מפרשים

Classical Commentaries

RAMBAN

Why did God test Abraham if He knew the outcome?

Genesis 22:1

Ramban understands the "trial" (nisayon) of Akeidat Yitzchak as a positive opportunity: since G-d already knows the righteous will obey, He commands a test so that the person's good intention becomes actualized deed, earning reward for action rather than thought alone—thus all trials in the Torah serve the good of the one tested. Rashbam, by contrast, reads "vayehi achar hadevarim ha'eleh" as referring to the immediately preceding covenant with Avimelech, and understands the nisayon as a painful rebuke (kontrarya)—G-d's way of punishing Avraham for rashly ceding land promised to his descendants, showing him that Yitzchak's survival, and thus the future of that promise, was never guaranteed. The two thus diverge sharply: Ramban sees the trial as constructive and reward-oriented, while Rashbam sees it as corrective and punitive, tied to a specific prior misstep by Avraham. AI SUMMARY

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

AND G-D TRIED ABRAHAM. — The matter of "trial," in my opinion, is as follows: Since a man's deeds are at his absolute free command, to perform them or not to perform them at his will, on the part of one who is tried it is called "a trial." But on the part of the One, blessed be He, who tries the person, it is a command that the one being tested should bring forth the matter from the potential into actuality so that he may be rewarded for a good deed, not for a good thought alone. Know further that G-d trieth the righteous, for knowing that the righteous will do His will, He desires to make him even more upright, and so He commands him to undertake a test, but He does not try the wicked, who would not obey. Thus all trials in the Torah are for the good of the one who is being tried.

RASHBAM, WHO READS IT DIFFERENTLY

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה — whenever we find the construction אחר הדברים האלה what follows is conceptually immediately following what has been reported immediately before. Examples are found in 15,1 after Avraham had killed the four kings who had taken Lot captive. At that time G'd had told him not to be afraid of any repercussions. We also find such a construction in verse 20 of our chapter where the Avraham was informed of the birth of Rivkah after we heard that Yitzchok had been born. We find a similar construction also in Esther 3,1 where Mordechai told Esther and she told the king about the assassination plot by Bigtan and Teresh. The event occurred around the time when Haman was promoted and wanted to kill Mordechai and the Jewish people. The fact that he had saved the king's life became the immediate cause of Mordechai's rise in the king's esteem.

[if I understand the author correctly, he wants to tell us that although sequentially the matters related are not immediate chronologically, the Torah or

Scriptures use the formulation to trace them to events which occurred some time back. Yitzchok was at least 37 years old before Avraham heard about the birth of Rivkah. Similarly, if the king had rewarded Mordechai for his part in discovering the plot immediately, history might have taken a different course. Ed.

] Here too, the words mean that what follows occurred after Avraham and Avimelech had concluded their covenant according to which until the fourth generation Avraham's descendants would not register a claim against lands owned by the Philistines at this time. G'd became very angry at this high-handed action by Avraham, seeing that he had given away lands which were part of what G'd had promised to Avraham and his descendants at the "covenant of the pieces" in chapter 15. We know that a condition of that covenant had been not to allow a single soul of the Canaanites to survive in that land, according to both Deuteronomy 20,16 as well as according to Joshua 13,3 and 15,45-47.

Clearly lots had been cast concerning the lands owned by the 5 Philistine rulers, and who was to settle in those lands after the conquest. As a result of Avraham's high-handed action,

והאלוקים נסה את אברהם — G'd now subjected Avraham to a painful test, something which was bound to cause him grief. Whenever the root נסה occurs, such as in Job 4,2 or Exodus 17,7 or Psalms 26,2 the connotation is an unpleasant one for the one being subjected to it.

In this instance, G'd, so to speak, indicated to Avraham that he had been foolish to think that he could guarantee's Yitzchok's and his descendants well being into the future, as he might have to terminate his life before he even had produced any offspring who would be called upon to honour his father's deal with Avimelech. We find that the ark of the covenant spent seven months in Philistine captivity as a result of Avraham having made such an unauthorised pact with Avimelech (Samuel I 6,1). The seven months corresponded to the seven sheep Avraham had gratuitously given to Avimelech. G'd swore that as a result the Philistines would fight seven wars against the Israelites in which they would be victorious. These wars occurred during the time of Shimshon, Chofni, Pinchos, Sha-ul, and the three sons of Sha-ul who were killed.

Another approach: as a result of Avraham's high-handed act seven altars (public altars equivalent of temples) were destroyed by the enemies of the Jewish people after they entered the Holy Land Land, They were: Moses' Tabernacle, Gilgal, Nov, Shiloh, Givon and the two Temples in Jesrusalem.

(copied from Midrash Shemuel by the editor of Rash'bam) According to still another version G'd's ark would repose in the land of the Philistines for 7 months.

נסה ה' — the words mean קונטריה, "G'd rebuked Avraham."