

# Hebrews

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# Hebrews

## The Test of Faith

### Hebrews 11:17-19

#### INTRODUCTION:

This message was taken from a sermon series by Tony Evans on the "Heroes of Faith". Our scripture passage come from Hebrews 11, but we will be spending most of our time in Genesis 22.

**The hallmark of a hero:** Their Bravery, Integrity, and Selflessness. They save the day and ask for no reward. Then they ride off into the sunset.

The Bible also tells the story of HEROS. But they are not always brave, good, or selfless.

In many ways they are people just like you and me. Missing the mark or dropping the ball. What is it that **Noah, Abraham, Sarah, or Moses** have in common that we should still be telling their stories yet today? **What makes them heroes?**

- **Noah** believed God when wickedness filled the earth and saved mankind from total destruction.
- **Abraham** believed God and became the father of many nations.
- **Sarah** believed God and became a mother in her old age.
- **Moses** believed God and became a deliverer of a people in bondage.

They are all connected by virtue of their great **faith**. The hallmark of a biblical hero.

#### All Stand and Read Scripture.

##### **Hebrews 11:17-19 (NASB95)**

*<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; <sup>18</sup> it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." <sup>19</sup> He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.*

#### Prayer

This morning we are going to look at the test of faith. Abraham's final exam. The author of Hebrews tells us that Abraham's final exam came when God asked Abraham to offer up Isaac which took place in Genesis 22. So what he talked about in Hebrews 11 actually took place in Genesis 22. The final exam.

#### **I. Faith May Appear to Have Contradictions.**

He was told to offer up Isaac who was the promise. You know that you are facing a major test when God confronts you with a major promotion that can transcend you to a whole

other level. You know it is a major test when it calls for something significant in your life and at the very same time makes absolutely no sense.

It is a major exam when God is asking you to do something, to be something, or to go somewhere and it makes absolutely no sense. Hebrews 11 says that God told Abraham to offer up Isaac who was the son of the promise. In Genesis, chapter 22, the story is unfolded for us in detail.

### **Genesis 22:1-2 (NASB95)**

22 Now it came about after these things, that God **tested** Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>2</sup> He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

That made no sense! Let me show you why. It is full of contradictions. The first was a **theological** contradiction.

#### **A. It was a Theological Contradiction.**

Why? God made a promise that from you I am going to build a nation through you son Isaac. Now kill him! Isaac is a teenager. He is not married and he has no children. Yet You have told me that you are going to build a whole nation and affect the whole world through my son. How can he be the extension that you have promised if I kill him? It is a contradiction!

When God is giving you a major exam it may not make any sense. It sounds like God is contradicting himself. Not only is it a theological contradiction but it was also a **Biblical** contraction.

#### **B. It was a Biblical Contradiction.**

It was a Biblical contradiction because in Genesis, chapter 9, God condemns murder. He taught us that we cannot take the life of another person. Yet he just told Abraham to take the life of his son.

So God has not only contradicted His promise, but He has also contradicted one of His Biblical teachings. God, what You are asking right now does not make sense. Not only was it a Biblical contradiction but it is also a **emotional** contradiction.

#### **C. It was an Emotional Contradiction.**

God told him to take you son "who you love". Your only son through Sarah and I want you to take him and sacrifice him. I am sure that Abraham was thinking "I love this boy!" I waited a hundred years for this boy and received him through divine assistance. Are You asking me to give up the thing that I love most? You are asking me to give up the very thing that you blessed me with! That is a pull on the heart string that you cannot explain.

"God! It does not make sense"! Not only was it a theological contraction, a Biblical contradiction, and an emotional contraction but it was also a **relational** contraction.

#### **D. It was a Relational Contradiction.**

How am I going to explain this to Sarah? How am I going to let the cat out of the bag that I am getting ready to take our son out and slay him as God has told me to do?

### **Genesis 22:3 (NASB95)**

<sup>3</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

**Now.....you know.....**why Abraham got up so early in the morning. He had to get up before Sarah got out of bed so he would not have to explain any of this to her. Worst of all, maybe, it was a **spiritual** contradiction.

### **E. It was a Spiritual Contraction.**

God told Abraham to take Isaac, slay him, and worship Me. If there was ever a day that you did not feel like going to church this would be the day. How can you worship God with a broken heart?

But it says that Abraham got up early in the morning. This is another thing that you need to observe. God told him to get up and go into the mountains to a place that I will show you. He had to obey without all the details. He said after you get on your way and go into the mountains **then** I will show you the spot that I want you to go to. You will not get all the details up front. I will only give you additional details when I see you moving.

## **II. God Will Always Carry Through with His Promises.**

### **Genesis 22:4 (NASB95)**

<sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance.

Somebody say "**third day**". **(Pause)** Keep this in the back of your mind. We will get back to it.

### **Genesis 22:5 (NASB95)**

<sup>5</sup> Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."

Wait a minute now! Abraham! God just told you to go kill him. Abraham tells the young men. Wait here. We are going a little further on and when we accomplish what God has sent us to do and finish our "church service" Isaac and I will return to you. But God told you to kill him. What do you mean, you are both coming back afterwards?

See when you are called to faith you have to speak the truth in the midst of the apparent contradiction. Hebrews 11 tells us how Abraham was able to say that to the young men.

### **Hebrews 11:19a (NASB95)**

<sup>19</sup> He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead,...

So if I believe your promise that you are going to work through Isaac to make a great nation and also do as you tell me to do, then since you never contradict yourself, in the end, everything is going to be OK. **You, no doubt have some kind of miracle that You will use to bring this boy back to me again.**

You may ask, "Where did this confidence come from?" That God could raise the dead? If you recall, Sarah's womb was dead and Abraham could not function any longer at 100 years old. Yet God allowed a miracle baby of Isaac to be born. Abraham saw how God could revive a womb and considered that the same God could also raise his son from the dead.

So when God calls you to a major exam, do not forget what He did in the previous quizzes. Do not forget what He did yesterday that placed you in front the larger challenge today. God is attempting to move you to a higher experience with Him.

So they make their way to the place that God revealed to them.

### **Genesis 22:6-8 (NASB95)**

<sup>6</sup> Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. <sup>7</sup> Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

Isaac say to Abraham, "I see the fire and the wood, but I do not see a lamb!" Every other time we went to church, we had a sacrifice. But today you did not bring a lamb. What is up with that dad? Abraham looks at his son and cannot say anything. He could not say **you** are the lamb **because it is hard for a man over 100 years old to chase a teenager who is running away!** **(Pause)** Because if I were Isaac at this point I would be up and away. Catch me dad if you can! **Does my middle name look like "LAMB" to you?**

**(Pause)**

Do you know what Abraham told him? "Son, God has got to fix this one." The Lord will have to provide because I do not have an answer. I do not know how this is going to work out.

When puts you in a final exam, you will not know how it is going to work out. God has to do something here because He is the only answer to this dilemma of faith. When you do what He has asked you to do, He **will** come through.

### **Genesis 22: 9-10 (NASB95)**

<sup>9</sup> Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

Can you only imagine what the two of them were thinking at this moment.

### **Genesis 22:11 (NASB95)**

<sup>11</sup> But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

The "**angel of the Lord**" is Jesus in the Old Testament. When God told Abraham to obey, He only used his name once. But whenever that same Lord calls your name twice it means something special is coming down the pike.

### **Genesis 22:12 (NASB95)**

<sup>12</sup> He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

So what is being said to Abraham at this moment? He is saying Abraham, now I know you love me because I **see it** and **feel it**. In other words you have now given me the experience of your love. Not merely the verbalization of it.

What is your Isaac? The thing that God cannot have because you are too attached to it? We are talking about a final exam. "**Now I know that you fear God**". And then God comes through.

### **Genesis 22:13-14 (NASB95)**

<sup>13</sup> Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. <sup>14</sup> Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided."

Everything that God is going to do in your life, He has already seen. You will not see it until you have completed what He has asked you to do. Most Christians are part time saints. They will pass a small quiz and wonder why God has not come through yet. But the question is, "Have you finished what He has asked you to do?" If you procrastinate for 50 years, it may take 50 years for you to see His provision.

## **III. Our Faith is Justified by Our Works.**

The Bible uses Abraham in James 2 where it talks about faith.

### **James 2:21-24 (NASB95)**

<sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

"Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac" and "he was called the friend of God" because he did as God told him even when it did not seem to make sense.

**If you only operate by sight you will never see what faith can do.**

Then the angel of the Lord continued...

### **Genesis 22:15-18 (NASB95)**

<sup>15</sup> Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, <sup>16</sup> and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. <sup>18</sup> In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

This passage says that God swore.

## **Hebrews 6:17-18 (NASB95)**

<sup>17</sup> In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things in which **it is impossible for God to lie**, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

God could not lie even if He wanted to. God used two means to ensure us of His integrity. The two are His promises and His oath. God makes promises and then He swears.

What is the difference?

A promise is something that God says He will do in His time. It does not say when: it only says that He **will** do it. Abraham has received promise after promise from God for years, but now he receives an oath. An oath is a promise, but now He has attached a time to it. When God makes an oath He is saying "I am ready to do it now and you have nothing else to do but watch me do my thing." That is an oath. God is no longer expecting you to do anything on your part because you have passed the final.

The good news is that Abraham had had failure a few times in his past. God just gave him retesting. Some of us are here today and we have been retested and retested and retested and God says "I will wait until you pass because I want to give you an experience with Me".

Do as you are told to do through the Holy Spirit and I will show you what I can do for you because of your experience with Me.

## **CONCLUSION:**

So here is the question, when I am faced with a seemingly impossible situation that God has asked me to do, how do I give up my "Isaacs" and serve God?

Listen to what John said about Abraham...

## **John 8:56 (NASB95)**

<sup>56</sup> Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad."

He is alluding back to Genesis 22:4.

## **Genesis 22:4 (NASB95)**

<sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance.

Remember I told you to remember this verse and that we were returning to it? Jesus in the New Testament tells us what Abraham in the Old Testament saw. Jesus said "**Abraham rejoiced to see my day**".

What day did Abraham see?

Let me tell you a little secret. Mount Moriah is located a few hundred yards from Mount Calvary. There are just a few hundred yards from Mount Moriah to the hill of Golgotha. Jesus said "**Abraham rejoiced to see my day**". And he was glad. So Abraham was on his way to kill his son and he looked up and saw God's only son being sacrificed for our sins. That is why the author of Hebrews encouraged us in our faith...

## **Hebrews 12:1-2 (NASB95)**

12 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It says that while you are on your journey, taking your final exam, keep your eyes on Jesus. Keep your eyes on Jesus as you obey God because He will sustain your faith until you reach the finish line of your test.

Keep looking at Jesus because if Abraham could see Jesus in the Old Testament and He had not even come yet, how much more should you and I look at Him now that He has come, died, and rose from the dead which happened on day number three.

**What a Day That Will Be!**