we hear and respond immediately? Do we hear at all? God speaks to us through His word. When we read or listen, are we in the frame of mind to be looking for what God is saying? What is God's word for me today? Or do I just let it go over my head?

God spoke and Abraham responded. I suppose Abraham did not have to contend with the vast array of communication clutter that is in the world today; he only had the natural sounds of home and countryside.

So what is the test that God has for Abraham? "Take now 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 of which I shall tell you." If Abraham was shocked, surprised, saddened or had other emotional feelings, we are not told. This news from God

probably came in the night for Abraham rises early in the morning. No delaying tactics in case God changed His mind! If we receive a clear impression that God has called us to some activity, which we may think is totally inappropriate, do we delay or ignore the message? It was not so with Abraham and both Isaac and two servants are involved in this early morning activity. Provisions are taken and notice who has the job of carrying the wood for the sacrifice! Surely this was inappropriate? In John 19:17 we read, “[Jesus], bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.”

We will find that the event of chapter 22 has more than one meaning. The whole story of Abraham offering up Isaac is a wonderful picture of God offering up Jesus as a sacrifice. So when Isaac carries the wood it looks on to the time when Jesus would carry His cross to the place of sacrifice.

Abraham knew the place which God had mentioned, “the land of Moriah”. Bible scholars tell us that on the mountains of Moriah, where Isaac was supposed to be offered, Christ was crucified.

“On the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.” The journey was long and all that time Isaac carried the wood and Abraham thought about the sacrifice. Was this a long time? It was not as long as that which was in the heart of God from eternity. From eternity both the Father and the Son saw the cross. Peter reminds us, “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God”, 1 Peter 1:18-21. The Lord Jesus said when here in this world, “I am not alone, because the Father is with Me”, John 16:32.

Verse 5 states, “And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.”” There are two points to consider. First, this was a work for Abraham and Isaac alone. The Lord Jesus reminded the disciples that they could not be with Him regarding the cross, “Where I go you cannot come”, John 8:21. Then there is the confidence that Abraham stated that they were going to worship and come back again. Such a statement is inconsistent with offering Isaac as a burnt offering. The secret of Abraham was his faith as we read in Hebrews 11:17-19, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”

Abraham believed in the God of life and resurrection. Abraham’s God was the living God. There are many scriptures which speak of God as “the living God”, two will be sufficient to quote, 1 Timothy 4:10, “We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour”, and in Hebrews 10:31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” If we are not trusting in the living God then be afraid of falling into the hands of the living God on the day of judgement.

As Abraham and Isaac climb the mountain, Isaac asks an amazing question, “We have the fire and the wood but where is the sacrifice?” More amazing is the answer by Abraham and Isaac’s subsequent acceptance. “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering”, verse 8. So they both went on together: Abraham, by faith, having confidence in God and Isaac having complete trust in his father. Again we see beautifully a picture of the Father with the Son as the man Jesus in this world. The Father knowing all things and Jesus demonstrating as the dependent man His complete trust for the work He had been given to do. In John 18:11, Jesus says to Peter, “Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?” This was said in the garden of Gethsemane prior to the betrayal by Judas.

As with all types and shadows they do not fully show the whole event. When Isaac is bound and on the altar of sacrifice, right at the last moment Abraham is prevented from fulfilling the sacrifice. In verses 11 and 12, “The Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” So he said, “Here I am.” And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

Notice the similarity in the words with those in verse 1: the Angel called and Abraham responded. God who knows what is in our hearts knew the commitment in Abraham’s and had seen that commitment demonstrated up to the last. Let us remember again that there was no voice from heaven to prevent God’s wrath falling on Jesus who became the only acceptable offering for sin that God could accept for all time and eternity. There is no other way to be right with God.

Now Abraham looks round and sees, in a thicket, a ram caught by its horns. The animal had become entangled and was unable to free itself. So the ram is offered for a burnt offering instead of Isaac. This was the substitute for Isaac, but there was no substitute for Jesus. Jesus became our substitute; He took the believer’s place.

In verse 14, "And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide (Jehovah-Jireh). Jireh is an unusual word as it means both seeing and providing, which is a very apt description applied to Jehovah. Jehovah acted consistently with His name. For Abraham, the Lord saw and then provided the substitute sacrifice. This brings to our attention again that of the greater need that God saw and provided His own Son.

Abraham's faithfulness is rewarded by the reaffirming of God's great promise to him. Verses 17-18, "Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." This is a tremendous blessing, not just the nation of Israel but all nations will receive blessing because of Abraham's faithfulness.

Verse 19 brings to a close this test and we find Abraham only mentioned as returning to his servants. Why is this? As a picture of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus ascends to heaven after the cross and is not seen by the world until He comes in judgement to establish His kingdom reign. Hebrews 11:10 reminds us that Abraham "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Abraham in his pilgrimage was looking for God's kingdom and reign. Christians today also look forward to the time when our Lord Jesus Christ will reign.

Let me close with two verses from JG Deck's hymn

*We're not of the world which fadeth away,  
We're not of the night, but children of day;  
The chains that once bound us by Jesus are riven,  
We're strangers on earth, and our home is in heaven.*

*And soon shall we enter our own promised land,  
Before His bright throne in glory shall stand;  
Our song then forever and ever shall be,  
All glory and blessing, Lord Jesus, to Thee.*

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