

**The Test of Faith** ..... Hebrews 11:17-28

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These study notes are prayerfully prepared and provided to aid,  
not replace, your personal study of God's precious Word.

Our journey through the Hall of Faith brings us to Abraham when he faced a supreme test of his faith. It's the story that's recorded in the historical record of Genesis 22. His test provides valuable insights and lessons for us. Abe's experience shows how believers must look beyond circumstances to God's promises, even when the promises do not seem to be fulfilled, or even fulfill able!

In the process of growth toward maturity, tests and difficulties play a key role. There are minor trials and major trials. Some last for a while. Others leave as quickly as they arrive. Occasionally, we face the "**ultimate test**", and that's what Abraham faced as the writer to Hebrews summarizes in Hebrews 11:17-19.

**2 Co 4:8,9 Four Levels of Tests.**

Paul talked about such tests with the Corinthians. In fact, he describes through the words he uses **four levels of tests**. Notice the words:

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves: we are **afflicted** in every way, but not crushed; **perplexed**, but not despairing; **persecuted**, but not forsaken; **struck down**, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."

**Affliction.** The word "*affliction*" refers to pressures. Daily deadlines and pressures which make up the common garden-variety of everyday stresses or pressures.

**Perplexity.** "*Perplexity*" describes "*without a way*." The more intense, not as common. This word describes the pressure of confusion, of not knowing quite which way to turn, especially when dealing with unfair people or unfair treatment.

**Persecution.** "*Persecution*" refers to "*run after, or pursue*." The more extreme pressure, this level does not pass quickly. The persecution can be physical, financial, social, emotional, spiritual.

**Being struck down.** This word literally means "*to be thrown down, shoved aside, rejected*." The maximum stress, involving the loss of someone or something dear and precious. It may involve disability or even death.

But now come to Hebrews 11:17-19 and

He 11:17-19 **Abraham's Supreme Test.**

11:17 Abraham offered his son, the son of promise, by faith, when he was tested. He was offering up his only begotten son! It was the ultimate test. One that no one known before.

- 11:18 This son, Isaac, was the one of promise, in whom the promise made by God would be fulfilled. All the promises could only be fulfilled in Isaac.
- 11:19 Abraham considered (that is, counted as true) that God could resurrect, even from the dead, even though he (Abraham) had never seen or heard of such before. God had provided the child. God is true, God is faithful, and is all-powerful. He knows what He is doing.

Now let's analyze the whole situation by reviewing the historical account provided for us in Genesis 22.

- 22:1,2 The test was **sent by God**. Imagine Abe's shock when told offer Isaac as a burnt offering. How could a fair, loving God, take away what He had given and promised? Notice how God refers to Isaac – "*your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac.*" God knows about those things in our lives that we cherish, that we come close to idolizing. God knows how to help us get our priorities in perspective.

The test was not so much whether Abe would obey God as it was a test whether he would believe that God would fulfill His promises in spite of the death of the one through whom His promises would be fulfilled.

Note as well: Isaac was set apart to be a burnt offering, v. 6 (Lev 1:1-17). So he was being offered not in atonement for some sin, but as an act of worship of God. And Abraham's obedience was itself acceptable worship. So the writer is encouraging us to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (recall Hebrews 6:12). We are to show the same patience and endurance and obedience that faith ought to produce.

Now let's look at Abe's faith here.

- 22:3-10 **Abraham's faith was characterized by:**
- 22:3 **Immediate obedience** to God's Word. "*Abraham rose early...saddled his donkey, took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went...*" Without postponing, without stewing, without negotiating, procrastination or giving of excuses, he arose early! And look, v. 4, it took 3 days to get to the place God told him.
- 22:4,5 Second observe his **Unquestioning confidence in God's plan**. Notice how he says, "*WE will worship and return.*" He saw this act of obedience as worship, not teeth-gritting obedience.
- 22:6-8 Third, **Undistracted focus on God's Person and Work**. Oh, the heart-wrenching question of verse 7, "*But Daddy, where's the animal?*" Isaac knew something was missing. But Abe shows his focus on God, "*God knows. . . He'll give it to us*

*at the right time. . . “*

From the booklet ***Bits and Pieces*** comes an interesting story about Florence Chadwick, the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions. On the Fourth of July in 1952, she attempted to swim from Catalina Island to the California coast. The challenge was not so much the distance, but the bone-chilling waters of the Pacific. To complicate matters, a dense fog lay over the entire area, making it impossible for her to see land. After about 15 hours in the water, and within a half mile of her goal, Chadwick gave up. Later she told a reporter, "*Look, I'm not excusing myself. But if I could have seen land, I might have made it.*" Not long afterward she attempted the feat again. Once more a misty veil obscured the coastline and she couldn't see the shore. But this time she made it because she kept reminding herself that land was there. With that confidence she bravely swam on and achieved her goal. In fact, she broke the men's record by 2 hours! Abraham focused on God – GOD WILL PROVIDE.

**[Immediate obedience, that was Abe's faith. Unquestioning confidence in God's plan, undistracted focus on God's Person. Ah but note verses 9, 10:]**

22:9-10 Fourth, ***Wholehearted thoroughness to follow-through*** with God's direction (eager to do it God's way, no questions asked). Notice that Abe did not bring along his own sacrifice just in case -- no excuses, no "what-ifs", no escape alternatives. He planned to follow-through exactly as God said.

SO WHAT? *Lingering Lessons for you and me:*

God's will ***requires obedience***. It's striking to note that obedience does not require understanding all the ramifications, details, and may not even make sense from a human standpoint.

Vance Havner illustrated obedience in his Devotional Treasury with this anecdote: "When I was a boy, my father had a habit of calling me to do things with the summons, 'Come, right quick!' I didn't mind the 'come,' but the 'right quick' irritated me sometimes. He didn't mean, 'Take your time; think it over; come if you feel like it.' I had the impression that ***I had better feel like it!*** Father considered himself to be the head of the house, and the rest of us were inclined to agree with him." Then Havner added, "The big word with God is 'now.' If we are going to get anything done for Him, we had better get at it now. He is the I AM, the Eternal Contemporary."

God's plan ***may not be understood***. Our heavenly Father does not always explain the end at the beginning. He shows us what we need, and what He wants us to see. Faith does not second-guess God's intentions.

A blacksmith had trusted Christ as his Savior and was working at his anvil when he was confronted by an inquiring unbeliever. "Why is it you have so much trouble?" said the man. "I have watched you since you became a Christian and you have had many problems. I thought when a person gave himself to God his troubles were over." A smile came across the blacksmith's face as he replied, "Do you see this piece of steel? I'm going to use it for the springs

of a carriage. But first it needs to be heated. Then I hammer it, bend it, and shape it the way I want it. Sometimes, however, I find that the steel is too brittle to be used, so I have to throw it on the scrap heap. As scrap, the steel is worth just a few pennies, but as a carriage spring, it is very valuable. Ever since I began applying this idea to my life, I have been saying to God, 'Lord, test me in any way You choose, but don't throw me on the scrap heap.'

Tests *may appear to contradict or block God's promises.*

"How can a simple mortal enjoy friendship with God? What possible common ground could bring us together in friendship?" The thought of a human becoming friends with God boggles the mind. As small, weak creatures, what could we possibly have in common with the Almighty Creator of the universe? The common ground is faith. Faith is what connects us to God in friendship. It's what made Abraham God's friend, David a man after God's own heart, and Enoch a man who walked with God. Today faith still turns enemies of God into His friends. God's greatest act of friendship was sending Christ to die for us, but what does it mean to be friends with God? It means:

Faith means *Choosing Him over others*: Even though it seems narrow-minded, you reject the false gods of other religions. You are careful that other people don't take first place in your life.

Faith means *Spending time with Him*: Realizing that God enjoys your company, you make time for the relationship.

Faith *means identifying with Him*: Just as you don't mind being seen with your human friends, you are not ashamed to let everyone know that you are God's friend.

Faith means *Supporting the same causes*: You and your Friend share the same outlook on life and what's important.

Faith means *Never tiring of His company*: Unlike some friends who wear out their welcome, God is one friend you're always glad to have around. All of this grows out of just a little faith! "Friendship with God?" by Jim Long. Campus Life, Jul/Aug 1992. Pages 19-21.

Our response to tests *reveals our true faith and theology*. Theology simply means "what I believe about God." My theology becomes the life preserver that keeps me afloat, or it can be the weights around my feet to pull me under. My theology is significantly important! As one professor put it, "Are you a 'Big-Godder,' or 'little-Godder?'"

It is a real tragedy that many athletic heroes win at their sport but lose in life. Life goes beyond the winning touchdown or a home run; it involves character. "The real heroes of life possess character qualities that endure time and circumstances." The Bible is the best place to learn about such character qualities because in addition to describing heroes it also points out how some of them failed. The lives of Saul and David can teach us much about character and making right choices. "Hall of Shame" by Dave Burnham. Second Look, Mar/Apr 1990. Pages 20-23.