

## Red Sea Rule #9, Faith Builders

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After God saved the Hebrews from the army of Pharaoh in Exodus 14, perhaps you were wondering why if God knew He was going to protect and deliver them that He ever put them in such a precarious situation? The answer is given in Exodus 14:30-31, "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians...And when Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used, the people feared the Lord, and they BELIEVED in the Lord". Clearly they already believed in God as He had so clearly revealed Himself, and they had been following God's glory in the cloud as they exited Egypt. But now their faith had been tested and built up, and they had a new and stronger faith in God's love for them. Therefore we can derive Red Sea Rule #9, "View your current crisis as a faith builder for the future". Have you been working out while sequestered at home? We don't want to become physically fat and atrophied, and God doesn't want our faith to be weak either. Life's trials are like treadmills for the soul developing strength and stamina in a spiritual sense. After all, every single day we live by faith in many physical ways—we trust the banks, we trust the police and fire to come when called, we trust chairs to hold up when we sit in them, and we trust doctors when they treat us and pharmacists when they give us medicine, etc. Shouldn't we naturally be learning to trust God's promises in the same way? We find the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen". Meaning the promises of God are such a reality to us that we are convicted to act upon them even though they have not been fulfilled yet. How important is it that we have faith and act upon it? We read in Hebrews 11:6, "It is impossible to please God without faith". In his book RED SEA RULES, Morgan finds 5 facts about faith: Faith is: 1. Believing that what the Lord said will be accomplished. 2. Being persuaded that God has the power to do it, 3. Believing that things will happen just as God promised, 4. Considering Him worthy to be trusted, and 5. Being willing to act in ways you otherwise would not, like Noah built an ark even though it had never flooded before.

Principle—Living by faith involves finding and claiming God's promises for every circumstance and problem. One of the great stories in the Bible of God building faith through trials and trouble was Abraham.

#### Genesis 22—God Tested Abraham

In Genesis 22, when Isaac was probably in his early twenties, God "tested Abraham". In verse 2 we are given God's shocking command to Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." If you are like me you are saying, "Wait, what?" Our loving God can't possibly be that cruel. This must be a copyist mistake, or a nightmare he would wake up from. God's words put the emphasis on just how hard this would be for Abraham—"your son, your only son, your beloved son". What could Abraham have been thinking as he began the three day journey to Mt. Moriah?

I love it when the God inspired New Testament explains or interprets the God inspired Old Testament, because in Hebrews 11:17-19, the author tells us just what Abraham was thinking. All the promises God had made him about having many descendants, being a great nation, and blessing the world could only come true through his son Isaac. He is the future that God has promised, so how is it possible if he is killed? In Hebrews 11 we are told that Abraham was thinking that God is able to raise men even from the dead. Therefore by faith, Abraham believed God would keep His promises even if He had to resurrect Isaac. If I had been there, I think I would have reminded God that only the low life pagan idol worshipping scum bags make human sacrifices, but that would have been very short sighted on my part. The fact was that God had an awesome plan to test Abraham's faith to the max, and He never had any intention of letting Abraham go through with it. We know that idolatry is putting something in the place of God. Any created thing that we cherish or love can distract us from our number one and only Lord of our life. Therefore the great test of our faith and belief is whether we are willing to give up our most sought after possession. What created thing or person in your life would be that ultimate test? Jesus said in Matthew 10:37, "He who loves...son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Many people struggle with understanding the Letter of James in the New Testament because James seems to contradict the theology of Paul. Paul makes it clear that salvation comes only by grace received by faith, yet James says, "What use is it if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" We know as a fact that James and Paul fully agree about the means of salvation being only by the grace of God because of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. All the early church leaders met in Jerusalem to settle this issue, and James sided with and spoke for Paul, so we know they both agree on the basis of and means of appropriation of salvation. What James is saying in his letter is that for faith to be real it must be proven to be faith. Real faith is proven up by obedience and works. Someone said it well that "We are not saved by works, but we are

saved by a faith that works.” When Paul said we are saved by grace through faith, he was addressing the means of salvation, and James was addressing the result of salvation. We can ask how Abraham himself could be sure that he was a believer as well as we who are students of the book of Genesis could be sure of Abraham. After all, in Genesis 12-16 he blew it big time—many times. He would know it only if he could take his most important possession, his only beloved son, and give him up to God. This is why when Paul used Genesis 15 to prove that Abraham was saved by faith, it marked the part in his story that Abraham believed God, but James used Genesis 22 to show that Abraham’s faith was proven by his obedience and willingness to give up Isaac. James says in James 2:22 concerning Abraham, “You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected (proven)”.

Is Faith Always Tested and Proven?

As we study all the characters in the Bible it becomes clear that they all were tested. Jacob was tested in his travails with Laban and Esau. Joseph was tested repeatedly in Egypt. Moses was tested when he went to Pharaoh, and was turned down. All the children of Israel were tested repeatedly in the wilderness after the Exodus as Moses wrote in Deut.8, “you shall remember all the way the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years...testing you to know what was in your heart”. David’s faith was tested by his encounter with Goliath. Possibly the biggest surprise was that even Jesus was tested in the wilderness in Matt.4:1 as we read that “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”. The Greek word translated here as tempted can also be used for proven or tested. When the Bible says that Jesus led a perfect sinless life, we know it is true because He was “proven”.

Genesis 22:2-18

God told Abraham to go to Mt. Moriah, which was about 30 miles away. Why did he have to go there, so far away? There was a nice convenient hill in the neighborhood, why not there? In His omniscience, God knew Moriah would be the place where over a thousand years later, His Temple would be built (2 Chronicles 3:1). Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac was to foreshadow all the sacrifices for sin that would later be offered in the same high place in Jerusalem. Those sacrifices for sin at the Temple were types of the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin that Christ made.

In Gen.22:5, Abraham told the guys who were with them to stay there, and Isaac and he would go on to Mt. Moriah and worship God with a sin offering, and then “return to you.” Abraham believed that they both would return. He was being obedient by going to sacrifice his most prized possession, but by faith he still believed that somehow they would both return. As they walked up carrying the wood to burn, the torch to light the fire, and the knife to kill the offering with---Isaac said, “Uh Dad, where is the lamb or goat? I believe you have forgotten the most important part of this sacrifice for sin.” Abraham replied that “God will provide”. Now that is faith! In verse 9, they came to the place, and Abraham built the altar, arranged the wood, and tied Isaac on the altar. Now Isaac was really concerned that his dad had lost it, as my kids might say, “HELLO, EARTH TO DAD, THERE’S A MAJOR GOOF-UP HERE”. Abraham raised his arm with the knife to slay his son, but the angel of the Lord stopped him saying with great urgency, “Abraham, Abraham...do not stretch out your hand against the lad.” God’s words from heaven were, “Now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only (irreplaceable) son.”

Everybody Needs a Scapegoat

Just ask Isaac, everybody needs a scapegoat. The question remained, “If Isaac was not to be sacrificed, then how would they make the required sin offering?” As Abraham had said, “God will provide.” In verse 13, they looked and saw a ram caught in the thicket by his horns nearby, and Abraham took it and offered up a burnt offering to God. From that time on, Abraham referred to that place as The Mount of the Lord Will Provide. The Lord will provide was also a great prophecy of Jesus’ incarnation. In Jesus, God would provide the perfect ultimate sacrifice for all our sins so that no other sacrifices would ever have to be made. Jesus is our scapegoat. When the author of Hebrews 11:19 says that Abraham received Isaac back as a type, he means that this whole event foreshadowed another greater event in which God the Father would sacrifice His Son Jesus Christ as a substitution for our sin, but would receive Him back through the resurrection.

Passing the Test and Receiving the Blessing

Beginning in Genesis 12, Abraham had failed many small tests or pop quizzes, but here in Genesis 22, he had aced the final exam of faith. Therefore, he qualified by faith to serve as God's channel of blessing for the redemption of mankind. In Gen.22:15-19, God repeated His previous promises, but this time enlarged them by emphasizing the "in your seed (singular) all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" part. Again we have the benefit of Paul interpreting this for us in the New Testament as we read Galatians 3:8,16, "the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you...Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed...referring to one seed, that is Jesus Christ.'" Maybe you are wondering if Abraham understood all this, but we have a strong clue from Jesus Himself in John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."

By faith we also now can participate in the Abrahamic Covenant by receiving and believing in the ultimate Scapegoat, our Savior Jesus Christ. Have you made this blessing of God the basis for your eternal life?

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