

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 17 (22:1-24): Some Summary Thoughts:

Genesis 22 is a strategic point in the larger Abraham cycle. It is also a watershed moment in Abraham’s life. In his time of testing, Abraham will be confronted with the need to “see” the sacrifice that God made available. Thus, Genesis 22 epitomizes Abraham’s entire life in microcosm. The text acknowledges his life as journey, his life as test (will he embrace or distance himself from God’s call?), and his life as trust in the promises of God. His great faith response: “*The LORD will provide*” (22:8) becomes proof that *El-Roi* (the God who sees Hagar, 16:13; 21:17-19) is also *Yahweh-Yireh*, the God who “sees” to the sacrifice in place of the promised son (22:14). The chapter is a fitting bookend to the opening scene of Genesis 12.

- In 12:1-3, God speaks His first Word to Abraham saying “*Go forth...*” effectively asking him to sacrifice his past, and promising him specific things for the future. Abram embraces God’s Promise and begins his journey as dictated.
- In 22:1-16, God speaks His last Words to “test” Abraham, again saying “*Go forth...*”; in effect, asking him to sacrifice his future. He then reiterates His promises in light of Abraham’s verbal/behavioral faithful response (22:1, 11-18). Again Abraham fully embraces God’s Promise. Significantly, the text in Genesis gives no hint about what Abraham thought of God’s request for him to sacrifice “*his son, his only son whom he loves*” (mentioned 3 times in verses 2, 12, 16). In fact, 3 times Abraham simply responds “*here I am*” (twice to God in verses 1, 11 and once to his son in verse 7).

Key Point: Genesis 22 appears to want us to understand that Abraham’s faith response is not “blind obedience to some command”; rather, his actions are rooted in his trust in God’s fidelity to His Promises.

The writer of the Hebrews attributes specific motivation to Abraham in light of God’s Resurrection Power exhibited in Christ saying: “*11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring [seed] will be reckoned.’ 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*” One could argue that since the source of Isaac’s life was God, Abraham faced the fact that God had the right to reclaim him through sacrifice. Thus, he honored the reality that he could not honor the gift over the giver. But this is only speculation. The truth in Genesis is that Abraham trusted in the Promise and particularly the Promise-Giver. He put his trust in God’s “seeing” and as a result actually did see the unseen – the core of “faith” (Heb 11:1)

There seem to be at least a couple of very important principles that emerge from the “test” required by God:

- (1) God does not just want right things done; He wants us to be the vessel of right things that He does.
- (2) The purpose of God’s testing, perhaps best stated by Peter in 1 Peter 1:5-7 appears to be so that God may be glorified by the proof of faith. Note the powerful parallels with Abraham, Isaac and Christians in Peter’s discussion of “new birth,” “faithful shielded by God’s power,” “refinement of faith through testing” in 1Peter 1:3-7: “*1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*”

Interestingly, God only appears to put His people to a “test.” There appears to be no instance in which He “tests” heathens. “Heart” and “faith” of His people intertwine in God’s tests. In Deuteronomy 8:2, for example, God reminds the Israelites that He led them for 40 years in the wilderness to humble them and “*to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands.*” In Exodus 20:20, after the Israelites reacted in fear to God’s powerful display of thunder and lightning at Mount Sinai after giving the 10 commandments, Moses says to the people, “*Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.*” Thus, it would appear that God tests to know whether His chosen one is faithful (even Jesus did not escape “testing” Mark 1:12-14), and even instill deeper faith to keep His people from thinking and behaving in ways contrary to His Will. God also tests with the intent of producing endurance/ perseverance which yields proven character which leads to hope (James 1:2-4; Romans 5:2-5). God does not appear to want to simply develop a man of skills. Rather, what He really seems to desire is for us to learn to “be” – to be men and women of moral character, useful in His service, dependent upon His strength