

By Faith: In Times of Testing

1. Reflect upon or discuss a time when your faith has been put to the test.
 2. Read Genesis 22:1 – 19. What is your initial response to Abraham’s test?
 3. Beyond the personal agony of being asked to sacrifice his own son, why else was this test so significant to Abraham? (See Gen 15:1 – 6 & 21:8 - 12)
 4. Read Genesis 22:3 – 5 and 22:6 - 8. What do these verses tell us about Abraham’s expectation regarding the outcome of this test?
 5. In light of Genesis 22:9 – 14, how are Christians to understand the cryptic statement in verse 14, “*On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.*”¹
 6. Read Genesis 22:15 – 19. Why does God reaffirm his initial promise to Abraham after he passed this great test?
 7. Why are times of testing such a vital part of our own faith development?
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God Only Knows

“Some time later God tested Abraham...*‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’*” (Gen 22:1 – 2) It’s difficult to think of a more profoundly painful test of faith than the one that was placed before Abraham on this occasion. Not only would this test have been difficult to face on a father-to-son level; but Isaac was also the key to *all* God’s promises to Abraham (Gen 21:12). However, according to Hebrews 11:17-19, Abraham was so convinced of God’s faithfulness that he reasoned that, if necessary, God could raise his son Isaac from death in order to keep his solemn promises. Of course Abraham’s faith wasn’t always so rock-solid. Years earlier Abraham used his wife’s maidservant, Hagar, to bear his son Ishmael because both he and Sarah were convinced that it was no longer possible for them to have a child together in their old age – despite what God had said (Genesis 16:1 – 4).

Given that God later commanded the nation Israel not to offer their sons and daughters as sacrifices² it seems impossible to understand this extreme test of faith except as an event that foreshadowed Jesus’ own sacrificial death for our sins. Any outrage we might feel toward God for testing Abraham in this way must be tempered by our realisation that, in the same place where Isaac’s life was spared, God offered his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. God only knows the agony of this sacrificial love. But by faith, Abraham was given some insight into our Heavenly Father’s heart that many of us may never know this side of heaven. And it’s the goal of faith to bring us into closer fellowship with God our Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

¹ Moriah and ‘Golgotha’ (the hill where Jesus was crucified) are in the same vicinity.

² See Dt. 18:10. God’s testing of Abraham came centuries before the Law of Moses. But this command suggests that God was interested in Abraham’s faith, not in a human sacrifice.