

Hebrews 11:17-19
“Abraham’s test”

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I. Introduction

The reference that the writer makes in Hebrews 11:17-19 is from the 22nd chapter of Genesis and this example of faith is from one of the most interesting chapters in the entire Bible for two reasons:

- **Theological:** First, it poses the question: Does God ever ask us to do something that is contrary to His own character and nature?
- **Spiritual:** Second, it asks us to ask: What spiritual implications does this story have as seen in the NT?

That is why we will be spending our time largely in Genesis chapter 22. But before we get there we need to ask ourselves why the writer asks this question to begin with? What was he trying to convey to the original readers about Jesus that was best illustrated in the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac as it related to trusting in Jesus as their Messiah? I submit to you that the reason for this illustration is that Abraham faced their same dilemma and choose to trust God. One of the reasons some of these Jew’s wouldn’t trust in Jesus is because they knew that Jesus had died and they couldn’t comprehend that He would be resurrected from the dead. So the writer pulls out a historical story of Abraham as an illustration of why they should believe in the resurrection.

II. Vs. 17 Passing the test

Vs. 17 The opening statement in Genesis 22 verse 1 is, “*Now it came to pass after these things*”. The purpose of this phrase is to get us to ask the question, “*After what things?*” The answer is after the events of chapter 21, which centered around God keeping His promises. We could write above verse 1 of chapter 22, “***After God showed that He always keeps His promises, He tested Abraham!***” The test was for Abraham’s benefit not the Lords. Even though the angel of the Lord says in verse 12 says “*for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.*” But the words, “***God tested Abraham***”, indicate that God knew what was in Abraham’s heart it was Abraham that did not yet know.

In light of what God instructs Abraham to do with Isaac how does this square with James 1:13 “*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*” **God’s tests are designed for us to pass satan’s are aimed at us failing.** This “test” was not a test that would **produce** faith it was one that **revealed faith**. Abraham was being asked **to place the PROMISER above the PROMISE and it is always the hardest form of idolatry to over come**. There are four things to note here in Genesis 22 verse 2:

1. “*Take now your son, your only son Isaac*”: God declared to Abraham that he only had one son not two. As **God never recognizes the offering of anything produced in the energy of our flesh.**
2. “*Whom you love*”: This is the first mention of the word love in the Bible and is a reference of a father’s love for his son. **Abraham is being asked to give the dearest love on earth he has to God.** Abraham will discover that he needed to love God more then even His blessings!
3. “*Go to the land of Moriah, ...on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you*”: Moriah was about 30 miles from where Abraham lived and it took three days for them to arrive. Moriah means “*chosen by God*” this mountain range would be the site of the temple built by Solomon and Herod. Geographically the temple mount is the lowest of the hills followed by the Mount of Olives the highest peak would be Calvary where Abraham took Isaac.

4. “*And offer him there as a burnt offering*”: The word’s “*offer and burnt offering*” come from the root word that means “to ascend or be high”. “*Slaying a sacrifice*” was implied God but He didn’t actually tell Abraham to slay His son. Though prior to the Mosaic Law, this type of offering was known as a “sin offering”.

So was God demanding a “human sacrifice”? The answer to this question is to interpret the difficult passage in light of the plain scripture. In Deut. 12:31 says, “*You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.*” **What God wanted was not Isaac’s life but rather Abraham’s heart.** And in obeying the Lord, Abraham showed to himself that Isaac “the promise” was not an idol in the way of God “the Promiser”. According to verse 3 there was not the slightest bit of hesitation on Abraham’s part:

- He sought no other opinions
- There was no argument from him towards God
- There was no fleece or compromise
- There is no mention of how he felt about this

Abraham’s obedience was not based upon how he felt based upon Heb. 11:17-19 it was based upon a five-letter word **TRUST!** He did not know how God was going to do it but He knew that God was going to do it and if need be God would raise his only son from the dead. The HOW and the WHY were not Abraham’s problem they were God’s. One persons put it this way, “*We must never doubt in the dark what God has told us in the light!*” There are three similarities to Jesus in Genesis 22:5 that the writer of Hebrews knew the readers would see:

1. Abraham saddles up the donkey, split the wood by himself. He did not ask his servants to do what God had asked him to do. In verse 4 we are given a great picture of the resurrection as Isaac was dead to him from the moment God had told him to offer his only beloved son and three days passed before they arrived at Mount Moriah.
2. Abraham calls Isaac a “*young man* or a lad” and in the Hebrew this word refers to a young adult. According to Genesis 23:1 we know that Sarah lived to be 127 and that she was 90 when Isaac was born which tells us that 37 years had passed from Isaac’s birth to Sarah’s death. I’m of the opinion that Isaac was 33 was years-old at this time which would makes him the same age as was our Lord at the time that He traveled this same hill.
3. Abraham tells two young servants stay while he and Isaac go up on Calvary to worship. Then Abraham says something very interesting, “*And WE will come back to you*”. No one had ever came back from the dead but Abraham believes that God is able. They are going to worship the Lord after the third day of Isaac who is 33 being dead to his father upon a hill called Calvary and Abraham says, “**Both of us are coming down the hill!**” The only thing impossible in Abraham’s eyes was that of God breaking his promise of 21:12, “In Isaac your seed shall be called!”

Based upon the Greek of Hebrews 11:17 and the word “tested” implies that Abraham met the test through faith BEFORE there was any visible evidence of God intervening. He

fully expected to offer Isaac and he fully expected God to raise his body from the dead out of ashes. His reason for this was that God had promised that the line of ancestry was to come through Isaac and in the offering it was Abraham's will that was sacrificed and died not Isaac as his was symbolic!

III. Vs. 18 Together

Vs.18 Genesis 22:6 makes it plain that Abraham didn't know that this was a test as he took the wood upon the back of Isaac, the knife in one hand and the fire in the other. Spurgeon noted that, "*Abraham took the knife up that hill, he did not forget it. As he took that knife and it was cutting into his own heart with every step they took yet he kept walking. Unbelief would have forgotten the knife or dropped it along the way but faith takes it and hangs on to it even though it is cutting your own heart deeper with each step!*"

We are also told that, "*the two of them went together*", the phrase in Hebrew means "*the two of them went in agreement.*" Isaac was 33 he could have easily overpowered his father. In verses 7-8 Isaac asks a very good question "*Where's the lamb?*" In the 13th verse we are told that a ram is caught in the thicket by its horns but a ram is not a lamb. Isaac understood that innocent blood must be shed for sinners to be able to approach God thus he asks about the provision for the sacrifice. Literally this phrase in Hebrew is "*God will see the lamb for Himself*". Hundreds of years later a prophet named John the Baptist looked out across the Jordan river where he was baptizing & on the bank of the river answered Isaac's question, "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29) You see there was another father's son who would walk up that same hill at the same age with wood upon His back only there would be no ram caught in a thicket as God would provide Himself a Lamb.

It was not the twine that held Isaac as it would not be the nails that would hold the Son of God. No it was the love of his father that placed him on the altar atop the wood. A Son lay a top the wood ready to be sacrificed and a father with a knife in his hand was ready to take his son but God will provide a sacrifice. Here is where we are going with

this picture: “*Abraham displayed his heart towards God by willing laying his son upon the altar, but God also displays His love towards a sinful world by placing His son upon the altar of the cross.*” As God spoke to Abraham in verse 12 “*now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.*” We too can say to Him, “**Now I know that you love me, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.**”

In Genesis 22:11 we see that Abraham was completely willing to act upon the Word of the Lord, as the angel of the Lord have to stop him. “*God takes the heart before He takes the action*”, He takes the “*will for the deed*”. God saw that Abraham was willing to obey no matter what the consequences therefore He did not require the sacrifice. **A lot of folks want to know the will of God before they act; but God wants to see if we will act before He will let us know in which way we are to do so!** Abraham was so living as if nothing but obeying the Lord was important.

Abraham had said to Isaac that “*God will see the lamb for Himself*” and **there was a ram in the thicket but there was also a Lamb there who would take away the sins of not just Abraham and Isaac but the whole world!**

IV.Vs. 19 The Lord Will provide

Vs. 19 Abraham “*concluded that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*”. It doesn’t say that Abraham concluded that if he didn’t do as God had said he would squash him like a bug! Abraham’s actions revealed that his offering of Isaac was in obedience to God’s word not because he thought if he didn’t God would punish him instead bit because it showed that Abraham understood God’s character of faithful, unchangeable, merciful and full of loving kindness. Hebrews 11:9 reminds us that Abraham “*dwelt in*

the land of promise as in a foreign country dwelling in tents". This tells us that things were not that which was in danger of being seated upon the throne of Abraham's heart and that the nearest to his heart, what was the child of promise. Think of the emotions that Abraham must have went through when he lifted his eyes and saw the ram caught by its horns in a thicket. Isaac was dead to him, thus the hopelessness of this moment was no doubt heavy upon his heart, he had believed according to the NT that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead and figuratively this is what God did in providing a substitute sacrifice. What's interesting to me is based upon Genesis 22:14 you would think that Abraham would have named this hill, trial hill or agony hill but instead he aptly names it "*The Lord will provide*" mount, or as the Hebrew renders it "*Jehovah Jireh*". This mountain bears the name that testified of God's presence and provision in providing the Lamb of God. Moses interjects saying that even during his day it was known as God's provision Mountain. People would go by that place and say, "*That's the place where God provided Himself a sacrifice*" not knowing that it would be the same place that God would provide His Only Son as our sacrifice for our sin. In 1 Cor. 15:3-4 Paul is writing to the Corinthians concerning the importance of the resurrection said, "*I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*". The key phrase is "*that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*". You can search the scriptures in the first testament and you won't find a reference to the resurrection happening on the 3rd day except for this one picture in Isaac. Isaac was reckoned dead the moment God gave the command to take him to Calvary and thus he was made alive "raised" after the third day.