

## The God Who Tests is the God-Who-Provides – *Genesis 22:1-19*

**Introduction** – This chapter is about Abraham and his faith. We already know that God had promised to bless him and make him a great nation. We already know that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. We already know that he obeyed God and sent Ishmael away for Isaac was the promised son. But now, in this most famous and vivid story about Abraham, his faith is tested with an unthinkable call to obedience. Like it or not, this is a story about your faith and the Christian life. We are tested in order to grow our faith, to trust God to be true to His Word, no matter the circumstances of your life, no matter your bewilderment as God manages the world, no matter your inability to explain or understand the intentions of God’s plans and purposes.

**The Test** – In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for “test” can also be “tempt.” But the use and context make all the difference. When someone tempts another, it is to cause the other to sin. Satan is the tempter in the Garden and throughout history. When someone tests another, it is to prove and strengthen faith. This passage begins by saying that “*God tested Abraham,*” but this is an editorial comment; God did not tell Abraham he was being tested (and He doesn’t tell you).

Instead, probably more than twelve years after the last chapter, Abraham hears from the LORD again, and it is a horrific word (v2). This is a troubling passage at first glance. God hates child sacrifices and years later will command Israel to wipe out the peoples of Canaan who partake of this detestable practice (Deut 12:31). To offer up a burnt offering meant to cut the throat of the victim and let it bleed out, to dismember the parts of the body, and then burning the parts on an altar until they were completely consumed. Hearing this command from God must have been excruciating beyond words.

This is why Moses writes the editorial comment (v1). But Abraham doesn’t know what is going on or what is going to happen, just as we often do not know why a trial has come to us. But Abraham’s faith already stands out, “*Here I am*” (v1, 7, 11). He obeys, rising up early, gathered the necessary provisions including Isaac, split the wood, and travelled three days at God’s bidding (vv3-4).

**Until the Last Moment** – Three days of walking. And then just Abraham and his only son, wood placed on his back, head up the mountain. Isaac asks about the missing lamb and Abraham responds still with faith (vv7-8). But there is no lamb. The altar is built, the son is bound, laid upon the wood and the knife is raised (vv9-10). God waited, waited, waited, until the last possible moment. And we learn much about the testing of God.

In his submission to God’s will and command, Abraham has the same sentiment that Jesus commands of his disciples that they must hate father, mother, wife, even their own lives if they want to be His followers (Luke 14:26f). The natural affections of this life must fall underneath our love for God and obedience to Him. No one knows he has such faith and loyalty until it is tested. And such testing produces and strengthens that faith and loyalty (James 1:2-4, 1 Pet 1:6-7). We may not like it, we may not understand it in the moment, but God requires this faith be demonstrated and demonstrated under pressure. It is that kind of faith that overcomes the world (1 John 5:3-4).

**“We will come back to you...”**(v5) – Abraham did not know what was to come to pass. He could not see how God’s promises could be kept, but he trusted God’s faithfulness and went forward in obedience. He didn’t now how, but he believed Isaac would return with him. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us exactly what was in the mind of Abraham. He had concluded that God would raise Isaac up even from the dead. Because God does not lie, Abraham concluded that he must be getting ready to watch a resurrection. And so, he went up.

Even so, that faith was tested, and in the last moment God finished the test, provided a substitute, and praised Abraham’s faith (vv9-14). God said, “*...for now I know that you fear God...*” (v12). Many ask what does it mean to fear God? The answer is that fear, faith, and love are all part of the same, for they all lead to obedience, even obedience in the face of losing everything, even yourself (Matt 10:28).

The thing Abraham feared losing was restored, and he names the place “*The LORD-Will-Provide.*” Abraham feared God more than losing his son, trusting God would do right. In return, God gave the greatest assurance He could by swearing upon Himself that through this seed all nations would be blessed (vv16-18, Heb 6:13-18). Therefore, Abraham rejoiced to see that day (John 8:56).

**Some Practicals** – Claiming to believe in God’s exhaustive sovereignty and predestination of all things is correct theology. Fine as far as that goes. But God draws straight with crooked lines, which means that He often acts in ways that are mysterious to us, defying our finite wisdom and understanding, even seeming to virtually contradict what He has taught us about His character and plans for our lives. We often look at the events in our lives or all over the world and wonder, “What on earth is God thinking?” But then we are called to take the next step of obedient faith, step by step. That is what it means to live by faith.

Therefore, when life seems to have gone bizarre and wonky, and God seems contradictory and unclear, it is time to stop and ponder to yourself, “Huh, this looks like a test.” It is proper to look for them and prepare for them. Because in this life, you are going to walk into a test whether you want to or not. We don’t get to choose.

With that mindset, we can walk into our trials, our tests, by faith, because we have watched Abraham walk out of his. “*We pay Him the highest honor, when in affairs of perplexity, we nevertheless entirely acquiesce to His providence*” (Calvin). True faith produces amazing works, justifying that amazing faith (James 2:21-24).

**Types and Shadows** – Of course, this living parable gives us a powerful glimpse of what God was planning to do with His only Son. The sacrifice took place on Mount Moriah, which it seems was the place where Solomon would later build the temple, where for centuries sacrifices would be offered daily, sacrifices to deliver Israel from her sins. Divine justice demands punishment for sin, but the blood of bulls and goats ultimately could not take care of our sin-problem. The Father would give His Son, His only Son, as the fulfillment of the types and shadows, the perfect substitutionary atonement (Isaiah 53:6).

Isaac asked his father, “*where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*” to which Abraham replied, “*God will provide for Himself the lamb.*” When Jesus came, John the Baptist tells us that Jesus is the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world. God did provide the Lamb. That Angel of the LORD who stopped the hand of Abraham, pointed to the ram caught in the thicket, blessed Abraham swearing by Himself, that Angel became Himself that Lamb of God. The Angel of the LORD was an appearance of the second Person of the Trinity. He was the Angel, the Messenger, the Word of the LORD. When He came in the Incarnation, His followers also did not know what He was doing when He went to Jerusalem and said He would be crucified. But those with the faith of Abraham, a faith that is the gift of God, see the resurrection to come in every story with a grave.