

## THE FAITH TEST

Genesis 22:1-14

When we hear the word “test” most of us think about school days and exams that we prepared for and took. In today’s world of education, testing is a major controversy in that the teachers and administrators are accused of trying to operate the system with a major objective of getting the students ready to take the test. They operate this way because the outcome of the testing determines their funding and any remedial programs they might have to undergo to correct deficiencies that might come up. There are strong arguments for and against such practices.

We would think that the major objective of the education system is supposed to be “well-educated” students who are able to function in the real world and be productive members of their communities, etc. How can those who are responsible for this to happen determine if the objectives are being accomplished before the students graduates and start living life on their own? The simple answer is that testing is the way to determine this and the testing is carried out by those in the administration of the overall education system. Mass testing cannot be carried out without focusing on true-false or multiple-choice type answers which are typically related to “facts” and, therefore, the teachers concentrate on “fact-based” materials. However, just knowing the facts without knowing how to apply them produces “educated” people who lack fundamental wisdom.

The basic or fundamental concern with the entire process can be summed up by attempting to answer the question “who is responsible for making the system work?” We have been so brain washed over the past several decades that most people think it is the responsibility of the Federal Government, the State Government, the local School Board, the school administrators and/or the classroom teacher. The problem is that we have not included in our consideration that the primary responsibility is squarely on the shoulders of the parents in the individual families (Deut 6:1-9). According to Paul (Ephesians 6:4) the fathers should be taking the lead in this effort. How many families essentially turn over this responsibility to the public education system instead of viewing that system as one of many “helpers” for the parents in the process?

So, how could parents go about assessing how effective the education and training of their children are going? Should they give them written tests and then adjust what the child is being taught? No one is going to do that. What do we do, instead? The cynical answer is that most do nothing. What can be done is to observe how their children respond to various situations and then provide training as needed to correct misbehavior or misinformation. The tests are given by their various life experiences.

We probably don’t like to think that the difficulties we encounter in life are like the “pop quiz” a teacher springs on a class. The teacher gives the test to try to get an idea of whether his or her teaching is being effective. In the case of God dealing with us, he knows what is in our hearts. The problem is that we don’t know what is there until we encounter a problem or temptation and sometimes (maybe more often than not) we just react and fail to learn anything from what has happened. We often fail to see that the problems God has allowed in our lives are there to show us what is really in our heart and to bring us to repentance and renewal.

In our study of the life of Abraham we see that he encountered a variety of life experiences that were “tests” of sorts and we have noted how he responded to these situations. We can probably come close to “grading” the various tests that he encountered. Warren Wiersbe

gave a list of some of these in his book *Be Obedient*. The first test was the “family test” which Abram passed when he left his family and went to Canaan. The second was the “famine test” which he failed when he went to Egypt. Next was the “fellowship test” which he passed by letting Lot have the first choice of where to live. That was followed by the “fight test” where he defeated the gangs of raiders. The “fortune test” was also passed when Abram would not take any reward from the king of Sodom. That was followed by the “fatherhood test” that led to the birth of Ishmael which did not turn out well. Because that did not turn out well, Abraham was faced with the “farewell test” in which he needed to send Hagar and Ishmael away.

The biggest test of all came about with regard to his teenage son Isaac that Abraham was counting on as the mean by which God would fulfill His promise to Abraham to be the father of a multitude. We see in this account an event in which God told Abraham to do something that seemed totally unreasonable.

### The Test Presented – 22:1-2

<sup>1</sup>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.” Genesis 22:1-2 (NASB95)

A lot of things had happened since the last time God visited Abraham. Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed, Isaac had been born and had been weaned, Hagar and Ishmael had been sent away from Abraham’s family, and Abraham was now living in an area about fifty miles south of where Jerusalem would be in later times. Besides, around fifteen years had passed by and Abraham then heard a new message from God.

You can imagine that as Isaac began to grow, he became the focus of his parents’ lives. Abraham believed that everything was great and he was confident that Isaac was his hope for God’s promise being fulfilled. But God was not through with Abraham. Abraham had moved (in his faith which was “believing God”) from trusting in what he had accomplished (Ishmael) to trusting in what God had accomplished (Isaac). There was one more step in his maturing.

The message started with God calling the name of Abraham. There was to be no doubt about to whom God was speaking – He called him by his name. Though it had been years, Abraham recognized that it was God Who had called him and he answered as a servant would answer his master. His response might be equivalent to what we would say when we answer the phone. We say “Hello.” What is implied is that “I hear you, I’m listening.”

As we read the instructions that God gave to Abraham, we see that God anticipated the objections that Abraham might have offered in response to what God said. Abraham might have objected that Isaac was his only son – God was already aware of that. Abraham might have objected that he dearly loved Isaac – God knew that, also. God was telling Abraham that because Isaac was his only son and because Abraham loved him so dearly that this was why he was being asked to do something totally out of character to what a person would do to an only, dearly beloved son.

God already had a place picked out for this test. It was the very place where the Temple in Jerusalem would be built. Of course, Abraham did not know what was going to happen more than a thousand years from that time, but God did. Abraham also did not know that this was a test, but God did and He was in control.

### The Test Preparation – 22:3-8

<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. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. <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.” <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. Genesis 22:3-8 (NASB95)

Abraham obeyed immediately and started out on a three-day journey with Isaac and some servants. We should note that Abraham did not ask God for an explanation. There was no “why?” or “why me?” Faith obeys completely the Word of God. When they reached Moriah, Abraham and Isaac left the servants and just the two of them went on to the place God had chosen.

This was a test to determine if Abraham was dependent on the gift or the Giver. Isaac was a gift of God’s grace. Sometimes we can focus on all the things that God has provided in His grace to us and lose sight of God Who supplies and provides.

Notice Abraham’s words: “I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come again unto you.” Notice that they were going to worship. When we are willing to give our most precious possession over to God, then this is acceptable worship. Abraham had to come to the conclusion that the relationship he had with God was not dependent on his having Isaac. Faith surrenders the best to God, holding nothing back. True worship is costly. Could we say that our worship of God is worth about what it costs us?

As Abraham and Isaac walked toward Moriah, Isaac noticed that they had not brought a lamb for the burnt offering sacrifice. This was a critical question that Abraham had apparently already thought about how to answer it if it was asked. The answer that he gave was stated in such a way that it could be interpreted in at least three ways. Essentially, Abraham said “son, God is taking care of that concern.” From the various translations we could see that the most obvious meaning of that is exactly what happened. A male sheep did show up just in time. That’s fairly easy for us to process with 20-20 hindsight. Abraham did not know that was going to happen as they were walking to the place of the sacrifice. Another possible meaning could be that God had provided Isaac as the sacrifice. That possibility was probably dominant in the mind of Abraham. A third possibility was that Abraham’s words were prophetic in that God Himself in the person of Jesus, the Christ, provided Himself as the Lamb that was slain for the sins of the world. Abraham could not have imagined that as being what his words meant.

### The Test Passed – 22:9-12

<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. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” <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.” Genesis 22:9-12 (NASB95)

We marvel at the obedience of Abraham, but equally amazing is the response of Isaac. He was not just a little boy. He was strong and agile and Abraham was quite elderly. Isaac could have simply run away. Isaac showed amazing faith and trust in his father. He had asked the question, “Where is the lamb?” He saw the fire and the wood, but there was no lamb. This action of Isaac is another one of the parallels that foreshadow what Jesus did as He did only the will of His Father.

We have noted in previous passages about Isaac that his life experiences were a

foreshadowing of what Jesus Christ would do. In Romans 8:32 we see that God did not spare His own Son but delivered up as a sacrifice for us. In the same way, Abraham (as a type of God, the Father) placed his “only son of promise” on the altar as a sacrifice. Another obvious comparison was that just as Isaac could have resisted Abraham and refused to be the sacrifice, Christ could have avoided the cross as He stated on the night of His arrest that He had at His calling twelve legions of angels.

As Abraham drew back the knife, he believed God for a miracle. We are told in Hebrews that Abraham was sure that God would raise Isaac from the dead so that the promises would be fulfilled. But God had another plan.

We see that God is never late in what He provides although it may arrive at the last minute. We see the urgency of the last minute timing as God called out to Abraham and repeated his name to make sure that He got Abraham’s attention. The fact that Abraham stopped was a vivid testimony that he did not need to think about obeying God before he obeyed. Sometimes we get so caught up in following through on what we think God wants us to do that we may fail to hear Him tell us something very important. Being responsive to God in a timely manner is a critical component of obedience.

As God stopped Abraham, He also commended him for passing the test that showed or proved that Abraham’s faith or his trust was not in the gifts of God but in God Himself. We see the progression of Abraham moving from “believing God but having confidence in his own accomplishments” to “believing God and having confidence in the gifts of God” and finally to “believing God and trusting in God Himself.”

#### The Test Provision – 22:13-14

<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.” Genesis 22:13-14 (NASB95)

God is sometimes referred to as Providence. This means that He provides whatever we need in order to do whatever it takes to be obedient to Him. God told Abraham to “offer Isaac” and Abraham did that without any bargaining or trying to make a deal with God. God intervened by providing a substitute for the actual sacrifice.

As we read the story, we are lead to anticipate seeing a “lamb” that will be provided. Instead, we see a fully developed ram with horns. If you recall, there is a similar “switch” in the scene around the throne of God in what John saw and related to us in Revelation chapter five:

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. (Rev 5:6).

In this we see that the Lamb (that God provided in the coming of Christ as a newborn baby), had been revealed as all powerful (seven horns) as He took His place in the Throne Room of God.

A third lesson that we learn from the test of our “faith life” is that we need to wait on the Lord to provide all that we need. As we see in the Abraham-Isaac account, God does not provide until personal sacrifice has been made. God’s provision was such that Abraham named the place Jehovah-Jireh which means the Lord provides. This is certainly a characteristic of God’s nature and it was another part of God’s ongoing progressive revelation of Himself to Abraham.

Thank God for His Substitute – for Jesus Who took our place. God did not withhold His Son to die for our sins. In His love he does not ask us to physically sacrifice our children; however, we must be willing to turn them over to Him for His service of worship. We need to sacrifice our wills so that our wills align with His will. We must be very careful to not trust the

works of our hand nor even the gifts from God but to focus on God Himself. It can be sobering to realize that our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible.