

The twenty-second chapter of Genesis introduces a swift transition in the narrative of Abraham and his son Isaac. As we enter this portion of Scripture, approximately ten to twenty years have passed since the events of Genesis chapter twenty-one. Isaac had now grown to become a young man, and Abraham faced a pivotal moment that served to challenge his faith...

“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you'” (Genesis 22:1-2).

The word used for “tested” in this passage means to “prove,” much like an exam serves to demonstrate a student’s knowledge. (1) Thus, Abraham’s test was designed to establish the validity of his faith in God.

But before we continue our look at this passage, it may be helpful to consider the difference between a test and a temptation. While these concepts may be interchangeable to some degree, they are not the same.

In general, a test is something that takes place *externally*. In this context, a test substantiates the existence of characteristics such as virtue, integrity, faith, and other similar qualities. Such tests may take the form of a health issue, a financial concern, an interpersonal difficulty, or any number of other areas.

On the other hand, a temptation is usually *internal* in nature. A temptation is associated with “a solicitation to evil” that tries to see if it is possible to elicit an ungodly response. While God may permit us to be tested in order to reveal and refine various elements of our character, a temptation is an enticement to sin that never comes from God.

As we're reminded in the New Testament epistle of James...

“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone...” (James 1:13 NIV).

When it comes to resisting temptation, we can find encouragement in the Biblical book of 1 Corinthians...

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

(1) H5254 - nāsâ - *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (kjv)*. (n.d.). Blue Letter Bible.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5254/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

So here is the test God designed for Abraham: ***“Go get Isaac, your only son, the one you dearly love! Take him to the land of Moriah, and I will show you a mountain where you must sacrifice him to me on the fires of an altar” (Genesis 22:2 CEV).*** As difficult as it may be to accept, this passage tells us that God instructed Abraham to offer his son as a human sacrifice.

Since other cultures of that era engaged in this practice, it's likely that Abraham was aware of this custom. Today, we [recognize](#) that the [concept](#) of [child sacrifice](#) is [anathema](#) to the God of the Scriptures. However, Abraham had never received instruction from God regarding this practice as far as we know.

The land of Moriah was roughly fifty miles (eighty km) from Abraham’s approximate location during that time. This represented a journey of about two to four days in the Old Testament era. In addition to the distance involved, God’s commandment to Abraham represented a significant challenge in more ways than one.

For instance, Abraham had to explain this directive to his wife, Sarah. Sarah had already spent decades waiting in anticipation of Isaac's birth, and now Abraham proposed to end his life at God's behest. Then we have the likely response of others who must have questioned God's character in directing Abraham to fulfill this command. These must have been difficult conversations for Abraham.

We should also remember God's promise to bless Abraham through his son, Isaac. There was no clear path to receive that blessing if Abraham were to sacrifice Isaac's life. So if Abraham wanted to act upon this directive, he would have to do so in the presence of others who might not understand (or agree with) his decision.

“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 the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off” (Genesis 22:3-4).

These details enable us to better appreciate Abraham's commitment to follow God's command. We should first note that he arose early in the morning. So, unlike [his nephew Lot](#), Abraham did not hesitate to act upon God's instruction.

Next, Abraham saddled his pack animal himself. While Abraham might have assigned a subordinate to complete such a task, he apparently believed that those preparations were far too important to leave to someone else. Finally, Abraham personally split the wood for this offering, thus leaving nothing to chance. These acts of dedication provide us with a good example to follow as we seek to fulfill God's will for our lives.

“And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you'” (Genesis 22:5).

These instructions from Abraham deserve a closer look: ***“‘Stay here with the donkey,’ Abraham told the servants. ‘The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back’” (NLT).*** Although these directions seem relatively straightforward, they conceal an important reality concerning the depth of Abraham's faith.

You see, a sacrificial offering necessitates the death of sacrifice. But let's consider Abraham's statement once again: ***“We will worship and then we will come back to you”*** (NIV, emphasis added). Notice that Abraham didn't say, ***“I will come back to you.”*** He said, ***“...we will come back to you.”***

So even if Abraham was forced to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, he was clearly convinced that God would resurrect him from the dead. Otherwise, he would have never told his servants, ***“...we will return to you” (LEB).***

“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' Then he said, 'Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’” (Genesis 22:6-7).

We should also notice how God stretched Abraham's faith in these verses. Remember that God first told Abraham, ***“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering...” (Genesis 22:2 emphasis added).***

Next, Abraham had to split the wood that he would use to sacrifice his son. After that, God had the father and son travel for days to the site of the execution. That meant Abraham had plenty of time to contemplate what was about to take place.

If that wasn't enough, Isaac apparently began to question the meaning of their trip. He essentially said, *"Father, we have the fire and the wood; where's the sacrifice?"* How might you respond to that question if you were in Abraham's position?

Nevertheless, we're about to discover that Abraham was ready to provide the right answer.

"And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.' So the two of them went together'" (Genesis 22:8).

God's directive to Abraham was impossible to grasp on a human level, yet his faith in God never wavered. But before we continue, we should also give Isaac some credit as well. Remember that Isaac was a young man when he embarked on this journey. On the other hand, Abraham was over one hundred years old at the time of these events.

Once Isaac discovered that *he* was going to be the sacrificial offering, it would have been very easy for him to return home. After all, Abraham had little recourse to prevent Isaac from leaving if that was his intent.

So Abraham was not the only person who demonstrated his faith in God as this drama unfolded. Isaac could have easily rejected any further involvement with this effort if he desired. Instead, he willingly submitted to God's plan, even though it was sure to precipitate his death.

"Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood" (Genesis 22:9).

So Abraham and Isaac each followed God's directive precisely, and each demonstrated his faith in God as well. Abraham trusted God enough to bind his son in preparation for his sacrifice, and Isaac trusted God enough to let his father do it.

"And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' So he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me'" (Genesis 22:10-12).

These verses feature two words that facilitate our understanding of this passage. Those two words are ***"know"*** and ***"fear."*** The word "know" means to *"ascertain by seeing"* ⁽¹⁾ The word "fear" conveys the idea of reverence in this context. ⁽²⁾ So in taking these actions, Abraham demonstrated the fact that he respected God above all else.

This concept is so important that the New Testament epistle of James used this event from Abraham's life to serve as an example...

"Didn't our ancestor Abraham receive God's approval as a result of what he did when he offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice on the altar? You see that Abraham's faith and what he did worked together. His faith was shown to be genuine by what he did.

The Scripture passage came true. It says, 'Abraham believed God, and that faith was regarded by God to be his approval of Abraham.' So Abraham was called God's friend. You see that a person receives God's approval because of what he does, not only because of what he believes" (James 2:21-24 GW).

So Abraham's visible conduct served to demonstrate his unseen faith. This is important, for what was true for Abraham is also true of us as well: what we *do* often demonstrates what we *believe*.

“Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided'” (Genesis 22:13-14).

It is significant to note that Abraham did not refer to this area as, “*The place where God put me to the test,*” or “*The place where Isaac almost died.*” Instead, he named that location “*The place where God provided.*” In giving that name to this area, Abraham emphasized God's provision and de-emphasized his personal experience.

(1) H3045 - yāda' - *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (kjv)*. (n.d.). Blue Letter Bible.
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3045/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

(2) H3373 - yārē' - *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (kjv)*. (n.d.). Blue Letter Bible.
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3373/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

“Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: 'By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'

So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba” (Genesis 22:15-19).

Astronomers estimate there are over 100 billion major galaxies within range of current telescope technology. If that figure is accurate, then the number of stars in the universe is likely to be 10²⁶ power, or one hundred million, billion, billion stars. While that is a breathtaking estimate, what's more astounding is the fact that it's virtually impossible to calculate the number of sand grains that exist here on planet earth- there are just too many to count.

These details illustrate a key takeaway from this passage. These verses do not imply that Abraham will have one hundred million, billion, billion descendants. Instead, he will have too many descendants to count, just like the grains of sand along the seashore. So whether Abraham looked up at the stars at night or down at the sand by day, he would always have a reminder of God's promise to bless him.

“Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, 'Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.’”

And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah” (Genesis 22:20-24).

We last encountered Abraham's brother Nahor back in [Genesis chapter eleven](#). Since the traveling caravans of that era probably carried the latest news between these families, this may explain how Abraham learned that his brother's household had grown to include twelve children.

So why is this seemingly insignificant piece of information tucked away at the end of this chapter? Well, this list of family members includes one very important granddaughter: Rebekah, the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel. As we'll soon discover, Rebekah will go on to become a very significant figure in Biblical history.