

The Faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph

Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac (17 – 19)

This is one of the most significant events recorded in the Old Testament (Genesis 22). The author of Hebrews reiterates what the Genesis account says: this was God “testing” Abraham:

- God had pledged to Abraham land, offspring, and blessing (Genesis 12:1 – 3; 13:14 -16; 15:4 – 5, 16; 17:5 – 6, 15 – 21; 18:18; 21:10 – 12; 22:16 – 18).
- Central to these promises was the promise of offspring (Hebrews 11:18). The texts cited above make clear that the fulfillment of the promised offspring would come through Isaac, not Ishmael (Genesis 17:9; 12:7)
- In this sense, the author calls Isaac Abraham’s *only begotten* son, a phrase which in every other instance of its use in the NT refers to the eternal Son of God (*monogenēs*). The phrase is NOT used of Isaac in the same sense it is used of the Son of God. The author uses the phrase to emphasize the plain statement of Scripture: that it will be through Isaac only and not through Ishmael that God’s promises would be fulfilled.

After promising Abraham a son in his old age, and giving him Isaac through the miracle of conception and birth through the dead womb of Sarah, why would God make such a contradictory demand of Abraham to sacrifice the very one through whom He had promised His blessings?

Genuine faith is tested faith. God’s command to sacrifice Isaac “was a testing of Abraham’s submission or loyalty to God; it was a testing of his affections, as to whom he really loved the more: God or Isaac; it was a testing of his *faith*” [Pink].

God’s command was against Abraham’s natural affection for Isaac and his natural reasoning: to kill Isaac would make God’s promise impossible, and yet Abraham goes against his affections and his reasoning and sacrifices Isaac (note that our text says Abraham “offered up Isaac” (Hebrews 11:17) as if the sacrifice was carried out). What motivates him to go against reason? FAITH.

The timing of the test:

- After he had already undergone other great trials (Genesis 22:1 “after these things”) God puts an even greater trial upon him: the prospect of the death of his son, and that at his own hand!
- After he had experienced “the miraculous birth of Isaac, the great feast that Abraham had made, when Isaac was weaned (Genesis 22:8), and the casting out of Ishmael (Genesis 22:14)...his outlook seemed most promising” [Pink] – it was then, in a time of relative ease, that his severest trial came.

The passing of the test: “Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead...”

- By faith Abraham understood that the God who had made the promise was able to keep the promise even though every earthly circumstance declared the promise null and void.

- Abraham expressed this faith in God's promise when he told the young men who accompanied them: "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and *will come again unto you*" (Genesis 22:5).

"...from whence (death) he received him in a figure (type, picture)" (Hebrews 11:19)

The author intimates that the sacrifice of Isaac and his resurrection is an picture for us of another Father's sacrifice of His only begotten Son (Compare Romans 8:32).

Isaac and the Blessing of Jacob and Esau (20)

Recall what our author has already told us about the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises..." (v. 13). And when the author points us to the faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, he does so by recounting for us what they said on their deathbeds – when it was clear they themselves would not receive the promises in their lifetimes – but yet *while dying* still believed God's promises to them would be fulfilled.

- The Blessing of Jacob: Genesis 27:27-29
- The Blessing of Esau: Genesis 27:39-49

Jacob and the Blessing of Joseph (21)

Like Isaac, Jacob blessed his sons when he was old. As he lay dying, Jacob still believed God's promises would be fulfilled in the future life of Joseph's sons (Genesis 48:1-22).

Joseph and the Future of God's People (22)

While Joseph lay dying in Egypt, he reminds his hearers of the promised exodus from Egypt (Genesis 50:24-25), that God will deliver Israel from Egypt and bring them to Canaan. Joseph instructs that his bones should be carried out of Egypt to Canaan – an indication that, while he knew he himself would not live to see the promise of a land fulfilled, he believed the promise would be fulfilled. By faith God's promises were affirmed for him, even though his own circumstances denied the reality of those promises.