

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM, PART 2

~ THE ULTIMATE TEST OF FAITH ~

The following study is based on *Hebrews 11:17-18*, “17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called.”

This story is probably the greatest test of faith that God has allowed anyone to ever endure (except Jesus of course). Let's go back to the Genesis account.

Genesis 22:1-12

1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. 2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. 3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. 5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? 8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. 9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. 10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. 11 And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. 12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

1. Why did God have to test Abraham like this?

- Abraham had failed the previous test and growth of his faith. When God told Abraham that he would have a son, he went and committed fornication instead of trusting God and going to sleep with his wife. He took Hagar as a wife and caused division in his home.

- God comes back to Abraham 13 years later and tells him plainly that Ishmael is not the promised son and makes it very clear that through Sarah he would have the promised son.
- So Abraham goes back, repents and then sleeps with his wife and they conceive Isaac. But his obedience this second time did not make up for his previous mistake. God spoke directly to both Abraham and Sarah this time.
- So God had to come and test Abraham again, to see if he would really believe His word this time and not on anything else.

2. Why would this have been such a difficult test?

- *Genesis 17:19*
And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.
 - Remember God comes to Abraham and tells him that Sarah will have a son and his name will be Isaac. God specifically points out that Isaac is that one that will be the inheritor of the promise that He gave to Abraham at the very beginning. It is very clear!
- And now in Genesis 22, what does God want Abraham to do?
 - He wants Abraham to sacrifice him!
- How would you harmonize these two words from God?
 - Promise from God - through Isaac all the nations of the world would be blessed.
 - Command from God - sacrifice Isaac.
- They both come from the same God, yet they are in contradiction with each other.
- It would have been tempting for Abraham to reason with God.
 - God are you sure you want me to sacrifice him? Did I hear it correctly? How would you fulfill your promise through Isaac if he is dead?
- Surely God would not give Abraham another son because God said clearly that through Isaac, the promise would be fulfilled!
- But after God gives Abraham the command at the beginning of Genesis 22 to sacrifice his son, He is silent until Abraham has his arm stretched out with the knife in his hand ready to slay his son.
 - God didn't say anything more or less after He gave that command.
 - So if Abraham had just sat there and waited, he would have never obeyed, he would have waited forever!
- The command was clear, and so was the promise.
- It seems like God is contradicting Himself.
 - Isaac is the promised one. Now I want you to sacrifice him.

3. What did Abraham do?

- *Genesis 22:3*

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

- He just rose up and obeyed.
- He didn't wait, he didn't doubt.
- The command was clear.
- Even though he didn't know why God was asking him to do it, the command itself was clear.
- Sometimes we reason with God too much. Or we tell Him that we won't move until He makes it clear the reason why.
- God never gave Abraham the reason why he wanted him to sacrifice Isaac. And even if Abraham had asked why, God probably would not have answered.
- Let's learn to obey even though we don't understand the reason why. We must make sure the command is clear, but not necessarily the reason why.

4. What was it that gave strength to Abraham to follow through with God's command to sacrifice his son?

- *Hebrews 11:19*

Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

- Abraham believed in a resurrection. He believed that God would bring Isaac back from the dead after he sacrificed him.

5. Where did this thought come into his mind about God resurrecting Isaac?

- Firstly, it was the only way that Abraham could harmonize both of these words from God:
 - Isaac is the promised one.
 - Now sacrifice him.
- If Isaac was the promised one, and God wants Abraham to sacrifice him, then the only thing that Abraham could think of for this to possibly come true on both sides is that God had to resurrect Isaac after he killed him. But even then, who would want to go through with such an act?
- So where did this idea come from, about a resurrection?
 - In the first 21 chapters of Genesis, we do not see any resurrection. We don't see anyone coming back to life.

- So this was a new idea that Abraham had to think of, not something that he could go back in history and expect or ask God to perform again.
- Let's go to *Romans 4:19-21*
19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: 20 -- He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.
 - We read this in the previous study regarding Abraham and Sarah conceiving Isaac.
 - Even though there was not a resurrection of a full human body, there is a mini-resurrection.
 - You see, Abraham and Sarah's bodies were dead already. It was impossible from a human standpoint to have children anymore at their age of 99 and 89 years old respectively. But because of their faith in the Word of God, their bodies came back to life and they were able to have the promised son.
- So even though it was not a solid platform to stand upon because it was not the same situation that Abraham was facing now, he did have something to go based upon which was his own personal experience.
- Let's read *Romans 4:18*
Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.
 - This verse was in relation to Abraham and Sarah having Isaac. But it can also be rightly applied to his current experience of having to sacrifice his son.
 - "*Against hope*" - God's command to sacrifice Isaac was against the hope that Isaac was the promised son.
 - "*Believed in hope*" - Abraham still chose to believe in God and His word even though it didn't make sense. He still chose to believe in hope.
 - Where did this hope come from? From the very same source to which it seems like is going against it now. God's word against His own word.

6. We know that Abraham went through with the sacrifice as we read in the story. What was the final declaration that God made of Abraham?

- *Genesis 22:12*
And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.
- God said - now I know that you fear Me.

- It wasn't that Abraham was actually afraid of God, and that was the reason why he still sacrificed his own son.

7. What does it mean to fear God?

- *Ecclesiastes 12:13*

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

- To fear God is to keep His commandments.

- *Exodus 20:20*

And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

- If we fear God, we won't sin.
- What is the definition of sin?
- *1 John 3:4*

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

- Sin is the transgression of the law. So not sinning is the keeping of the law.

- To fear God means to obey Him.

- Faith and obedience go hand in hand.

- If you have faith in someone, it's because you trust them.
- And if you trust them, whatever they ask you to do, you will have faith in their word to follow what they want you to do.

- Example:

- We have faith in the doctor (especially if we have been going to that doctor for a long time) and they ask us to simply take this medicine and you will be better. Maybe you ask them, "What is in it?" And the doctor just says, trust me, once you eat it you will feel better. Many of us, without any further word will go home and just take that medicine even though we don't know what it will do. You see, we know the command (eat it 3 times a day after meals), but we don't know what it does except the doctor says it will make us feel better.
- We have such similar faith in the words of our parents when we are young. When they ask us to do something, we will just do it cos they said so. That is faith! Taking them at their word and their word only.

- Faith and action, or faith and works always go together. You cannot separate one from the other.

- God asked Abraham to leave his home country (faith), he left (action).
- God told Abraham that he would have a son with his wife Sarah (faith), so they went and slept together to try (action) and out came Isaac.

- Now God tells Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac (faith), Abraham gets up and obeys (action).

If we are to have the faith of Abraham today, we must have the same trust in the word of God that Abraham had. That even hoping against hope, he still trusted in the word of God.

Is our faith weak today? Do we doubt God sometimes that He loves us and knows what is best for us? Let us spend more time in His word so that we can strengthen our faith. Let us have a deeper relationship with God so that when it seems like God is not there, that we can trust that He lead us to this point and that He will lead us through it as well.

Let us trust His word in *Romans 8:28* which says “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*” It may not always be what we expect, but it will always be for our best good, to those that love God. And if we love Him, we will trust Him in spite of how we feel, or what we see ahead of us. ALL THINGS will work out for good.