

**Text:** Hebrews 11:17-19, Genesis 22:1-19

**Title:** Faith Under Extreme Testing

**Truth:** Abraham's faith is an example for us to trust God in any test.

**Date/Location:** September 4, 2011 at FBC

## Introduction

We are trying to learn and remind ourselves about what the life of faith looks like. We saw in general terms that such a life:

- Is assured of the Christian's future hope;
- Is convinced of spiritual realities that are unseen;
- Is how the OT saints lived.

More specifically the Christian life of faith:

- Believes what God has done in the past (creation);
- Does what God expects in the present (Abel and Enoch);
- Obeys when God reveals the future (Noah);
- Follows God when He calls (Abraham);
- Submits to God when tested (Abraham);
- Dies still believing in God (Isaac, Jacob, Joseph);
- Disobeys civil authority when it commands sin (Moses' parents);
- Separates from sin (Moses);
- Helps the people of God (Rahab).

## Diagram

17 By faith **Abraham,** offered up **Isaac,**  
when he was tested,  
and **he** offered up **his only begotten son,**  
who had received the promises  
18 of whom it was said,  
[Genesis 21:12] "IN **ISAAC** YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED,"  
19 concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up,  
even from the dead,  
from which [the dead] **he** also received **him**  
in a figurative sense.

Notice the parallelism in verse 17.

## I. Potential Objections

1. The verb “offered up” poses a problem right away. He “almost offered” sounds better. But when we look at Abraham’s attitude, it is clear that he really had given his son to God. The context of Genesis 22 shows that God’s command was to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham had quickly become resigned to the fact that his son was going to be killed in the sacrifice to God.
2. What about Isaac being Abraham’s “only begotten son”? Ishmael had been born some years before so Abraham did have another child. Abraham and Sarah together, however, only had Isaac. Furthermore, the word does not focus on the order of birth or generation but rather on a unique relationship or “one of a kind.” You can do an interesting study on this word by reading Luke 7:12, 8:42, 9:38; John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18; Heb. 11:17, and 1 John 4:9. Sometimes the word refers to an only child; other times it refers to Christ Who is an “only child” but Who also shares a unique relationship to God the Father. Isaac was the son of promise and so was uniquely related to Abraham in that way.
3. Finally, this passage brings up the issue of human sacrifice.
  - a. Jeremiah 7:31, 32:35, and Leviticus 18:21 show that God never even considered such an abominable thing. Those sacrifices were murder of deceived or unwilling people (usually children) for the sake of pagan (false) gods. This makes the test of Abraham’s faith all the more shocking and difficult, as he probably knew of human sacrifice in the ancient near east and was repulsed by it.
  - b. However, God never intended to carry through with the killing of Isaac. That eliminates most of the tension with human sacrifice. Isaac was not a suitable substitute for anyone so his death would have been pointless.
  - c. When Jesus Christ was offered for us, it was a suitable, voluntary, substitutionary offering to the true and living God to pay a penalty for our moral misdeeds. It was sort of a human sacrifice, but not really in the true sense of the word. Jesus stood in our place, taking it on the chin for us instead of allowing us to do so. Such is not human sacrifice, but the heroic giving of life in place of another. This is like the parent who pushes a child out of the way of an oncoming car to safety, but dies himself in his selfless act.
  - d. Jesus died, but His was not a human sacrifice in the same sense as the child sacrifices of the pagan ritual.

## II. Genesis 22

1. Abraham received special revelation in v. 1-2. The Bible is God's special revelation to us.
2. Note the utter trust in and fear of God exhibited by Abraham to go about doing the sacrifice immediately ("early in the morning," v. 3), and even making an inconvenient journey to do so ("on the third day," v. 4).
3. If we read the story carefully, it is amazing to note Abraham's faith. In verse 5 he said "the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and **we** will come back to you." In my weak faith, I would probably say something like "We **might** come back, or might not!"
4. Isaac's question about the lamb in verse 7 was reasonable. It gave his dad another opportunity to express faith in God's provision of a lamb.
5. Abraham's raw obedience is shown in verses 9-10. He did what he was told and took up the knife with which to kill his son. Isaac also obeyed. He must have been a boy capable of running away from his dad by now.
6. That was the extent of the test (v. 11-12). God had seen Abraham's faith fully expressed and thus He cut the test short.
7. How could we miss the idea of substitution in the provision of the ram in the thicket (v. 13-14)? Abraham believed God would provide a substitute lamb, and God did.

## III. Hebrews 11:17-19

1. Notice the tension highlighted by the parallelism of v. 17. Abraham offered up Isaac. In light of the issue of human sacrifice, this was a huge test to drop on Abraham.
2. But on top of that, we have to realize that Abraham was the one who received the promises, and Isaac was the only child in whom those promises would be fulfilled (Romans 9:7). Review Genesis 12 and other passages in Genesis on this issue, and you will realize:
  - a. The whole Abrahamic covenant rides on the birth of the promised child Isaac.
  - b. Without Isaac, the promise of a great nation would be broken. Isaac had to be alive for that promise to come to pass, for Abraham knew that he in particular was the promised son.
  - c. Worse yet for us today, the promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham would be broken if Isaac died

then. You say, “Who cares?” If you read Galatians 3:8, you will see the significance of a broken promise on this point. A broken Abrahamic covenant means no salvation for the Gentiles, which probably includes you!

### 3. Abraham did this by faith.

- a. Remember faith is assurance of things hoped for and confidence (being convinced) about the unseen. Abraham was assured that God’s promises to him would be fulfilled. He was also convinced that even though he could not see how sacrificing his son was in accord with those promises, he still would follow God.
- b. Hebrews adds that Abraham believed that even if God did not provide that substitute, God would raise Isaac from the dead. God simply had to do so in order for the promises to be fulfilled, because Isaac had yet to be married and have any children that could carry on the promised line (Genesis 24-25). Abraham’s faith was strong!

### 4. Back to the idea of substitution

- a. We would naturally think that Isaac is a picture of Christ and Abraham of God the Father.
- b. The ram caught in the thicket actually became the substitute for Isaac. So, it becomes a picture of Christ as well.
- c. Let’s put together two ideas: first, that God will provide a lamb, and second that the lamb stood in a substitute role for Isaac. Notice that God provided his own substitute. In fact, that is always the case. We cannot provide any substitute for our sins or for our lives. Only God through Jesus Christ can do that.

## Conclusion

Abraham responded obediently to God even when the command God gave was seemingly unreasonable. Of course, Abraham thought that God would raise up the promised son from the dead, so that took the sharpest edge off the unreasonable demand of God to offer a human sacrifice. But that conclusion itself is an indication of deep faith.

Good faith in God does not exempt us from further tests of faith that are intended to prove the reality of our faith.

Compare Abraham’s response to a seemingly unreasonable command to our response to many of God’s totally reasonable directives (Romans 12:1-2). What a weak faith we have!

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