

# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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## THE TESTS OF GOD

*Abraham said,  
"God will provide for Himself  
the lamb for the burnt offering,  
my son."*

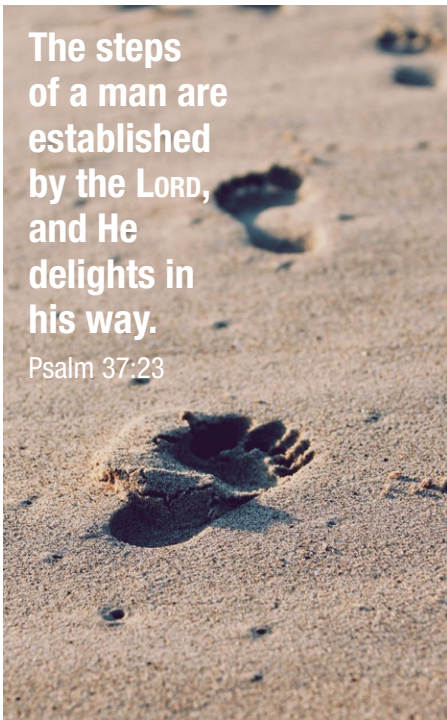
Genesis 22:8b

By: Janet Aslin, *BFP Staff Writer*  
Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

**TESTS ARE AN INESCAPABLE AND NECESSARY FACT OF LIFE.** Can you imagine allowing anyone who has not proven that they know the rules of safe driving to have access to our roads as a driver? Or perhaps an even more extreme illustration...Who would allow a surgeon who had not mastered the required anatomy classes to operate on their body? Yes, tests are necessary to demonstrate proficiency.

What about matters of faith? Does God test us? Scripture says that He does, both individually, as in the case of Abraham and the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:2), and corporately, as when He tested the Israelites when they left Egypt and entered the wilderness (Exod. 16:4), to name just two examples.

What feeling does the word “test” evoke when you hear it? For some, it might bring up memories of past failures, of studying to the best of their ability and still not getting a passing mark. Yet others, who found schoolwork easy and never had to study, will have a completely opposite response. Regardless of which group you place yourself in, you can rest assured that tests in God’s world are different. They are not “pass or fail” but rather “pass or retake.” If we do need a “retake,” we can be assured by the words of David the psalmist who testified of God’s mercy when he wrote, *“The steps of a man are established by the LORD, and He delights in his way. **When he falls, he will not be hurled down, because the LORD is the One who holds his hand**”* (Ps. 37:23–24 emphasis added).



The steps  
of a man are  
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Psalm 37:23

## Two Hebrew Words for Test

There are two distinct Hebrew words translated primarily as the word test. The first is Strong’s number H5254, *nasa* (נָסָה pronounced naw-saw), and the second is H974, *bachan* (בָּחַן pronounced baw-khan). The *Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive*

*Concordance of the Bible* uses very similar terms to describe both words: test; try; prove; examine. The words in parenthesis are added under the definition of *nasa*—to test (usually to prove character or faithfulness).

In his word study of *nasa*, Chaim Bentorah offers the following clarification. “*Bachan* has the idea of testing as we immediately think of testing, that is [to make] sure that something works, or you learned your lesson. The word *nasa*, however, is very close to this but with a subtle important difference. *Nasa* has more of the idea of a challenge. A weight lifter will *nasa* (keep adding more weight) until he is maxed out, that is, he keeps adding weights not until he fails, but until he has reached and discovered his limits.” In other words, using the word *nasa* would indicate you are being tested not so much to see what you know but to determine the depth of your character.

## Who Is Testing Whom?

Throughout the Bible, we read of times when God tests man, when man tests God and also when man tests man. We’ll look at the first scenario only and explore two instances when God tested man. Although both *nasa* and *bachan* appear in Scripture verses that speak of God testing man, the verses I have selected only contain the verb *nasa*.

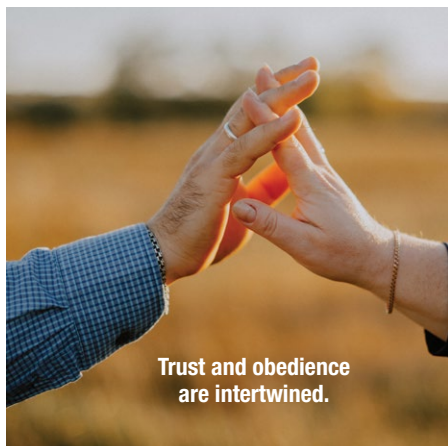
In his article, *Why Does God Test Us?*, Rabbi Gil Student writes, “The notion that the all-knowing God needs to test us to determine whether we will follow His command is absurd. He knows the future and therefore gains nothing from the exercise. Yet the *Torah* [Gen.–Deut.] discusses in multiple places God’s tests.” We are the ones who need to see how we react when placed in a position that requires us to decide whether we will trust God or try to solve the problem on our own.

## Will You Trust Me?

When we get down to bedrock, so to speak, one of the core questions that needs to be answered is, “What do I believe about God’s nature? Is He trustworthy? Can He provide for my needs when circumstances seem to indicate otherwise?” These are legitimate questions if we are going to stand firm in our faith that

God is, indeed, faithful and worthy of our trust when the going gets rough. And then there is obedience. Trust and obedience are intertwined, rather like the chicken and the egg—which came first? We'll look at trust first because we can't obey unless we first trust.

The book of Exodus tells the story of God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. Once they left their steady supply of water and food to enter the wilderness, the testing began. How would they eat in this wilderness? Could God truly provide for their physical needs? There are several verses in Exodus that speak of tests of character. In the following passage, the Israelites were concerned about what they would eat, and God proved His faithfulness while testing their trust each day. *"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, so that I may test [nasa] them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction'"* (Exod. 16:4). Unless the Israelites trusted God to provide food on a daily basis (in this case), it is unlikely they would have obeyed Him.




## Will You Obey Me?


The second core question is, "Will you obey Me?" A kingdom can have just one king. Nations have a single president or prime minister. And man cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). Throughout our lives, we come up against this test: will we obey God or will we allow self to usurp the throne that rightly belongs to Him? This is a serious test. In several places in Scripture, the Lord describes Himself as jealous. He is not willing that we have divided loyalties. One such example is found in Exodus 34:14, *"For you shall not worship any other god, because the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."*

The Israelites faced a test of trust leading to obedience (or disobedience) when they were led out of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness. They saw the parting of the Red Sea, crossed on dry ground and then watched as the Egyptian army was swallowed





up by that same sea (Exod. 14:13–28). Three days later, after the bitter waters of Marah were miraculously made drinkable, the Lord gave them a statute followed by an amazing promise. *“There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested [nasa] them. And He said, ‘If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and listen to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer’”* (Exod. 15:25b–26). The Israelites were asking for water, but God promised so much more—perfect health. The only condition was to listen carefully to the Lord’s voice and then do what He asked.



The *Torah* is God’s instruction manual and is read throughout the year in synagogues and Jewish homes. This focus on God’s Word began millennia ago. In preparation for their entrance into the Promised Land, one of the cautionary reminders the Lord gave to Joshua as he assumed leadership after the death of Moses had to do with that very thing. *“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that **you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it;** for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will achieve success”* (Josh. 1:8 emphasis added). In other words, know God’s Word and do (obey) it.

Only a foolish student would take a test without studying the book and learning the material. There are a lot of “grays” in our world today. In order to obey God, we need to spend time in His Word so that we will know without a doubt what the biblical position is on those gray areas. Daily reading and meditation on Scripture will lead to clarity in our understanding. Another helpful habit is that of discussing Scripture passages with a believing friend.

## Advanced Tests

Sometimes in Scripture the word “test” is not mentioned at all, and yet, it is a test. Not once, but twice King David faced a test that ultimately revealed his faithfulness and the condition of his heart toward the Lord. Although Saul was Israel’s first king, his disobedience cost him the position when he chose not to wait for Samuel and usurped the role of priest (1 Sam. 13:9). At the Lord’s direction, Samuel went to Bethlehem to secretly anoint one of Jesse’s sons as king (1 Sam. 16:1–12). Clearly, the Lord knew David’s heart as He told Samuel, *“God does not see as man sees, since man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart”* (1 Sam. 16:7b).

In the years that followed, Saul remained on the throne and David was forced to flee for his life more than once. Surely he must have wondered why the Lord allowed this state of affairs. During that time, there were two occasions when David could easily have killed Saul and taken his rightful place on the throne. Once when Saul entered a cave to relieve himself and David cut off the corner of his robe (1 Sam. 24:1–6) and the second time when Saul and his army slept in the wilderness as they pursued David (1 Sam. 26:1–11). The second time, David and Abishai entered the inner circle of the camp where Saul lay sleeping. Abishai urged David to kill Saul, even offering to do the deed himself if David was unwilling (1 Sam. 26:8).

In both cases, the men with David urged him to kill Saul and be done with it. What seemed like a shortcut to his God-ordained destiny would have met with the full approval of his men had he taken matters into his own hands. Yet David resisted their arguments and chose to trust the Lord. *“But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not kill him, for who can reach out with his hand against the LORD’s anointed and remain innocent?’* David also





Daily reading and meditation on Scripture will lead to clarity in our understanding.

said, ‘As the LORD lives, the LORD certainly will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down in battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I would reach out with my hand against the LORD’s anointed!’” (1 Sam. 26:9–11a). David passed this test.

## Must We Be Tested?

Must we be tested? Yes. Not because God doesn’t know what the results will be, but in order that we will discover our true character and grow in our journey of faith like the men and women of the Bible.

David’s life, though he was far from perfect, is a wonderful demonstration of a life lived in trust and obedience. When he was yet a young shepherd, the Lord saw David’s heart and knew his character. Yet David experienced tests. He did not pass each test the first time, but he knew the mercy and grace of God that allowed “retakes.” And David was called “*a man after My heart*” (Acts 13:22).

May we, like David, recognize the opportunities to trust in God when circumstances look hopeless and those around us clamor for us to take matters into our own hands. May we decide each morning that we will choose to see God’s hand in everything that comes our way that day. May we rejoice when we pass a test and be encouraged when we need a retake because our Father will not be satisfied to see us remain infants and immature. May we grow into maturity, being “*diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15). Our God is for us!

# Our God is for us!



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Scripture from New American Standard Bible

## TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

## Bridges for Peace—Offices

**Australia:** Tel: 07-5479-4229, [bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com)

**Canada:** Tel: 204-489-3697, Toll free: 855-489-3697, [info@bfpcan.org](mailto:info@bfpcan.org)

**Japan:** Tel: (81) 3-5969-9656, [bfp@bfjp.org](mailto:bfp@bfjp.org)

**New Zealand:** Tel: (64) 7-855-5262, [bfp.nz@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:bfp.nz@bridgesforpeace.com)

**South Africa:** Tel: 021-975-1941, [info@bridgesforpeace.co.za](mailto:info@bridgesforpeace.co.za)

**South Korea:** Tel: 070-8772-2014, [bfp@bfpkorea.com](mailto:bfp@bfpkorea.com)

**Spanish:** Tel: (52) 646-238-7206, [intl.spanish@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:intl.spanish@bridgesforpeace.com)

**Russia:** Tel: (7) 903-309-1849, [info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com)

**United Kingdom:** Tel: 165-673-9494, [ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com)

**United States:** Tel: 800-566-1998, [postmaster@bfpusa.org](mailto:postmaster@bfpusa.org)



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### International Headquarters

PO Box 1093, Jerusalem, Israel

Tel: (972) 2-624-5004

[intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com)

[www.bridgesforpeace.com](http://www.bridgesforpeace.com)

