

Intercultural Bible Study - Genesis 22:1-18

On 17 November 2010 I did a Bible study together with five students of *Canon Benaiah Poggo College* (Kajo-Keji, Southern Sudan). We looked at the story of God testing Abraham in Genesis 22. The students were (see photo, from left to right): Emmanuel, Lubajo, Lalaka, Moses en Michael.



Below you find a summary of our discussions about this Bible passage. The students are very much interested to hear how you in your context understand this story. If you can summarize your thoughts on this passage and send it to me, then I will pass it on to these Sudanese students. Please send your contribution to: [j.a.hasnoot \(a\) gmail.com](mailto:j.a.hasnoot@gmail.com)

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Instructions

- When you do this Bible study in a group, please make sure you have someone to lead the session (we want to hear from *everybody*) and someone to take notes (for the summary report).
- Before you read or share what the Sudanese students have said, you have to first study the text by yourself (yourselves). After that you can have the participants respond to the thoughts from Sudan: what do you think of these thoughts? What is different? What is the same?
- For your own study you could use these main questions: 1. What is the story about? 2. What is God telling us/me? 3. How do I/we respond?
- The first question (what is the story about?) you could break down in sub-questions like: What is happening in the story? Where is it? Who is doing what? Why does it happen like this? What is awkward or interesting? Is there something I don't understand? What do I like in this story?

About the story

- *God spoke to Abraham but how? (verse 1)*

God speaks to Abraham in a dream or he heard a voice. Today God still speaks to us in dreams, vision or through the Bible. We don't hear God speak to us anymore in an audible voice.

- *Why did he offer a sacrifice on a mountain? (verse 2)*

A mountain is in the Old Testament often a holy place. That is the place to sacrifice. It is also a place to meet with God. Like Moses on Mount Sinai.

- *Why were the donkey and the servants necessary? (verse 3)*

The donkey had to carry the wood and the equipment. Abraham took the servants with him because he is a rich man with a lot of wealth. Such a rich person must have servants with him.

- *Does the phrase 'on the third day' have a special meaning? (verse 4)*

No, it is just that the journey took three days. That is it.

- *Why did the servants stay behind? (verse 5)*

They were not allowed to see what was going to happen since the place for sacrifice was holy. That is not a place for servants.

- *Is Abraham lying to the servants ('and come back to you')? (verse 5)*

[convinced] Yes, he is lying! But he had to, otherwise the servants would have tried to stop Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. Abraham has to obey God. That is more important. Abraham lied before in Egypt (Genesis 12), then it was wrong.

(In relation to this Lalaka tells the fable about a village where the villagers were chasing a lion. A woman in the village was just cutting the (very) long grass when the lion asked her if she could hide him. The woman hid the lion under the cut grass and told the villagers that she had not seen the lion. When the lion reappeared from under the grass, he told the woman he was hungry and he ate the woman. Moral of the story: lying is really bad!)

- *Why was Isaac carrying the fire wood? (verse 6)*

Because he is the son! It is not the father's job, unless the son is very small.

- *What do you think of Isaac's question? (verse 7)*

This is a normal question. He is asking this question because there is no lamb for the burnt offering.

- *What does it mean to build an altar? (verse 9)*

That is making a little floor with stones. It is also done like that in our culture. People even build a small hut around the altar but then is not a burnt offering.

- *What do we know about the Angel of the Lord? (verse 11)*

One student: it is Gabriel. Another student: I think it is Christ.

- *Where does the ram come from? (verse 13)*

This is a miracle. God provides. All things are possible with God.

About the meaning of this passage (for us)

- *Abraham did what God asked him to do. Couldn't he have refused?*

Student A: No, he couldn't because he had to obey God.

Student B: Abraham knew on beforehand that God would provide the solution (the ram).

Student C: Abraham had received Isaac in a special way from God himself. God could rightfully take Isaac back, if he wanted. Abraham knew that.

- *The promise (verse 16) is following after the test. Why is that?*

Abraham is now qualified. God knows now that Abraham loves him deeply. That is why God is giving the promise after the test.

- *What sacrifice do we have to offer?*

A: We have to present ourselves as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Then God's blessing will follow.

B: Even though we have little ourselves, we have to share that with those who have nothing.

C: We must give up jealousy and proudness and love each other. We are one family.

- *How does God test us?*

A: When I for example have saved some money for something, it can happen that a family member becomes ill and that we need the money for medicines. That raises questions within me: can I really trust God? Do I really love him, even in these circumstances?

B: I have followed God's voice and became a deacon. But there are times that we have very little money. Then I sometimes question God: why do we have so little even though we do what God wants us to do?

C: Sometimes after sowing we see lots of crops grow in the garden of the neighbours but not in our garden. It feels like a test: Do I still love God in these circumstances or am I complaining?

- *What does this story say about God and about us?*

A: God blesses those who love him. We can trust God in every situation.

B: We see the salvation in Christ in this story. God gave us his only Son. He gave us the solution (Christ) for our problem (sin).

C: I must trust in God with all that I have, because it was all given by him. That is why I must be willing to give it back to him.