

**Who Is Testing Whom? By Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr.<sup>06050626</sup>**  
**Genesis 22:1-14 and Matthew 10:40-42**  
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Slowly and quietly the two made their way up the mountain. It was a steep, rocky, and twisty climb. The young boy struggled under the weight of the wood he was carrying. In front of him was his old father carrying the knife and the fire. He knew they were going to make a sacrifice to this God that his father worshiped. He was wise for his age and knew about sacrifices. Usually, when you do these things, you kill your best lamb or bird, or whatever you have, and burn it on a fire as an offering to God. He didn't see any animals around. Finally, burdened down by the load he was carrying, he asked, innocently "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

His father said "God will provide the lamb for the offering."

When they reached the rock at the top of Mt. Moriah, they put down their loads. The boy helped his father gather the heavy stones to build an altar. Then he helped his father lay the sticks down for a fire. Then, his father did a strange thing. Imagine the mixed feelings of trust and terror as his father tied the boy's hands and feet and laid him on the wood. Father and son looked into one another's eyes for what must have seemed like an eternity. The father raised the knife high above him to plunge it down into his chest. There, at that instant, the course of human religious history turned.

The scripture says that suddenly, God's voice called out from heaven and told Abraham to stop, and that he was only testing the old man. Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket. There before his eyes was a substitute offering for his son.

My heart has difficulty conceiving of a God who would test someone by asking them to sacrifice their only son — to take an innocent baby or a child to an altar and kill it. This to appease an angry God? I refuse to worship such a god!

There are a couple of points, however, that make me wonder about what really happened during that knife-raised instant. First, Abraham was one hundred years old. He had waited at least eighty years for the birth of a son who could carry on the promise of life for his lineage. Why would he sacrifice this long-awaited miraculous son? It wasn't as though he and Sarah were young and could have other children through whom to carry on the promise.

Second, it sounded earlier as if Abraham knew how things were going to turn out. In verse five, when they left the two young men with the donkey, Abraham said, "*we* will worship and *we* will come back to you."

Third, I don't think God would tell Abraham to take his son Isaac to sacrifice him as a test when the common practice of the whole culture around him was to sacrifice one's firstborn child.

The popular religion in the land of Canaan, in which Abraham and Sarah lived, was pagan. People worshiped the god Molech. Ten years ago, I stood on a bluff above the archaeological excavations of Megiddo, near the port of Haifa in central Israel. There below was a four-thousand- year old altar discovered by archaeologists. It was round. It had been dedicated to the god Molech. On that very altar, Canaanite parents sacrificed their firstborn to appease the terrible and fierce god. We find a clue in Leviticus 18:21, written long after Abraham, "You shall not give any of your offspring to sacrifice them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD." In other words, everybody did it—everybody sacrificed their first born, so why would this be a test for Abraham? If everyone did it, Abraham knew he was supposed to do it

too.

Perhaps, during that knife-raised instant, Abraham said “No, wait! I can’t worship a god who demands the sacrifice of human life to appease the god.” Perhaps, in the development of the Judeo-Christian faith, Abraham was the first to stand up against convention and decide he was not going to sacrifice a human life to worship God. That is why he is the father of my faith!

In a sense, Abraham tested God. Would this God still love him if he refused to sacrifice Isaac? I’ve heard people say, “God was testing you.” I wonder, does God test? Or rather, do we go through difficult times and in the midst of them, we discover that God is with us, giving us strength and hope. Any difficult time is a matter of testing: will we hold firm to our belief in God, or will we give in to bitterness, loneliness and despair?

There are some more points that we could glean from this story of Abraham and Isaac, whether you believe God was testing Abraham or Abraham was testing God.

First, Isaac trusts in his father Abraham, the same way Abraham trusts in God. We are asked trust God in the same way. Even when we’re going through fiery trials, we must trust that God is with us, giving us what we need to go on. We are asked to be faithful to our creator God.

Second, we are asked the question, “What is your God?” God was asking Abraham to sacrifice this dearly-awaited son. Abraham showed that he loved God more than anything else, even his own son. How do we answer the question, “What is your God?” Do we love our money more than we love God? Do we love our house more than we love God? Do we love a car more than God? Do we love our children more than God? What is your God?

Third, do we sacrifice our children to other gods? Do we let them watch TV and movies and video games without discussing them with them? Do we let our children run unfettered, as though that somehow showed we had unconditional love for them? That is not showing love; it is letting them think that actions have no consequences. Do we let our children slink quietly up to their rooms to be anti-social for whole evening, listening to their music or talking on the phone? Our children need to learn that they are a part of a family. That means they must learn to interact with other family members. Our children are precious in the eyes of God. We cannot sacrifice them to the gods of drugs, sex, power, or wealth.

At the close of the passage, it says “Abraham called that place ‘The LORD will provide’”<sup>1</sup> That is the point of this whole story: we must have faith in our God enough to know that God will provide. God is more important than our children, than our sweat and toil, than our wealth. God will provide: have faith!

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<sup>1</sup>Genesis 22:14