

## Text: English

Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test, saying to him, "Abraham." He answered, "Here I am."<sup>2</sup> "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you."<sup>3</sup> So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.<sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.<sup>5</sup> Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."<sup>6</sup> Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.<sup>7</sup> Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"<sup>8</sup> And Abraham said, "It is God who will see to the sheep for this burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.<sup>9</sup> They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.<sup>10</sup> And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son.<sup>11</sup> Then a messenger of יהוה called to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am."<sup>12</sup> "Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me."<sup>13</sup> When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.<sup>14</sup> And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, "On the mount of יהוה there is vision."<sup>15</sup> The messenger of יהוה called to Abraham a second time from heaven,<sup>16</sup> and said, "By Myself I swear, יהוה declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,<sup>17</sup> I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.<sup>18</sup> All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command."<sup>19</sup> Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

**Text: Hebrew/English**

1. וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַהֲאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test, saying to him, "Abraham." He answered, "Here I am."

2. וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יִחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אַהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ:

"Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you."

3. וַיִּשְׁכַּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחְבֵּשׁ אֶת־חֻמְרוֹ וַיִּלָּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו אִתּוֹ וְאֵת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּבְקַע עֵצִי עֹלָה וַיִּקֶּם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים:

So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.

4. בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיֵּשֶׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרֶחֶק:

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.

5. וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נַעֲרָיו שְׁבוּ־לְכֶם פֹּה עִם־הַחֹמֶר וְאֲנִי וְהַבָּעַר נִלְכֶה עַד־כֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם:

Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."

6. וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיִּשָּׂם עַל־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַמַּאֲכָלִת וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.

7. וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲגַהּ הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיִה הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה:

Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"

8. וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֵלָהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה בְנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:

And Abraham said, "It is God who will see to the sheep for this burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

9. וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבְנוּ שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת־הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹל אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לְעֵצִים:

They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

10. וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַמַּאֲכָלִת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת־בְּנוֹ:

And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son.

11. וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

Then a messenger of יהוה called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.”

12. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תִּשְׁלַח גֵּדְךָ אֶל־הַנֶּעֱר וְאֶל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מֵאוֹמֶה כִּי וְעַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יִרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶתָּה וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּת אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי:

“Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.”

13. וַיֵּשֶׁא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אֵיל אִשׁוּר נֹאֲתָו בַּסִּבְבָּה בְּקִרְנָיו וַיִּלֶּךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לַעֲלֵה תַחַת בְּנוֹ:

When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.

14. וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שְׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה וַיִּרְאָה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יִרְאָה:

And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of יהוה there is vision.”

15. וַיִּקְרָא מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שְׁנִיַּת מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם:

The messenger of יהוה called to Abraham a second time from heaven,

16. וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־יְהוָה לִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּת אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ:

and said, “By Myself I swear, יהוה declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,

17. כִּי־בְרַךְ אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְהִרְבָּה אַרְבֵּה אֶת־יִרְעֶךָ כַּכּוֹכָבִים הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיָּם וַיִּרַשׁ יִרְעֶךָ אֶת שְׁעַר אֹיְבָיו:

I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.

18. וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּיִרְעֶךָ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ לְעַבְדְּךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי:

All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.”

19. וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נַעֲרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיִּלְכוּ יחדוֹ אֶל־בְּעָר שְׁבַע וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבָעַר שְׁבַע: {פ}

Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

## Question #1: “After these things...”. After what things?

### Genesis 22:1

And it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham.

### Midrash Rabbah, Bereshit 55:4

“And it came to pass after these things that God tried Abraham.” After what things? According to R. Yohanan, citing R. Yose ben Zimra, after the things Satan had to say. Following the fest given upon the “child’s having grown and being weaned” (Gen. 21:8), the Ministering Angels spoke up to the Holy One, “Master of the universe, out of the entire feast that this old man, upon whom You bestowed fruit of the womb at the age of one hundred – out of the entire feast he prepared, could he not have spared, say, one turtledove, one fledgling, as an offering to You?” The Holy One replied, “Is it not true that Abraham prepared the feat in honor of his son? Still, if I say to him, ‘Sacrifice your son to Me,’ he will sacrifice him at once.” The angels said, “Try him.” At once “God tried Abraham.”

### Midrash Rabbah, Bereshit 55:4

Ishmael said to Isaac: I am more beloved than you, for I was circumcised at the age of 13 when I had the maturity to protest but did not, but you were circumcised when you were small, without the ability to protest. Replied Isaac: “All that you loaned to God was three drops of blood. However, I am 37 and if God asked me to slaughter myself, I would not refuse.” Said God: “Behold, the hour is at hand.” And God tested Abraham.

### Pirke Avot 5:3

With ten trials was Abraham tried, and he withstood them all.

### Maimonides, *Mishneh*

1. God tells him to leave his homeland and be a stranger in the land of Canaan
2. Immediately after his arrival in the Promised Land, he encounters a famine
3. The Egyptians seize his wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh
4. Abraham faces incredible odds in the battle of the four and five kings
5. He marries Hagar after not being able to have children with Sarah
6. God tells him to circumcise himself at an advanced age
7. The king of Gerar captures Sarah, intending to take her for himself.
8. God tells him to send Hagar away after having a child with her
9. His son, Ishmael, becomes estranged
10. God tells him to sacrifice Isaac upon the altar

### Pirkei d’Rebbie Eliezer, 38A.1

The Akeda is God’s retribution against Abraham for the ill treatment of Ishmael and Hagar. While he did as God commanded (in listening to Sarah as she wanted them banished from the camp), he only gave them bread and a jug of water; he withheld gold and silver, and even without sufficient provisions for their journey.

Midrash Rabbah, Bereshit 56:7

“And He said, ‘Do not raise your hand’”. Where was the knife? Three tear drops fell from the Ministering Angels and destroyed the knife. So Abraham said to Him, “I shall strangle him.” God replied, “Do not raise your hand against the boy.” “I shall draw some blood.” “Do not do anything to harm him,” do not make him any blemish. “For now I know,” meaning, “I have let all know that you love Me.”

**Question #2: Did Abraham Pass the Test?**

Genesis 22:12

Do not lay a hand on the boy, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld your son, your only son.

Aggadat Bereshit 31:3

Abraham passed the test, for he quickly obeyed God’s command to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Unlike Lot, his nephew who lingered and hesitated, as soon as God said to Abraham “Take your son...”, Abraham got up early in the morning and immediately set out on his journey. He woke up early on the second day and saw nothing. It was not until the third day that he saw the divine presence standing on the mountain, as it is said, “On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place far off” (Genesis 22:4). Why did God wait until the third day to reveal the place to Abraham? So that the nations of the world would not say that Abraham sacrificed his son brazenly, but that he had thought about it and done it out of love for God. When God revealed HIMSELF to Abraham, Abraham’s fear overwhelmed him and he lost his mind. But he went ahead and sacrificed his son. If he had waited even an hour, he wouldn’t have done it. That is why God said he would suffer for three days so that everyone would know that he had acted out of love and not fear.

Midrash Rabbah, Bereshit 56:8

When I said to you “Take your son...” I did not say to you slaughter him (*sh’chateihu*) but only bring him up (*ha’aleihu*). Now that you have brought him up, introduce him to Me, and then take him back down.

Midrash Tanhuma

God said “*v’haaleihu sham l’olah*” – “bring him there as an *Olah (ayin-lamed-hay)*”. *Olah* did not mean “sacrifice” but rather was connected to the word *Aliyah* – spiritual uplift. God said only “raise up your son with an appreciation of your devotion to Me.” Abraham was so dazzled that he became confused and misunderstood God’s intended purpose.

Rabbi Burton Visotzky

Then there is the murder itself to consider. How does a father raise his hand and put a cleaver against his son’s throat? Now, I know that every parent has a moment or two, particularly with teenagers, when the thought “I’ll kill them” has flitted through his or her mind. But it is a long way – three days’ distance – from an angry or frustrated passing thought to the assumption that this murder is a divinely commanded sacrifice. To most modern sensibilities, that three-day journey could as well have been measured

in light years. Or was Abraham simply empty by then? The Akedah one trial too many for him?

One can almost see the flat effect of the depressive as he walks, zombielike, up the mountain. It takes the angel more than once to catch his attention. And when it's over and Abraham has won the greatest prize of all, he stumbles down the mountainside, not even noticing that Isaac has been left behind. Abraham dwells in Beer Sheva, far from Isaac, far from Sarah who is in Hebron, far from Ishmael and Hagar in Egypt. In the end, Abraham is close only to God.

Rabbi Amy Scheinerman

Abraham's all-consuming desire to do God's will at the expense of the welfare of those he loves most (Sarah, Hagar, Yishmael, Yitzchak) points to areas for moral growth and development in all of us.

Rabbi Norman Cohen

Abraham knew all along that God was not going to have him kill Isaac – that's why he says to his attendants, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the boy will go worship and then **we** will return to you" (Gen. 22:5). The test for Abraham was not whether he would sacrifice his son, but whether he would have faith that God would never require him to do so. In that regard, he never once believed that he was going to slaughter his son; he was going through the motions until God could change His mind.

## Questions

- What is the actual test?
- Who was Abraham's favorite son?
- What are the things after which this occurs?
- Why does Abraham go back alone to his servants?
- Who are the 2 servants and why does Abraham bring them?
- Where was Sarah?
- For what was God really asking?
- Did Abraham pass the test?
- When Abraham says, "We will return to you," why does he use the plural in reference to himself if he is going to kill Isaac?
- Why does the text say they arrive where God told them to go, when it never says that God told them?
- Why didn't Isaac figure out that something was afoot until they were up the mountain?
- Why does God send an angel instead of doing by Godself?
- Why is "Abraham" said twice?
- How many angels are there?
- Why didn't the servants go with them?
- Why does the speak change from an angel to God from v. 15 to v. 16?
- What happened on the first two days?
- Why did Abraham lift his eyes? What does he see?
- Why does the narrator put himself into the picture by telling what the mountain is called today?
- Who wrote this text?
- Why is Yireh translated as fear over devotion?
- How old is Isaac and what is his role through all this?
- Why is Isaac so passive on the alter?
- Why is Isaac suddenly referred to as the "naar" in v. 12?
- Why are there so many details that we would deem as irrelevant when some of the glaring details are omitted?
- Did Isaac really die, and the text is covering up a murder?