

Easter Vigil

FAITH TESTED

Genesis 22:1-18

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Analysis by Bill White

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2He said, "Take 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 that I shall show you." 3So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. 4On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. 5Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." 6Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

9When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. 11But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said,

“Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 12He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy 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.” 13And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14So Abraham called that place “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

15The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, 18and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

DIAGNOSIS: TESTED FAITH

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Sacrifice your son...*

Abraham has a monumental, even horrific problem. God has instructed him to sacrifice the life of his son. For years God had promised descendants to Abraham and Sarah, but they had none. Finally, when they were sure they were too old and had virtually lost hope they are given a son, Isaac (Genesis 21:1-7). God had kept his promise; their hopes, dreams and prayers had been fulfilled! And now the God who had graced them with this great gift says, “Take 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 that I shall show

you” (Genesis 22:2). What!?! Why!?!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : ... and prove your faith

Underlying this is the deeper problem that God is in fact testing Abraham’s faith (v. 1). Will Abraham continue to fear, love and trust God even now that God seems to be acting against his promise? Or will he now trust his human logic and reasoning in order to cling to what he loves?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : because faith without works is dead.

Even worse, what are the consequences of Abraham’s response? If he follows through with the sacrifice will he be charged with murder? Will his family say he’s lost his mind? After all, only an insane person would murder his own son and say, “God told me to do it.” But if he disobeys God, if he does not put his faith in God into action then in reality he has no real faith in God. And there are eternal consequences to be suffered for the faithless.

PROGNOSIS: TEST PASSED

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Life-giving faith offered, faith that produces good works

The God who is testing Abraham knows exactly what it is to sacrifice his one and only Son, the Son whom he loves. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17). Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac; God took the wood of the cross and laid it on Jesus. As the ram caught in a thicket by its horns became Abraham’s sacrifice, God’s own sacrifice is Jesus stuck to a wooden cross with a crown of thorns stuck to his head. But Jesus’ death is

not final. On Easter Sunday God raises him from the dead. Now, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Word and sacraments, the free gift of faith in the crucified and risen Christ is offered to the world. This is life-giving and life-sustaining faith. God's own sacrifice is complete and no further sacrifice is necessary.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Proving faith*
God had already blessed Abraham through faith (Genesis 15:6). In this story Abraham is a marvelous example of one who does fear, love and trust God. Abraham's faith is in the God who provides. He believes God himself will provide the lamb (Lamb of God?) for a burnt offering (Genesis 22:8), so much so that he is willing to prove his faith by proceeding with the sacrifice of Isaac to God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Sacrifice made, blessing bestowed*
Abraham's obedience was an external sign of true faith in God, specifically here, faith that God would provide. God approved this sign and provided the ram for sacrifice. And God keeps his promise to bless Abraham, his descendants, and all the nations through his offspring (Genesis 22:17-18), a promise kept and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.