

THE TEST OF FAITH

God tests people but He never tempts them (cf. James 1:13). From one angle God tests people, and from another angle Satan tempts people. In other words, a test can at the same time be a temptation. The difference is in the motivation. God seeks to PROVE and STRENGTHEN people in their faith, thus He tests them. However, Satan tries to get us to fall. God's desire is to prove us. Satan's desire is to disprove us.

Hebrews 11:17–19 (NKJV)

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called,"

19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Abraham grew in faith through the years. He was regularly tested along the way and sometimes he faltered. He waited 25 years for the promised son through Sarah. Finally at the age of 100 his faith was very strong, and the promised son arrived.

Now some years later when Isaac was somewhere between being a teenager and a young man (guesses are anywhere from age 13 to 33 – more probably about 17) God told Abraham, as found in Genesis 22, to go and offer up his son of promise as a burnt offering.

This was the ULTIMATE TEST! Abraham and Sarah had waited, and waited, and waited, and finally God had miraculously provided a son in their old age. And now after all that God told Abraham to kill him.

It was through this son specifically that God had promised an innumerable number of descendants. All of the promises that God had made to Abraham in terms of descendants were centered in Isaac. It was through this son that the covenant promises would be fulfilled. How could all this come to be if the promised son died? Abraham was sorely tested!

He had the promises in conjunction with this son, but now he had the command to offer him up as a burnt offering. Both were from the mouth of God.

Note the emphasis on Isaac being "***his only begotten son***". At this point Abraham had another son named Ishmael, but Isaac was not the "***only begotten son***". Only begotten does not refer to origin. Rather it means "***unique***" or "***one of a kind***".

Isaac was unique in that he was the only son of Sarah, and he was the only son who would inherit the covenant promises. He was the son of promise! This was a test concerning what was dearest and best to Abraham. This was a test of obedient faith!

Obedience is what defined Abraham's faith. Hebrews 11:8 says, "**By faith Abraham obeyed...**". That is characteristic of saving faith.

However, people of faith are not always consistent. Sometimes we falter in our faith. But God continues to work with us and build us. As Hebrews 12 says God disciplines all of his children so that He might build holiness into our lives (cf. Heb. 12:7-11).

Abraham at this point had been through a lot. There were successes and failures but now as an old man he is strong in his faith. But with that strong faith came a supersized TEST. However, there was no hesitation on Abraham's part. Immediately the next morning he headed out on a 3-day journey to do the God-commanded deed as seen in Genesis 22:3-4.

When it says that Abraham "**offered up**" Isaac, the sense is that it was as good as done. He fully intended to do it. Genesis 22:10 says that "**Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.**" In his will and purpose, he did in fact slay him.

This really was a difficult pill for Abraham's faith to swallow because innumerable descendants were promised through this child. This was the chosen seed (cf. Gen. 21:12). Now how could it be that God called for Abraham to sacrifice him? How could the promise then possibly be fulfilled?

Well, Abraham concluded that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead and thereby fulfill His promises through him.

"**Concluding**" is the idea of giving careful consideration and thoughtful reasoning to something. Abraham calculated everything that God had said concerning the promise as well as this command, and his conclusion was that in order to fulfill the promise God would have to raise up Isaac from the dead.

Note it carefully, "**concluding that God was able**". Abraham knew full well that God had already brought Isaac out of deadness in that both he and Sarah were reproductively dead when Isaac was conceived. Isaac was conceived out of deadness (cf. Rom. 4:19). Abraham had lived it.

He had seen it – that God can do anything. Nothing is impossible for God (cf. Mk. 10:27).

Even though Abraham's conclusion was that God was able to do it, we should realize that up to this point there is no recorded resurrection on file. This had never happened before, so this required great faith. This is similar to Noah who had never seen rain before and yet believed God concerning the coming flood.

Abraham's faith is clearly on display when he told his young servants to stay with the donkey and said, "*the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.*" **Note:** "We will come back to you"? (cf. Gen. 22:5). Where did he get the "**we**"? If Isaac is slain, then he alone would come back. But Abraham is certain that Isaac will come back with him even if this involved a resurrection from the dead.

If a resurrection was required to fulfill the promise, then Abraham was convinced that this is what God could and would do. We also see Abraham's faith in Gen. 22:8 when he told Isaac, "***My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.***"

Again, we note that Abraham had every intention of killing Isaac and therefore he was as good as dead in the mind of Abraham. This is reflected in the phrase, "***from which he also received him in a figurative sense.***"

In a sense, Isaac became a type of Christ Whom the Father willingly gave up for us (cf. Rom. 8:32).

In Genesis 22 when Abraham was just ready to plunge in the knife the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham and said, "***Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God***" (Gen. 22:12). Abraham had passed the test!

God was so pleased with this obedience of faith that He again reiterated the Abrahamic Covenant to Abraham - only this time in the form of an oath (cf. Gen. 22:15-18).

Hebrew 6:13-18 picks up on this, saying that by "***two immutable things***" God guaranteed His covenant promises to Abraham. God first confirmed the covenant by His Word which by itself is unchangeable, and then He further confirmed it on this occasion with an oath.

This is the kind of faith that Abraham had. No matter what, no matter how impossible the circumstances seem to be, God is able, and He will fulfill His promise – even if that involves a resurrection.

The nature of a God-honoring faith is that it believes God will fulfill His Word even if that involves a resurrection. And as we see it often does. Fulfillment of God's Word involved the resurrection of Christ, and it will involve the resurrection of the saints to finally enter into the fullness of God's promises.

Someone has well said that there are certain truths in the Bible that require submission and not debate. Abraham had a test like that which required the submission of faith and not debate. In fact, this is where faith starts. We put down our rebellion and submit to the truth of God.

This we see in Abraham's great example of faith. In short, a faith that comes to God as He is (cf. Heb. 11:6) sees Jesus as more important than anything or anyone else. This is the kind of faith modeled by Abraham.

So, we see that Abraham believed God for the physically impossible. He believed God could raise the dead. He believed God would do whatever was necessary to fulfill His Word. Abraham had the kind of faith that obediently surrendered all to God – even that which was dearest to him.