

command?" In testing recognize that your circumstances may appear to contradict God's promises.

8) In testing try to reconcile apparent contradictions.

Abraham's supreme test is a good example of *spiritual geometry*. Abraham knew the promise regarding Isaac (*cf.* Heb. 11:18). He also knew the character of God: God is faithful and always keeps His promises. From this he reached the conclusion found in Hebrews 11:19: "He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead." This is the only possible way to reconcile the promise and the command. The word "considered" in Hebrews 11:19, better translated as "reasoned," shows Abraham put a lot of thought into reconciling the promise with the command.

9) Tests are designed to shake your confidence in God.

A test often produces doubts about God's character. In his supreme test Abraham must have wondered, "Is God faithful? Does He keep His promises?" A command from God may seem to but cannot abrogate one of God's promises.

10) Testing demonstrates your fear, love, and trust in God.

Abraham's supreme test demonstrated:

- his fear of the LORD (*cf.* 22:12).
- his love for the LORD. He would not have attempted this sacrifice unless he loved God more than his son.
- his trust in the LORD. He believed

his relationship with Isaac would continue even if God had to replace his cremated body and raise him from the dead.

11) Testing demonstrates how much faith and confidence you have in God.

Do you really trust Him or some other form of security (*e.g.*, children, job, money)? Jeremiah calls other kinds of security "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (2:13).

12) Testing shows the strength of your faith and the extent of your obedience.

In testing you learn how strong your faith is; or, sad to say, the limits of your obedience—the most you're willing to pay in terms of loss or suffering to please God. Testing often reveals the outer limits of your faith, trust, confidence, obedience, and willingness to serve—the point beyond which you will go no further. Testing shows the reality of your spiritual life!

13) In testing present goals and desires must be sacrificed and the future left up to God.

This is what made Abraham great: He was willing to sacrifice to God what he loved the most!



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ABRAHAM'S SUPREME TEST

Genesis 22:1-19



The Cost of Obedience



*"There is no way
to self-knowledge
except through trial."
~Augustine~*

Abraham's supreme test is found in Genesis 22:1–19. It consists of a horrid command to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise—the only son of Abraham. The triumph of Abraham in the areas of faith and obedience teach us some important lessons about divine testing.

1) A test may come unannounced at any time.

2) Tests are created by issuing unwelcome commands.

God's command to Abraham was crystal clear: Abraham personally heard God's voice. God initiated the test and chose the time of testing. It was a test of obedience (*cf.* 22:12). Abraham was commanded to do something he really didn't want to do—something difficult, seemingly senseless, and personally revolting. This command was the most repugnant thing imaginable to Abraham. In testing God may ask you to carry out hard, painful, loathsome commands.

But notice!

Abraham's obedience was:

- *immediate*. It didn't take him long to decide to obey—just a few hours while lying awake on his bed. How could he go back to sleep after receiving such a disturbing command?
- *discreet*. Abraham told no one what he was about to do in order to avoid pressure, debate, and argument. He did not discuss his plans with his wife. Surely he wondered, "How will I ever explain this to Sarah?" Listen to the words of the first century Jewish historian, Josephus:

Abraham, deeming that nothing would justify disobedience to God and that in everything he must submit to His will, since all that befell His favoured ones was ordained by His providence, concealed from his wife God's commandment and his own resolve concerning the immolation of the child; nay, revealing it not even to any of his household; lest haply he should have

been hindered from doing God's service... (*Antiquities*, 1.225).

• *unselfish*. Philo contrasts the heathen sacrifices of his contemporaries with the moral superiority of Abraham's sacrifice:

It was not offered from any selfish motive, under the compulsion of a tyrant, or through fear of man, from desire of present glory or hope of future renown. He did not offer his son to win a battle, or to avert a famine or a pestilence, or to obtain some coveted gift of the gods. Nor did he give up one child out of many. He was ready to sacrifice his only son, his beloved son, the son of his old age, and he did this simply because God commanded it. His sacrifice in itself went far beyond all heathen sacrifices, as in its motives it infinitely surpassed them. He gave all that he had, and he gave it not from fear, or from interest, but out of love to God (Jack Finegan, *In the Beginning: A Journey through Genesis*, 116).

3) Testing may bring loss: loss of money, comfort, security, health, or loved ones.

Abraham was threatened with loss, the loss of someone he dearly loved and wanted to keep. The commands of Scripture create similar tests of obedience for us today, as, for instance, when our obedience is sure to bring about the loss of something we truly love and desire.

4) Testing causes a wearying struggle in the mind between obeying God and not wanting to give up things you enjoy.

That's why tests are hard and not much fun. For Abraham a heartwounding battle must have taken place between his desires and God's desires—an inner turmoil over

keeping his son or pleasing his God.

5) Tests are tailor-made for each person.

God knows how to make tough tests because He knows what's important to you. In testing God often asks for what you love the most—for what you least want to sacrifice!

6) Tests are graduated to fit the maturity of the individual (*cf.* 1 Cor. 10:13).

Abraham's supreme test took place when he was "in his old age" (Gen. 21:2)—perhaps 110 or 120 years old (*cf.* 21:5). It was not an easy test for a spiritual babe but a difficult one for a spiritually matured Old Testament saint.

Now, this test was not only for Abraham but also for our instruction (*cf.* 1 Cor. 10:11) and for angelic observation (*cf.* the Book of Job). It proves that some want to please God no matter how abhorrent the request—no matter how high the cost. Though not explicitly stated and therefore an argument from silence, I can't help but wonder if Satan was the unseen instigator of this test. Having failed with Job, he proposed a different yet equally difficult test for Abraham. Remember that Abraham and Job lived about the same time.

7) Tests often make no sense from our perspective.

Abraham's supreme test caused confusion and an attempt to reconcile apparent contradictions. He wrestled with a tough question, "How can the promise about Isaac (Gen. 21:12) be reconciled with this