

Hebrews 11:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

Analysis

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, This recounts Abraham's supreme test of faith: God's command to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise, the 'only begotten' (monogenēs, μονογενῆς—'unique,' 'one-of-a-kind') through whom all covenant promises depended. The verb 'offered up' (prosenenochenpresent perfect tense) indicates Abraham brought Isaac to the point of sacrifice, knife raised, before God intervened. In God's reckoning, Abraham completed the offering (Genesis 22:16: 'you have not withheld your son').

This trial tested everything: Abraham's love for God versus love for Isaac, faith in God's promises versus visible reality, trust in divine goodness versus apparent contradiction. How could God fulfill promises through Isaac if Isaac died? Abraham's faith resolved this paradox by trusting God's character and power beyond human understanding. He believed God could raise Isaac from the dead if necessary (v.19), demonstrating that genuine faith rests in God's ability to accomplish His will by any means, even resurrection.

This account profoundly foreshadows the gospel. As Abraham willingly offered his beloved son, so God the Father 'spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all' (Romans 8:32). But unlike Isaac, Christ wasn't spared—He actually died as the substitutionary sacrifice for sin. The ram caught in the thicket (Genesis 22:13)

points to Christ, the substitute provided by God Himself. Abraham's faith in resurrection anticipates Christ's actual resurrection, securing our justification.

Historical Context

Genesis 22 records this event occurring after Isaac was weaned and old enough to carry wood up Mount Moriah (the future temple site in Jerusalem). Abraham was approximately 100-120 years old. This trial came after decades of waiting for Isaac's birth, making the command to sacrifice him incomprehensibly difficult. Ancient Near Eastern child sacrifice to pagan deities like Molech was practiced, but God explicitly condemned it. God tested Abraham not to receive human sacrifice (which He abhors) but to demonstrate Abraham's supreme allegiance and to prefigure the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. The test revealed the reality of Abraham's faith and provided a type of the gospel.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What has God asked you to 'offer up'—to surrender completely, trusting Him with what you treasure most?
2. How does Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac reflect God the Father's willingness to sacrifice Christ for you?
3. In what areas do you need Abraham's faith to trust God's goodness even when His commands seem to contradict His promises?

Interlinear Text

Πίστει προσέφερεν Ἀβραὰμ τὸν Ἰσαὰκ πειραζόμενος καὶ
By faith offered up Abraham G3588 Isaac when he was tried and
G4102 G4374 G11 G2464 G3985 G2532

τὸν μονογενῆ προσέφερεν ὁ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας
G3588 his only begotten offered up G3588 G3588 the promises
G3439 G4374 G1860

ἀναδεξάμενος
he that had received
G324

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 22:16 (Parallel theme): And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

Revelation 3:10 (Parallel theme): Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

James 5:11 (Parallel theme): Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

1 Peter 4:12 (Parallel theme): Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

Hebrews 7:6 (Covenant): But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises.

Proverbs 17:3 (Parallel theme): The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts.

Zechariah 13:9 (Parallel theme): And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

2 Corinthians 8:12 (Parallel theme): For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

Deuteronomy 8:2 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

2 Chronicles 32:31 (Parallel theme): Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.

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