

Chapter Twelve

ABRAHAM TESTED

Hebrews 11:17 - 19 *"By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." He considered that God was able to raise men, even from the dead; hence speaking figuratively, he did receive him back."*

This time the example is made of Abraham's obedience when told by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The original story is found in Genesis 22. God spoke and Abraham obeyed. He knew the promises of God regarding his seed and assumed that this promise would be fulfilled through Isaac, but the word had come and Abraham obeyed. That is faith! He did not understand why God should ask him to do this awful thing; he did not ask to understand, but simply obeyed. He knew that what God had promised, God would have to fulfill. If therefore God had promised to bless all the nations of the world through the son of promise Isaac, and if he was to put Isaac to death, God would have to do the impossible - raise him back to life. Paul declares in Romans 4:3 that *"Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness."* James says in his book, Ch.2:21, *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was working with the works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scriptures were fulfilled which says "And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness."* The apostle continues to say that *faith without works is dead*. There is no such things as faith unless it is made manifest in works!

As with all the other examples of Hebrews 11, here we have a type to teach us truths about God and His purposes in us. Here, once again, is clear teaching regarding **resurrection** and **God's faithfulness**. God has made a promise and is able to fulfill it.

However, there are other truths to be gleaned from these verses. There will come times when God will test His people. He doesn't do this so that He might learn something from the results for He knows the outcome even before the testing. Nor does He test us by allowing temptations to come. That is the work of the enemy, Satan, using our own carnal desires to lead us astray. Indeed, Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *"Father, lead us not into temptation"* knowing that is never in the will of God. However testing is in His will, for it is by testing us that He purifies us and conforms us more and more to the image of His son, Jesus.

When metallic ore is processed in order to produce the pure metal, it undergoes severe testing in the furnace and pressing mills. The ore is heated until it is all melted and the dross is skimmed away. When no impurities remain, the molten metal glows with a pure light and, when poured out, shows a perfect reflection in its surface. That is why the Lord would test us so that we might reflect His glory and image.

For many years I was a school teacher in a system that assessed its students by annual exams and periodical tests. Of course, few students liked that system and many parents complained so that,

today, there is relatively little testing done in schools and students can often graduate without ever having been examined as to the knowledge or understanding they may have gained. One of the major complaints against exams is that they always produces *failures*. Contrary to popular opinion, I am one who believes that failing can become a valuable stepping stone to success. It enables us to know what our strengths are, where we need to make more effort, where we could more efficiently direct our energies. In other words, the result of the exam can help us to focus in better on the pathway ahead of us. When I was a schoolboy I failed some of my public exams, to no one's great surprise. I then focused on those in which I had been successful, finally proceeding to an honours degree in university. No one ever considered me a failure just because I was unable to pass a certain measuring mark in a couple of subjects!
And God **never** counts us as a failure if we do not pass His present testing.

As we wrote in an earlier chapter, one of the tests that the Lord allows to come into believer's lives, is the testing of **offenses**. Jesus said that they will surely come and we had better learn how to deal with them. (Luke 17:1).

Another test is that of the **closed door**. I have experienced the disappointment of God closing a door before me when I had anticipated walking through into a marvelous, new opportunity. The embarrassment was intense as I had spoken freely about this wonderful opportunity God had placed before me, only to find that, when the time came, instead of leading me on He closed the door. How I wished I had not spoken so freely, for now I felt very foolish. I questioned God as to His reasons and must confess that it took some time before I could yield to His will in this matter. It was to be another ten years before I could see just why He closed that door, in order to prepare an even better way for me. I tell this story in greater detail in my other book *Stepping Stones*.

A third test we may experience is concerning those things which may hinder us in being led by the Lord. These would involve our **personal strengths, our relationships and our possessions**. Like Abraham we may be asked to give up what is most precious to us. God doesn't do this to hurt us - that is never His intention. He does it to set us free from any trust we may have in our own abilities. So often we will find, that when we lay down our possessions before Him, He invites us to take them back up to use them in service for Him. I think of Rob, a friend, who was the lead singer in a rock & roll band when He came to the Lord. His conversion was very real and he soon found that singing in the night clubs was so unsatisfying. He lay aside his guitar, as the only music he knew how to play was unsuitable for the new songs he wanted to sing. It was four years before he believed that the Lord would have him take up the instrument again, at which time he began to sing new songs. Today, Rob is in a full-time music ministry for the Saviour.

Moses had to lay down his shepherd's staff, a sign of his occupation and authority. (Exodus 4:3). Then he was instructed to take it up again, but this time it was called the *rod of God* with which he was to do mighty deeds such as open a way across the Red Sea. (Ex 4:17).

Gideon had to give up his army so that God might win a great victory over the Midianites. (Judges 7).

We may be called to give up relationships, family and home. Let me remind you of the promise of Jesus, that “there is not one who, having given up family and home, for the sake of the kingdom, will not receive many times as much in this life and the life to come. (Luke 18:29,30).

Whenever I read the story of Abraham and Isaac, I feel something of the pain in the father’s heart. What an agonising time it must have been, as he led his son up the mountain knowing the intentions in his head. He still clung to the hope that God would somehow change the outcome, even speaking prophetically that “*God would provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering*” (Gen 22:8). He had no idea how true that would be for it was on that same mountain, several centuries later, that another father would watch His only-begotten Son die as the lamb slain for the sins of the world. How our heavenly Father’s heart must have sorrowed, yet He was determined that His Son would die. This was to be the only way that justice could be met by mercy, so that we might be redeemed from our sinful and lost state.

Summary

God was not being cruel or insensitive to the feelings of Abraham when He asked him to sacrifice his only son - the son of promise. He had a great destiny for His servant, but it was necessary to try him in the furnace first. The following principles are revealed in this portion of Hebrews 11:

- 1. God is faithful in our testing times.**
- 2. When God calls us to lay something down in sacrifice, it is that we might take it up again in power.**
- 3. God only allows testing to come in our lives so that He might make us pure.**
- 4. His plan of redemption is to ‘provide Himself a lamb’.**
- 5. Again we see the principle of resurrection life. Our Hebrew author declares this to be a ‘type’.**