

After Which Things? Four Readings of One Phrase

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The Akeida, read on Shabbat 31 October 2026, opens with four words that have kept commentators busy for a thousand years: "וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה". It came to pass after these things. The word "דְּבָרִים" can mean things or words. So the question is: after which events, or after whose words?

The answer changes what the test was for.

Rashi: after words in Heaven and in the tent

Rashi brings two opinions from the Gemara (Sanhedrin 89b). "יֵשׁ מְרִבּוֹתֵינוּ אוֹמְרִים אַחֲרָיִךְ". The Satan accused Avraham: of all the feasts he made, he never brought You one bull or one ram. G-d answered, he did all of it for his son, and if I told him to offer his son before Me, he would not hold back.

The second opinion: "יֵשׁ מְרִבּוֹתֵינוּ אֲמָרִים אַחֲרָיִךְ". Yishmael boasted to Yitzchak that he was circumcised at thirteen and did not protest. Yitzchak answered, "מִיִּרְאָאִי? אֵלֹהִים". You try to scare me with one limb? If G-d told me to offer my whole self, I would not hold back.

In both readings, someone made a claim about what a person would give, and the Akeida answers it. In the first, the claim is about Avraham. In the second, it is Yitzchak's own claim, and he is held to it.

The Ramban: the test is for the one tested

The Ramban asks why G-d, who knows everything, would test anyone. His answer: a person's actions are fully in his own hands, so it is called a test from the side of the one tested. But G-d commands him "לְהוֹצִיא הַדָּבָר מִן הַפֶּה אֶל הַפֶּעַל, לְהַיּוֹת לוֹ שֶׁכֵּר מַעֲשֵׂה טוֹב, לֹא שֶׁכֵּר לֵב טוֹב", to bring it from potential into action, so he would have the reward of a good deed and not only of a good heart.

He quotes Tehillim 11:5, "ה' צֹדִיק יִבְחֵן", and concludes, "כָּל הַנִּסְיוֹנוֹת שֶׁבַּתּוֹרָה לְטוֹבָתָהּ". Every test in the Torah is for the good of the one tested.

The Radak: a lesson for later generations

The Radak reads "after these things" plainly. It came after what happened with Avimelech, after Avraham's long stay and his move to Be'er Sheva. He raises the same problem as the Ramban: G-d searches the heart and knew Avraham would obey. And it can't have been to show the world, because no one was there except Avraham and Yitzchak.

His answer: the test was for us. It was meant "לְהִרְאוֹת לְבָנָי עוֹלָם אֶהְבֵּת אֲבִרְהָם הַשְּׁלָמָה", to show the world Avraham's complete love, for the generations who believe in the Torah, so they would learn to love ה' with all their heart and all their soul.

The Rashbam: after the treaty

The Rashbam also ties the phrase to the Avimelech chapter, but he hears anger in it. Avraham made a covenant for his son and grandson over land G-d had given him, "וַחֲרָה אִפּוֹ שֶׁל הַקֵּב"ה", and the test was a rebuke: "וְרָאָה מֶה הוּעִילָה בְּרִיתוֹת בְּרִית שֶׁלךָ", see what your covenant was worth. Paper 3 takes this reading on its own terms.

Why the set does not rest on one view

Put the four side by side. For Rashi the test answers a claim. For the Ramban it turns a good heart into a good deed. For the Radak it is a lesson written for the generations. For the Rashbam it is the price of a treaty.

The Radak and the Rashbam read the same words the same way, "after the Avimelech chapter," and reach opposite conclusions. One sees a quiet passage of time, the other a rebuke.

That is the Torah's way of teaching. One phrase holds several true lessons, and a reader who hears only one of them has heard less than the verse says. A test can be an answer, a gift, a lesson and a reckoning all at once.

For us, the Ramban's line may be the one to carry out of Shabbat. Whatever trial a person or a people faces, "כָּל הַנִּסְיוֹנוֹת שֶׁבְּתוֹרָה לְטוֹבַת הַמִּנְסֶה". Every test is for the good of the one who is tested.

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Sources (fetched from Sefaria 30 October 2026): Rashi, Ramban, Radak and Rashbam on Genesis 22:1. Not checked in the original: Sanhedrin 89b (via Rashi); Tehillim 11:5 (via Ramban).

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