***The Story of Sacrifice and Son***

**Abraham in 2021: Genesis 22:1-19 January 24, 2021**

***Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love,  
and go the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering  
on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”*Genesis 22:2**

**Joining Abraham in the school of faith**

*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 will be reckoned.” 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*

Hebrews 11:17-19

1) This is going to be the story of sacrifice and the “unique” (*monogenēs*) son

2) Abraham believes God’s promises, even when the response to covenant is terrifying

**Abraham’s is tested (like Adam, like Job, like the Exodus, like Jesus, like me!)**

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”*

*“Here I am,” he replied.*

*2 Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”*

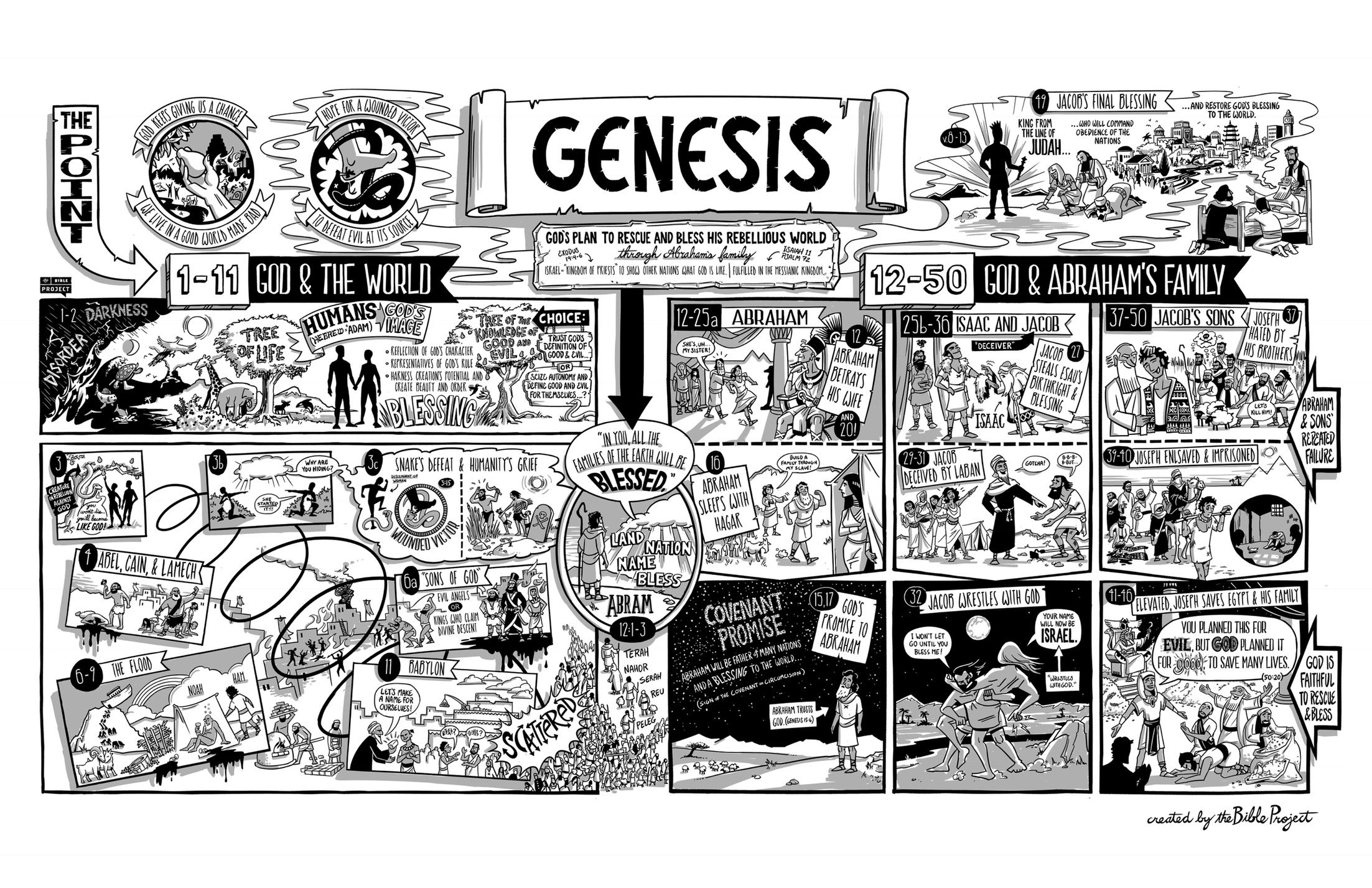
*3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”*

Genesis 22

1) Each “act” begins with “Here I am” and ends with Abraham leaving “together” (looking back to 12:1-9)

2) Please don’t get sentimental – God really did ask Abraham to sacrifice his son

3) From the beginning, Abraham believed that God would be faithful to his promise



**The Abraham Cycle (Waltke, p. 20)**

A Genealogy of Terah, 11:27-32

B Promise of a son and start of Abraham’s spiritual odyssey, 12:1-9

C Abram lies about Sarai; the Lord protects her in a foreign palace, 12:10-20

D Lot settles in Sodom, 13:1-18

E Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot militarily, 14:1-24

F Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Ishmael, 15:1-16:16

F` Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Isaak, 17:1-18:15

E` Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot in prayer, 18:16-33

D` Lot flees doomed Sodom and settles in Moab, 19:1-38

C` Abraham lies about Sarah; God protects her in a foreign palace, 20:1-18

B` Birth of son and climax of Abraham’s spiritual odyssey, 21:1-22:19

A` Genealogy of Nahor, 22:20-24

**Isaac finally speaks**

*6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”*

*“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.*

*“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”*

*8 Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.*

*9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But . . . .*

Genesis 22

1) Isaac askes the theological question: Where is the Lamb? (See John 1:29-34)

2) Isaac becomes the “beast of burden” – he allows himself to be bound, so the story is the *Akedah*

3) Just as in Hebrew, God’s provision means that he himself will “see to it” (Latin, *pro + videre*)

**A theology of “because”**

*11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”*

*“Here I am,” he replied.*

*12 “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*

*13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”*

*15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”*

*19 Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.*

Genesis 22

1) Our respose to God’s voice reveals the heart (see Genesis 3:8-11)

2) Remember: God takes the curse on himself and carries out the sacrifice of his Son

3) Covenant principle #4: Covenant is always confirmed in obedience (“because” three times!)

**More lessons with Abraham**

1) Fifteen years later, Abraham still remembered kindergarten – but now he’s in the graduate school of faith

*3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey.*

Genesis 17 (see connection to 12:1-9)

*What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

Romans 4

*20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*

James 2:20-24

2) Yes, this is the Hebrew Scripture’s version of John 3:16

*16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

John 3:16-17

3) The heart of sacrifice has always been about what is not withheld (see Micah 6:7)

*31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Romans 8:31-32

4) The testing works both ways!

*2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

James 1

**Resources for further studies of Genesis 12-25**

The Bible Project team has a great video, [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4isSyennFo*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4isSyennFo), and poster and study for Genesis at [*https://bibleproject.com/learn/genesis-12-50/*](https://bibleproject.com/learn/genesis-12-50/)

Spurgeon has several good sermons for Genesis 22; I like Spurgeon’s “Jehovah Jireh” at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/jehovah-jireh/#flipbook/> and “Mature Faith” at  
[*https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons15.xxi.html*](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons15.xxi.html)

For Genesis 22, I appreciate Kenneth A Matthews’ commentary in the New American Commentary series (Broadman and Holman, 2005). His commentary on Genesis 22 is included in my sermon notes – just ignore the JEDP stuff. Too many commentators think they must engage with modernist textual criticism in order to be taken seriously.

I like Sailhammer’s commentary in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1990); Bruce Waltke’s newer commentary *Genesis* (Zondervan, 2001); and Leupold’s commentary on Genesis available online at[*https://www.ccel.org/ccel/leupold/genesis.xiv.html*](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/leupold/genesis.xiv.html)

[*monergism.com*](file:///F:\2021%20teaching\monergism.com) has a series of articles on Paul’s thoughts on Abraham in Galatians 3 and Romans:  
John Davis at [*http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/19/19-3/19-3-pp201-208\_JETS.pdf*](http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/19/19-3/19-3-pp201-208_JETS.pdf)  
Moise Silve at [*http://files1.wts.edu/uploads/pdf/publications/wtj/silva-fall-01.pdf*](http://files1.wts.edu/uploads/pdf/publications/wtj/silva-fall-01.pdf)

Bob Deffinbaugh has a good series on Abraham at [*https://bible.org/series/genesis-paradise-patriarchs*](https://bible.org/series/genesis-paradise-patriarchs)*.* His sermon on Genesis 22 is included in my notes.

Third Mill has good stuff:  
Ligon Duncan’s excellent intro to covenants at [*https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.  
asp/link/jl\_duncan%5Ejl\_duncan.CT001.html/at/Covenant%20Theology*](https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/jl_duncan%5Ejl_duncan.CT001.html/at/Covenant%20Theology)  
three videos on Abraham at [*https://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/FA*](https://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/FA)

Alexander Maclaren has a good series on Abraham at [*https://ccel.org/ccel/maclaren/gen\_num/gen\_num.*](https://ccel.org/ccel/maclaren/gen_num/gen_num.)

Charles Biggs in “Reformed Perspectives” at [*http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/cr\_biggs/OT.Biggs.Genesis.15.ourcovenantgod\_10.27.03.html*](http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/cr_biggs/OT.Biggs.Genesis.15.ourcovenantgod_10.27.03.html)

Good article on Galatians 3 and our connection to Abraham   
John Davis at [*http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/19/19-3/19-3-pp201-208\_JETS.pdf*](http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/19/19-3/19-3-pp201-208_JETS.pdf)  
Kim Riddlebarger at [*https://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/an-exposition-of-galatians/Does%20the%20Promise%20Come%20by%20Faith%20or%20Works%204.pdf*](https://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/an-exposition-of-galatians/Does%20the%20Promise%20Come%20by%20Faith%20or%20Works%204.pdf)and Third Mill at   
[*http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/lay\_people\_speak/16331~3\_9\_99\_5-22-34\_PM~McL.gal3.ps.pdf*](http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/lay_people_speak/16331~3_9_99_5-22-34_PM~McL.gal3.ps.pdf)

**13. Abraham’s Test (22:1–19)**K. A. Matthews in his *NAC* commentary on Genesis

Chapter 22 is known in Jewish tradition as the Akedah (*ʿăqedâ*), “the binding [of Isaac],” taken from the word “bound” (*wayyaʿăqōd*) in v. 9 (see Excursus: “The Sacrifice of Isaac”). It is the final test of the man’s faith, the closing bookend to his discovery of God’s sufficiency to achieve the promises made at Haran. This remarkable episode brings together the foregoing events in the Abraham narrative by means of allusion. Among the striking connections between 12:1–9 and 22:1–19 are the twin commands, lit., “Go by yourself [*lek lĕkā*] from your country … to the land I will show you” (12:1) and lit., “go by yourself [*lek lĕkā*] to the land of Moriah … I will tell you about” (22:2). Both episodes share in many features: (1) the patriarch is commanded to separate from family, “[from] your country, your people and your father’s household” (12:1), and “take your son, your only son, Isaac (22:2)”; (2) he faithfully carries out the divine instructions, which ends in promise of blessing and in the patriarch’s worship (“built an altar,” 12:7; 22:9).

There are many allusions in this chapter to the promises issued in previous events (e.g., 12:2–3; 13:14–16; 15:4–5; 16:10; 17:2, 5–6, 16, 20; 18:18; 21:18). By such a preponderance of back references, the author effectively brings forward all that has preceded. The impact is the elevation of this single event so as to make all of the past promises hang on Moriah’s test. The call at Haran requires the patriarch to leave his former circles of security; the orientation of the promises is toward the future, emphasizing the birth of an heir. Now the Lord requires Abraham to relinquish the future by offering Isaac as a sacrifice. Similar to Job’s trial, the patriarch chooses the Giver over the gift, relying on the Lord to make good on his promise. The Haran incident describes Abraham’s immediate obedience to the command “Leave” (12:1) by the verbal echo, “So Abram left” (12:4). In the matching story, the author captures the same allegiance by Abraham’s departure for Moriah “early the next morning” (v. 3); also his voluntary attitude is reflected by the repeated dialogue, “Here I am” (vv. 1, 7, 11). Repetition of the family connection, “son,” “only son,” and “father,” heightens the pathos of the story. Isaac is in fact not the “only son,” but he is the “only son” who remains the potential heir; the patriarch expelled Ishmael, his firstborn, and now he faces sacrificing his “only” son.

That God “tests” (*nissâ*) his people is not exceptional; it is a means for revealing their obedience (e.g., Exod 15:25; 16:4; Judg 2:22), producing fear so as to engender piety (Exod 20:20; Ps 26:2), discovering their authenticity (Deut 8:2; 13:3[4]; 2 Chr 32:31), and producing their well-being (Deut 8:16). In the present case, what is revealed is that the patriarch “fears” the Lord (v. 12). The object of the test is Abraham’s proper response, which entails obedience and trust. There is a sure verbal linkage involving “test” and “fear,” where the two words occur together in only two passages: Abraham’s experience at Moriah (22:1, 12) and Abraham’s descendants at another mount, Sinai (Exod 20:20). Abraham’s obedience is viewed as the archetype of God’s expectations for Israel’s loyalty to the Ten Words (Ten Commandments). R. W. L. Moberly identifies Abraham’s “fear of the Lord” as the Hebrew equivalent to what Christians mean when they refer to “faith.” He parallels the Akedah to Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus, who undergoes testing and responds obediently, refusing to seize power for his self-interests (cf. Phil 2:1–13). What Jesus refused from Satan at the beginning he receives (“all authority”) from God after his supreme act of obedience (Matt 28:18). Abraham, too, resisted the human impulse to withhold his son for his own advantage, expressing a submissive spirit.

The anthropomorphic portrayal of God (“Now I know,” v. 12) preserves the narrative tension of the account; by the test the Lord takes the road of “discovery” that leads to the climax of Abraham’s obedience (vv. 11–12). The chilling description of the command, the march up the mountain, and the raised knife have their denouement in the angel’s intervention. The test is not born out of the necessity of divine knowledge but the requirement of human faith’s achievement. By presenting the challenge, the man could express his faith in a concrete way; now potential faith is realized, securing for the patriarch the promises God has all along ensured would come to pass (cf. Jas 2:21–23). Moreover, as Moberly observes, the phrase “now I know” conveyed a “deepened relationship” as God’s response to the obedient choice of Abraham, showing the Lord’s concern for Abraham.

Nevertheless, the test has a double meaning, for the outcome of the matter reveals as much about God as it does about Abraham. Throughout the Abraham narrative, we learn about the Lord’s gracious election and preservation of Israel’s father. This episode, however, appears discordant with what we know of Israel’s deity. Legal texts condemn child sacrifice (Deut 12:31; 18:10), especially the practice associated with the worship of Molech (Lev 18:21; 20:2–5). Later the practice appears in the Southern Kingdom (2 Kgs 16:3; 21:6) but is eliminated by Josiah (2 Kgs 23:10) and condemned by the prophets (e.g., Jer 7:31–32; Ezek 16:20–21). The conflict between orthodox Yahwism and the Akedah, however, is only apparent; the author alerts the reader that the story is a “test” (v. 1), and thus it must be evaluated provisionally. This divine request for human sacrifice is unique in Israel’s experience; the special circumstance of Abraham’s role as the father of the covenant requires a test without parallel. The rabbis argued that the testing of Abraham was not devious since God tests only those who can withstand, that is, the righteous (Ps 11:5). Similarly, God’s integrity is not questioned for his trying of Israel, and the test of Abraham is on the same level, for it is a prototype of later Israel’s trials (*Gen. Rab.* 55.1–3). Christian tradition, however, focuses on the fulfillment of the promises (Heb 11:17–19; Jas 2:21–23) since Isaac alone could fulfill the promises, as God himself stated (21:12), making it certain that the boy would somehow survive. Hence, the issue lay with the Lord, not Abraham, for he left it to God to resolve the theological and moral problems he himself created.

Composition. We have already observed that 22:1–19 fits in the Abraham narrative with numerous echoes of the preceding accounts. It also shares many features with the preceding expulsion narrative (21:12–19), indicating 22:1–19 originally was composed in concert with the Hagar-Ishmael episode. Both narratives contain a similar plot development and many striking correlations; for example, God requires the dismissal of Abraham’s sons (21:12–13; 22:2), both sons almost die (21:16; 22:20), the angel calls from heaven (21:17; 22:11), and Hagar sees the well and Abraham sees the substitute ram (21:19; 22:13). Further, there are parallels in chap. 22 with the first Hagar-Ishmael episode in chap. 16, for example, the keyword “see/provide” (*rāʾâ*, 16:13–14; 22:8, 14). The significance of such connections shows the author’s abiding interest in the inheritance theme as played out by the two sons; the verbal affinities among the three narratives (chaps. 16, 21, 22) heighten the tension of what is at stake in the death of Isaac.

The composition of the pericope according to source critics consists of two sources; vv. 1–14, 19 are attributed to the Elohist and vv. 15–18 to the Yahwist or to the work of the later redactor. Earlier critics also contended for a prior oral form of an etiological story lying behind vv. 1b–14, concerning child sacrifice at a cultic location (v. 14). Westermann rejects this older view since chap. 22 does not make foremost child sacrifice or the cult; rather, all parts of the story focus on the theme of divine test. Both Westermann and Van Seters acknowledge that it is impractical to try to divide the narrative into such layers. The criteria for distinguishing the Elohist (E) as a separate source, the “shrinking” source among critics (see vol. 1a, p. 75), are at best suspect. The occurrences of the name *Elohim*, for example, are no longer viewed as a reliable indicator of E. Conversely, the appearances of *Yahweh* in this E document create a dilemma (vv. 11, 14[2×]). The convenience of attributing the occurrences of *Yahweh* to a redactor is an unsatisfactory explanation by E proponents, since the naming of the site in v. 14 (using *Yahweh*) is integral to vv. 1–14. The name *Elohim* is best explained as the result of the author’s theological point, *Elohim* appearing in the early verses that point up God’s control over the human sacrifice. But for rhetorical effect the name *Yahweh* occurs at the dramatic moment of the narrative. Moreover, Van Seters and others have shown that the chapter has a stronger relationship to the theme and language of the central source (his exilic Yahwist) of the Abraham account than the proposed E connection.571

Finally, the promise section in vv. 15–18 is typically deemed secondary; it possesses a different literary style and is anticlimactic to the plot as unfolded in vv. 1–14, 19. Yet if vv. 15–18 are absent, the story fails to give an adequate explanation for the purpose of the test; the nature of the event as a challenge to Abraham’s faith looks beyond the sacrifice itself to the larger question of the promise. Also the striking verbal correlations of command (*bôʾ*) and promise between 12:1–3 and 22:2, 15–18 suggest that vv. 2 and 15–18 are the result of the same author, who has 12:1–3 in mind. The promise section is not a rehash of former promise oracles but expands and secures them, making vv. 15–18 the logical and most appropriate outcome of the chapter and the whole of the Abraham story. The commentary on our passage in 26:3–5 shows that the event at Moriah involved the fulfilling of the promises. Further, the essentially unified structure of the chapter (see below) comports well with the idea of one author.

Structure. The structure of 22:1–19 is particularly rich in complexity due to numerous repetitions within the narrative, giving the passage a coherence by following the story line of problem to denouement. The observation of repeated patterns has led scholars to propose chiastic structures and parallel panels in the chapter. Although these studies exhibit differences in their results and practice diverse methods of analysis, some based more on content and others relying on words and clauses, they agree that the evidence of repetitions shows an artful design. This we believe is best explained as the creation of one author.

The narrative possesses three movements, each ending with the same clause, “and … went on together” (vv. 6b, 8b, 19a). Abraham’s responses, “Here I am” (vv. 1b, 7a, 11b), appear in the three dialogues, each in one of the narrative movements.

v. 1a Introduction—“tested”

vv. 1b–6 “Here I am” (*hinnēnî*, v. 1b)

“the two of them went on together”

(*wayyēlĕkû šĕnêhem yaḥdāw*, v. 6b)

vv. 7–8 “Here I am, my son” (*hinnennî bĕnî*, v. 7a; niv “Yes, my son”)

“and the two of them went on together”

(*wayyēlĕkû šĕnêhem yaḥdāw*, v. 8b)

vv. 9–19a “Here I am” (*hinnēnî*, v. 11b)

“and they went on together” (NIV “set off”)

(*wayyēlĕkû yaḥdāw*, v. 19a)

v. 19b Conclusion—“stayed in Beersheba”

The first movement begins with the initial dialogue of God and Abraham and continues with the description of Abraham and Isaac’s approach to Mount Moriah (vv. 2–6). The second movement begins similarly with the dialogue of Isaac and Abraham and concludes with their continued trek up the mount (vv. 7–8). This center movement is the apex of the chiastic arrangement, encapsulating the narrative tension of the whole: the identity of the offering. The third movement is the longest and most important, possessing a third dialogue between the angel of the Lord and Abraham and a protracted monologue by the angel, who speaks a second time (vv. 9–19a). This third movement includes two parallel panels (ABB′A′). It begins with the preparations and execution of the sacrifice (vv. 9–10, A), followed by the dialogue (vv. 11–12, B). The subsequent narration tells of the substitute ram and the naming of the place, “The Lord will provide” (vv. 13–14, B′). Again the angel speaks from heaven, announcing the favorable results of the test and the promissory reward of land, descendants, and blessing (vv. 15–18, A′). The movement closes by narrating the return of the party to Beersheba (v. 19a). The geographical references show the symmetry of the story: Beersheba-Moriah-Beersheba. The events and return in the final movement restore the father-son relationship as at the first.

Movement one: From Beersheba to Moriah (vv. 1b–6)

Movement two: Climb up Mount Moriah (vv. 7–8)

Movement three: At Moriah and return to Beersheba (vv. 9–19a)

A Execution of the Isaac sacrifice (vv. 9–10)

B First call from heaven (vv. 11–12)

A′ Execution of the ram sacrifice (vv. 13–14)

B′ Second call from heaven (vv. 15–18)

Return to Beersheba (v. 19a)

The direction of the story turns at the first heavenly dialogue in vv. 11–12. The repetition “Abraham, Abraham!” marks the reversal when the angel from heaven intervenes to arrest Abraham’s hand. The second peak in the story is the second divine speech delivered from heaven, a monologue reiterating the promises substantiating Abraham’s faith and future (vv. 15–18).

***(1) The Test (22:1–6)***

***1Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”***

**“Here I am,” he replied.**

**2Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”**

**3Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”**

**6Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together,**

The first movement in the story establishes the nature of the command to sacrifice Isaac as a test (vv. 1–2). The trek from Beersheba to the Moriah region occurs across three days, resulting in the father and boy at the foot of the sacrificial mount (vv. 3–6). The passage emphasizes the obedience of Abraham and the trusting compliance of his son, who is unaware of what will befall him.

**22:1–2** “Some time later” (lit. “and it came about after these things”) points generally to the prior events at Gerar in chaps. 20–21 (cf. 15:1; 39:7; 40:1). The parallel phrase introduces the next episode in 22:20. The chronological notation distances the Moriah test from the expulsion of Hagar/Ishmael and the Beersheba treaty with Abimelech (chap. 21). “For a long time” in 21:34 probably is inclusive of chaps. 20–21, but 22:1 indicates enough time has elapsed for Isaac to have grown from a toddler (ca. two to three years old) in 21:8 to an adolescent in chap. 22. Isaac is old enough to endure a climb bearing wood (v. 6) but is still considered a “boy” (*naʿar*, vv. 5, 12). Although the author does not concern himself with the extent of Isaac’s knowledge and compliance, it is apparent that Isaac must have dutifully conceded to his aged father’s wishes. That it is said God “tested” (*nissâ*) Abraham prepares the reader for the exceptional request to follow (see comments below). This reminds us of the patriarch Job, whose devotion to God is called into question by Satan (Job 1:9); God’s response to Satan invites testing that results in remarkable suffering, including the loss of Job’s children. It is God who may test his people (e.g., Exod 16:4; 20:20), but they are castigated for trying him (e.g., Exod 17:2, 7; Num 14:22; Deut 6:16; Ps 106:15–16). Reference to the man by name, “Abraham,” recalls the promise of a legion of nations (17:5) and here prepares us for the last-moment call from heaven, “Abraham, Abraham!” (v. 11).

The identity of the sacrifice is described with heart-rending precision, “your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love” (v. 2). Y. Avishur compares the gradation of this three-phrase description of Isaac, from the general to the specific, with the first command to leave Haran, also three expressions: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household” (12:1). “Your only son” translates *yĕḥîdĕkā*, lit., “your only one” (vv. 2, 12, 16); it is used of mourning an only son (e.g., Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10) and an only daughter (fem., *yĕḥîdâ*, Judg 11:34). It is equivalent to a person’s life, which is irreplaceable (Pss 22:21; 35:17). Ishmael is also his son, but Isaac alone remains the apparent heir, the “beloved.” The similarities between the episodes of Ishmael’s expulsion and Isaac’s sacrifice (chaps. 21; 22) reinforce the comparison of the two sons. “Whom you love” is not to imply Abraham did not love Ishmael, but his love is explicitly stated to emphasize the precious possession Isaac is in the eyes of the old man. The passage shows if anything that the expulsion of the elder lad made his heart fonder of the lone remaining boy. More important, it makes the test as severe as is thinkable; no test could be any more probing of the patriarch’s loyalty, for even the taking of his own life would not pass the trial since the future promise lay with the boy.582 Perhaps the mention of the name “Isaac” (“he laughs”) by the Lord and repeatedly in the narrative (vv. 3, 6, 7, 9) is designed to recall the joy of the boy’s birth to the elderly couple (21:6–7).

The place for the sacrifice, however, is vaguely cited, “the land of Moriah” (v. 2). This uncertain destination is reminiscent of the first call at Haran; God alone knows the way (“I will tell you”; cf. 12:1). Moriah as “Mount Moriah” occurs only once more, but very importantly as the site for Solomon’s temple (2 Chr 3:1); it is this association that generated the Jewish tradition that the temple mount was the place of Abraham’s sacrifice (e.g., *Jub.* 18:13; *Gen. Rab.* 55.7).583 Today the Muslim shrines El-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock occupy the traditional site of Mount Moriah.

Modern critics are skeptical of the authenticity of “Moriah” as the original site, suggesting rather that the original name was suppressed or lost and “Moriah” given to connect Abraham and the temple. There are problems with the identification of Moriah and the temple site, such as the three-day journey, which appears too far from Beersheba, and the absence of the Chronicler’s mention of the Abraham event. But there is no “Mount Moriah” in Genesis 22 that requires the equation with the temple mount which the critics have supposed for the text here. For this reason too the Chronicler made no attribution of the temple site with the Abraham sacrifice; Genesis only refers to a mountain range called Moriah (“on one of the mountains,” v. 2), which permits both Genesis and the Chronicler to describe the sites accurately.

There are other problems with the name “Moriah.” The ancient versions variously translate the word rather than recognize it as a place name. This probably is due to the definite article with Moriah (*ʾel ʾereṣ hammōrîyâ*, lit., “to the land of the Moriah”), which is uncommon for a proper name. The etymology of the name is troublesome too. In the Genesis narrative, explanations for the name may occur, although only implicitly. The most obvious is the name assigned to the place in v. 14, “The Lord will provide” (*Yahweh yirʾeh*), which also is a subtle play on “see” (*rāʾâ*) in vv. 4, 8; the idea of “see” reflects the versions and occurs again in 2 Chr 3:1 (“appeared,” *nirʾâ* from *rāʾâ*).

The exhortation, “Sacrifice him [*haʿălēhû*] … as a burnt offering [*ʿōlâ*]” (v. 2), is the language of tabernacle sacrifice (e.g., Exod 29:38–45; Lev 1:3–17; Num 15:1–10). In Jewish tradition the term “bound” (*maʿăqidîn*), an allusion to Genesis 22, first appears in *m.* *Tamid* (4:1) referring to the daily (*tāmîd*) offering of two lambs required in the tabernacle (Exod 29:38). “Burnt offering” first occurs in 8:20 (see comments) and thus long antedated the tabernacle system; both Noah and Abraham function prototypically for Moses’ system (e.g., Exod 24:4–8). The “burnt offering” was fully consumed, producing an aroma that pleases the Lord (8:21; Lev 1:9).

**22:3** “Early the next morning” (v. 3) occurs in settings of urgency in the Abraham narrative (19:27; 20:8; 21:14; also 28:18; 32:1; Exod 24:4). This remark indicates the patriarch’s prompt obedience as in the prior divine instruction regarding Ishmael (21:14). The narration’s “took” and “place God had told him about” (v. 3) correspond to the divine instructions of v. 2, evidencing Abraham’s full submission. Unlike his earlier rebuttals to God, substituting Eliezer (15:2) or Ishmael (17:18; cf. 21:11), Abraham is utterly mute; his only words are absolute compliance and a confidence in the Lord’s final provision. His testimony to the servants, “We will come back to you” (v. 5), conveys his reliance on God to make good on his prior promise, “Through Isaac … your offspring will be reckoned” (21:12). The provisions of servants, donkey, and prepared wood for the trip indicate Abraham’s wealth, yet none of these can substitute for his most precious possession. The Hebrew construction of the sentence, “He took with him … his son Isaac,” distinguishes the prized member of the retinue. The two unidentified servants may suggest the rejected candidates Eliezer and Ishmael (so *Tg. Ps.-J.*), whose (symbolic) presence highlights the gravity of the assignment. Mention of wood is not because of the sparse mountainside, as scholars sometimes surmise; rather it creates an irony in detailing the preparations made for sacrifice, pointing up the absence of the all-important sacrificial subject itself. In fact, unknown to the others, Abraham does bring the sacrificial lamb (Isaac).

**22:4–5** “On the third day” (v. 4) need not require three complete days of travel; portions of days one and three may be intended (Jonah 3:3), or three days may be a stereotypical expression for a journey (31:22; Josh 9:17; 1 Sam 30:1). “Third day” also may signify a critical event (40:12–13; Exod 19:15; Num 7:24; 29:20; 2 Kgs 20:5, 8; Hos 6:2) or even the day of annihilation (Lev 7:17–18; 19:6–7). “Looked up and saw” (v. 4) is one of many parallel actions to Hagar in chap. 21 (v. 19); the expression also recalls the earlier stories of Lot (13:10) and the three visitors at Mamre (18:2). In our passage the expression “looked up” (lit., “lifted up his eyes”) occurs twice, tying together the events of discovery, both the mount and the unexpected ram (vv. 4, 13). Abraham’s instructions to the servants reveal the patriarch’s ultimate trust in God’s provision (“we will come back”); his faith is therefore a testimonial to the servants as well as to the boy (cf. Heb 11:17–19).

By the narration’s rhyming words *pōh* (“here”) and *kōh* (“there”) in v. 5, a geographical contrast describes the two servants left behind and the pair who go ahead to “the place” assigned for sacrifice. That Abraham’s actions were unusual is shown by the specific instructions required for the servants. If apparent to Isaac that the sacrificial beast is absent (v. 7), then it is apparent to the servants as well when Abraham divulges his purpose to “worship.” The term “worship” (*hištaḥăwâ*) already occurred in its nontheological sense, “bow down, prostrate,” in 18:2 and 19:1; of its 170 uses the word appears twenty-three times in Genesis (e.g., 23:7, 12; 24:26, 48, 52).

**22:6** Now Isaac becomes both the beast of burden, carrying the wood (v. 6), and the sacrificial lamb. The passage continues its emphasis on Abraham’s complete obedience by repeating the language “took” (*lāqaḥ*), recalling the initial directive “take [*lāqaḥ*] your son” (v. 2). The boy bearing the wood portends the “burnt offering” (*ʿōlâ*), and Abraham taking the source of the “fire” (“firestone,” NJPS) and the knife identifies the offerer. The passage captures the poignant significance of Abraham’s carrying the fire and knife by the added depiction “in his (own) hands” (“himself,” NIV). “Knife” (*maʾăkelet*) is a large tool used for dismemberment, including human victims (Judg 19:29; cf. Prov 30:14). Its appearance twice in vv. 6, 10 may be a sound play on “angel” (*malʾāk*), whose interception hinders the blade’s purpose (v. 11). “As the two of them went on together” (vv. 6, 8) presents another touching depiction of the offerer and his gift to the Lord. The passage shows that there was ample occasion across the three days and during the scaling of the mount for Abraham to ponder retreat, but he steadfastly moved forward.

***(2) Abraham and Isaac Together (22:7–8)***

***7Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”***

**“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.**

**“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”**

**8Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.**

At this acute point in the story, the boy speaks his only recorded words, raising the obvious question of a “lamb,” which ironically bears on his own unknown role (v. 7). “My father” (“father,” NIV) and “my son” (v. 7) underscore the trust that such familial relations possess; Isaac’s reliance is not misplaced. In a profound twist of outcome, his father’s unreserved dependence on God’s promissory word, though it ostensibly means the loss of Isaac, assures the boy’s future blessing as pledged for Abraham’s generations (cf. v. 17).

Abraham’s answer is not evasion but his honest openness to God’s operations (v. 8). “God” at the head of the clause emphasizes the source of the sacrifice. “Provide” (*rʾh*) is the key word of the account, used in the offering of the ram (“saw,” v. 13) and the naming of the sacred site (v. 14[2×]). In Levitical sacrifice the offerer himself provided the animal. Here, however, Abraham reverses the means, showing that God’s command made the matter his own responsibility. Strikingly, the patriarch’s words convey a theological profundity that has its immediate reality in the unexpected ram (v. 13). The church fathers viewed Abraham’s answer a theological foreshadow of Christ’s sacrifice. The Christian reader today sees the additional irony that God supplies his own Son for the sins of the world, whereas Abraham’s son escapes unharmed. The ambiguity of Abraham’s intention by “my son” in the sentence enhances the already-cryptic nature of his answer. Grammatically, “my son” can be understood in two ways: Abraham’s address to Isaac, which is the customary interpretation, or an appositional phrase defining the “burnt offering,” meaning Abraham identifies Isaac as the offering. Such subtle allusions to the coming events of the chapter contribute to the mood of anticipation that characterizes chap. 22. In the redemption of Israel’s firstborn, the dedication of the child to the Lord signifies the relationship of the family to the Lord God (hence, also the entire nation) and the continuity of the family’s generations consecrated to him alone (e.g., Exod 13:2, 12–15; 34:1–20; Num 3:11–13). The claim of the Lord on Abraham’s son reflects his place as patron deity of the family and its generations. The redemption of Isaac by the substitute ram, as in later Israel’s rite of the firstborn, provides for the life of the child who is consecrated unto the Lord.

***(3) The Sacrifice to the Lord (22:9–19)***

***9When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”***

**“Here I am,” he replied.**

**12“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”**

**13Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”**

**15The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”**

**19Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.**

The arrangement of the final section consists of two sacrificial offerings, the Isaac offering (vv. 9–10) and ram offering (vv. 13–14), with two heavenly messages interspersed (vv. 11–12; 15–18). The final verse describes the party’s return and Abraham’s residency in Beersheba (v. 19). The Isaac “offering” is a metaphorical picture of the boy’s sacrifice. Although the Lord stops the patriarch short of killing Isaac literally (v. 11), the father’s action is reckoned by God as in effect a burnt offering given (v. 12). After the ram sacrifice, the second message is the apex of the chapter, distinguished as an oath (“I swear by myself,” v. 16), indicating the divine confirmation of the patriarchal promises. Christian readers will remember the baptism and transfiguration of Christ during which the heavenly voice confirms the sonship and ministry of Jesus (Matt 3:17 pars.; 17:5 pars.).

**22:9–10** Reference to “the place” brings the reader to the appointed site for worship; “which God had told him about” reiterates the calculated obedience of the man (v. 9; cf. v. 3). This location is a divinely ordained, sacred space; that “the place” (vv 3, 4, 9, 14) is the “mountain of the Lord” (v. 14) speaks prototypically of the Sinai setting (Num 10:33), where the tabernacle’s “altar of burnt offering” is erected (Exod 40:29). “Mountain of God” is the common reference, however, to Sinai/Horeb (Exod 3:1; 4:27; 18:5; 24:13; 1 Kgs 19:8). The same language, “mountain of the Lord,” describes Jerusalem’s temple (Isa 2:3; 30:29; Mic 4:2; Zech 8:3). “The place” (*hammāqôm*) is a common designation for tabernacle (e.g., Exod 15:17; 23:20; Lev 4:24), noted in Deuteronomy as “the place the Lord God will choose” (e.g., Deut 12:5; 14:23; 15:20; 16:2; 17:8; 26:2; 31:11; for temple, e.g., 1 Chr 15:3; 28:11; esp. 2 Chr 3:1; Pss 26:8; 43:3; Isa 18:7; 60:13; Jer 7:13, 14).

That Abraham built an altar fits his practice, recalling entry into the land at the start of his faith pilgrimage (12:7–8). This custom also foreshadows Moses, who erects an altar for burnt sacrifice (Exod 17:5; 24:4). In v. 9 the definite article, “the altar” (*hammizbēaḥ*, NIV “an altar”), may indicate an existing altar that is rebuilt by Abraham; but since the place appears unknown to Abraham, the article probably distinguishes this altar proleptically as the commemorated altar of Isaac’s binding.

The almost matter-of-fact description of Abraham’s preparation of the sacrifice is broken by the emotive identity of the sacrifice, “his son.” Mention of the wood arranged on the altar not only gives a graphic picture for the reader but also contributes to the portrayal of Isaac as a willing victim who must have recognized at this point that he was the intended offering. “He bound” (*wayyaʿăqōd*) translates the verb *ʿāqad*, which occurs only here in the Old Testament. Isaac, the stronger and swifter of the two, submits without struggle to the old man’s binding to the altar. Is it to ensure that the lad will not escape if his heart weakens in the face of the knife? Or is the binding rather Abraham’s assurance that the thrust of the knife will fall certain to kill mercifully the motionless victim? The delay required to bind Isaac may reflect the father’s wish to postpone the painful end of the ordeal.

Verse 10 describes the patriarch’s final steps in reaching for the knife; the two verses detailing the event are told in “slow motion” so the reader can experience with the father the anguish of the prolonged moment. That the author states clearly the purpose of the raised knife, “to slay his son,” confirms the deliberateness of the man’s action. There is no hesitation or any intercession, as in the dialogue over Sodom (18:23–26); the father fully concedes to the divine will (cf. Job 1:21; 2:10).

**22:11–12** The “angel” speaks from heaven (v. 11) as in the deliverance of Hagar and Ishmael (21:17). The repetitive “Abraham, Abraham!” marks this as the turning point of the story; now that the test has accomplished its purpose, the story line reverses the threat to the boy. The fervency of the heavenly command is expressed by the emphatic “Abraham!” twice and the interruptive “do not lay a hand” (v. 12); the latter reverses the lethal action “he reached out his hand” (v. 10a). The urgency of the interdiction is magnified by its inclusiveness: do not do “anything” against the lad.

The angel’s explanation “Now I know” (v. 12) is an admission that the ordeal was a test, a discovery of Abraham’s depth of loyalty. The text reads the singular pronoun “you,” referring to Abraham alone, indicating that despite what commendation might be inferred from Isaac’s obedience, it is Abraham who is the object of the test. “Fear God” describes the man’s obedience and trust motivated by his love of God (cf. Deut 10:12–13). Job is “a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8; 2:3; cf. 1:1). If Abraham is the model of faithfulness to *Yahweh* in Israel, Job represents the nations whose integrity is put to the test (“he is blameless and upright,” 1:8; 2:3; cf. 1:1). The similar moral standard is expected of foreign rulers (20:5–6, 11; 42:18; Deut 25:18). The causal clause, “because you have not withheld from me,” presents the test’s evidence of the patriarch’s devotion (cf. “because,” vv. 16, 18). It is not a theoretical matter; James capitalizes on this aspect of the event when he observes Abraham’s “faith was made complete by what he did” (Jas 2:22). The term “withheld” (*ḥāśak*) occurs twice, extolling the virtue of Abraham’s obedience (vv. 12, 16) that results in the repeated promise of many descendants (v. 17). By releasing his “only son” he gains a multitude of offspring, even as his name (“Abraham, Abraham!”) conveys (cf. 17:5).

**22:13–14** The death of the discovered ram “instead of [Abraham’s] son” (v. 13) epitomizes the idea of substitutionary atonement, which characterized the Levitical system. Verses 13–14 mirror the earlier dialogue of father and son concerning the sacrificial victim (vv. 7–8). The timely presence of the entangled ram answers the boy’s earlier perplexity, “Where is the lamb?” (v. 7). Abraham interprets the appearance of the animal according to his response in v. 8, “God will provide” [*ʾĕlōhîm yirʾeh*], in naming the place “The Lord will provide” (*yahweh yirʾeh*, v. 14). The opportune moment of the suddenly seen substitute implies the obvious—the Lord is responsible for the appearance of the surprising ram. Ancient versions (LXX, SP, Syr.) and a few medieval Hebrew manuscripts followed by many EVs (e.g., NIV [see NIV note], NRSV) read *ʾayil ʾeḥād*, “one ram,” that is, “a ram” as opposed to *ʾayil ʾaḥar* (MT), which is traditionally translated “behind *him* a ram” (AV, NASB). Alternatively, translating *ʾaḥar* temporally, “a ram just caught,” retains the MT reading and makes sense of the passage, indicating the immediacy of the snared animal. This is the point of the miracle, the sudden appearance of a sacrificial ram (“behold,” *hinnê* [“there,” NIV]) conveniently trapped at the perfect moment.604

The significance of the appellative *yahweh yirʾeh* for the name of the mountain also reflects the double sense of *rāʾâ* (“provide/see”) in “he saw” (*wayyarʾ*) (v. 13). The NJPS captures the double sense, “God will see to the sheep” (v. 8). The concluding phrase in v. 14, “it will be provided/seen” (*yērāʾeh*), refers to the animal promised in v. 8. The Greek reading (and *Tgs. Ps.-J., Neof.*), however, interprets the subject of “he saw” (*wayyarʾ*) as “the Lord”: “On the mountain the Lord was seen.” In this case the naming of the site indicates a theophany occurred, as the Lord commonly “appeared” (*wayyērāʾeh*) to Abraham (12:7; 17:1; 18:1) and to Israel at Sinai (“the mountain”; e.g., Exod 3:1–2, 16; Lev 9:4, 6).

**22:15–16** That there is a “second” (*šēnît*) call from heaven (v. 15) emphasizes the importance of the event. The promise appears in a rare form of oath (“I swear by myself,” v. 16), enhancing the pledge to follow (vv. 17–18). Although the Lord is said at many places in the Old Testament to undertake an oath (e.g., 1 Sam 3:14; Ps 89:3), this is the only place in Genesis that the Lord expresses the patriarchal oath under explicit obligation to his own character (“by myself”); other occasions of divine oath “by myself” in the first person are few and limited to the prophets (Isa 45:23; Jer 22:5; 49:13). This oath was remembered as the basis for divine blessing of future generations (e.g., 26:3; Exod 33:1; Num 14:23; 32:11; Deut 1:35; 7:8; 10:11; 34:4; Josh 1:6; Judg 2:1; Jer 11:5). A second time the angel explains that the promise is confirmed by what Abraham accomplished (“you have done”), an amazing act of loyalty deserving of another heavenly mention. The development of the patriarchal promise, given in stages in the Abraham narrative from its inception in 12:1–3, reaches its terminal rendering in vv. 17–18.

**22:17–18** As already noted, this culminating passage gathers descriptions of the Abraham promises from earlier narratives and expands upon them: (1) “I will surely bless you” adds “surely” to the first occasion of the pledge in 12:2; (2) “the stars in the sky” recalls Abram’s night vision (15:5) but here includes “and [I will surely] make your descendants as numerous” (cf. also Hagar, 16:10; Eve, 3:16); (3) the motif of immeasurable “sand” (*ḥôl*), echoing the Abram-Lot separation (13:16, *ʿāpār*, “dust”), appears in conjunction with the stars only here in Genesis (cf. Jer 33:22; Heb 11:12); and (4) “possession of the cities [lit., gate] of their enemies” (v. 17) is new to the promise, though it will appear in the familial blessing for Rebekah (24:60b). The blessing for Rebekah invoking the language of 22:17 ties together the promise of descendants through Isaac and the bride who would achieve it for the house of Abraham. In the life of Abraham, this provision reminds us of Abraham’s defeat of the eastern bloc of kings (chap. 14) and the demise of the cities of the plain (“gate,” 19:1, NIV “gateway”).

Verse 18 ends the review of the promises by variations on the theme of blessing for all nations (12:3; 18:18; cf. 26:4; 28:14); it is also reminiscent of the meaning attached to the new names “Abraham” and “Sarah” in the covenant of circumcision (17:4–6, 15–16), referring to their royal seed. The addition “through your seed” (*zeraʿ*, “offspring,” NIV) in v. 18, not found in the earlier expressions (12:3; 18:18), in context appropriately reflects the preservation of Isaac, the “offspring” of promise (21:12; cf. 26:4; 28:14). Blessing for “all nations [of the earth]” in Ps 72:17 and Jer 4:2 allude to 22:18/26:4 when the psalmist describes the idealized king who fulfills the promise, and Jeremiah acknowledges that only a repentant Israel can accomplish it. Hebrew *zeraʿ* (“offspring”) may refer to an individual or a collective group, requiring the context to indicate which is in view. As we suggested at 3:15, the ambiguity of the term *zeraʿ* serves the author’s intent to bring both an individual and a nation in the purview of the promise (vol. 1A, p. 246). The same potential ambiguity appears in vv. 17 and 18; the former verse appears to demand the plural sense (as NIV “their enemies”),612 whereas v. 18 permits an individual in view, though we would expect to interpret “offspring” in the same sense as v. 17. The parallel phrase to v. 17 in 24:60b assumes “thousands” of descendants and also is best understood as plural (EVs, “their enemies”). The semantic flexibility of “offspring” permits the promise to refer to both an individual (David) and a group (Israel).613

This feature explains how the early church could define the promise’s fulfillment in terms of both ancient Israel’s royal house and the messianic person Jesus Christ. The New Testament alludes to elements of 22:17–18 when acknowledging the patriarch’s spiritual role for the Christian believer (e.g., Heb 11:12). The writer to the Hebrews (6:13–14) reminds his readers that the promise of salvation is irrefutable, for the Lord confirmed it swearing an oath by himself, for “there was no one greater for him to swear by” (6:13). Peter quotes 22:18 (perhaps conflating 12:3) in Acts 3:25 in showing the Jewish leaders that Christ is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of blessing intended for all families (*patria*; cf. Gal 3:6–9, 16), beginning first with the Jews (Acts 3:26; Rom 1:16; 2:9–10; see comments on 12:3).

The last words of the angel befittingly repeat the astonishing achievement of the patriarch, “because you have obeyed me” (v. 18b; cf. Adam, 3:17). Obedience is critical to the success of Abraham’s descendants in establishing Canaan as their homeland (e.g., Exod 19:5; Deut 11:13). In Abraham Israel has its example, as does the church, who is the “father of us all” (Rom 4:16).

**22:19** Verse 19 provides a double conclusion. “They set off together” (v. 19a) closely reflects the earlier expression, “the two of them went on together” (vv. 6, 8), thus ending the third movement of vv. 9–19a. Verse 19b’s reference to Abraham’s stay at Beersheba is a second conclusion, ending the whole pericope as the comment in 21:34 concludes the former episode. Geographically, the trip to Moriah is an excursion; theologically, the matter of ultimate trust is finally settled, and the patriarch’s spiritual sojourn nears its end. The narration’s mention of Abraham, not Isaac, returning (v. 19a) opened the way for Jewish speculation about Isaac’s fate. The focus on Abraham alone, however, is in accord with vv. 15–18. Moreover, the language “they set off together” presupposes the parallel in vv. 6, 8 (“went on together”) in which the boy Isaac is specifically noted (“two of them”).

Excursus: The Sacrifice of Isaac

The (almost) sacrifice of Isaac was significant for Jewish and Christian interpreters, though far more for Judaism than the New Testament. Some Jewish sources mention the “blood of Isaac” and “the ashes of Isaac” whose sacrifice achieved forgiveness and deliverance for future Israel in its time of trials. Such extrabiblical additions regarding Isaac’s death and (implied?) resurrection have similarities to the Christian doctrine of atonement. Romans 8:32 is considered by many scholars as the chief allusion to Gen 22: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.” An important question for Christian interpreters today is to explain to what degree, if any, Jewish and Christian circles influenced each other regarding their respective views on the concept of a vicarious expiation by the shedding of blood.

Early Jewish Interpretations. The Akedah (Gen 22:1–19) was a subject appearing in the entire range of Jewish sources, from early targums and rabbinic midrash to medieval commentators.615 Jewish sources offer diverse and growing traditions, not a uniform interpretation developed unilinearly. It is not our purpose here to propose a chronological framework for the developments mentioned below, only to cite the main ideas. Exegetical mysteries in the episode, which are unique in the Torah, and pressing community needs were the seedbed for the elaborate retellings of the Akedah. An example of an exegetical mystery was the absence of Isaac’s name in Gen 22:19. The rabbis asked and attempted to answer, “Where did Isaac go?” (*Gen. Rab.* 56.11). In *Tg. Neof.* 22:19 it is explained that the angels took him to the “schoolhouse of Shem,” presumably to learn Torah (so *Gen. Rab.* 56.11). Among Jewish community needs we can point to Roman oppression and the cessation of sacrifice at the destruction of the temple in a.d. 70, making the martyrdom of Isaac a powerful message of encouragement to the besieged Jews (*4 Mac* 13:9–12; 16:18–20; *L.A.B.* 32:2–3).

1. In regard to Isaac, a fundamental shift occurred from the passive Isaac of Genesis to the mature, active, and virtuous volunteer, the perfect offering. Isaac’s sacrifice became the idealized sacrifice, which was especially related to the New Year’s feast or alternatively the Passover sacrifice. The preamble in *Tg. Ps-J.* records a debate between Isaac and Ishmael, each claiming to be the rightful heir based on their merits. At hearing Isaac’s boast that he would yield all his members to God, the Lord proceeds with the test (also *Gen. Rab.* 55.4; *b. Sanh.* 89b). This voluntary spirit by Isaac is enhanced by his mature age of thirty-seven years (*Tg. Ps-J.*; also, e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 55.4), by Abraham informing him in advance that he is the sacrifice (*Tg. Neof.* 22:8; also *Gen. Rab.* 56.2–3), and by the heavenly voice confirming his heroism (*Tg. Neof.*). Josephus (*Ant.* 1.13.4[232]) depicts him receiving the news of his fate “with joy,” whereupon “he rushed to the altar and his doom.” Later midrash (ca. fourth century) even portrays him binding himself (*Sifre Deut* 32). Other explanations ascribed God’s action to Satan’s idea, as in biblical Job (1:9–11; *Jub.* 17:16; *b. Sanh.* 89a) or the envy of the angels (*L.A.B.* 32:1–2; *Gen. Rab.* 55.4). Also a rabbinic tradition cited Isaac’s remarkable righteousness (*Gen. Rab.* 55.2, quoting Ps 11:5), showing another similarity to Job (1:8).

2. Another important discussion was the relationship of the Akedah event and the salvation Israel experienced as a chosen nation. The Palestinian targums include a prayer by Abraham, calling upon God to forgive and save future generations (Gen 21:12) by remembering “the binding of their father Isaac” (*Tg. Neof.* 22:14; also *Ps-J.*). Pseudo-Philo depicts Isaac announcing that his sacrifice would be more effective for future generations than all other sacrifices (*L.A.B.* 32:2–4). Rabbinic midrash especially linked the merit of Isaac’s binding for the salvation and deliverance of Israel throughout its history (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 55.8; 56.10; *Lev. Rab.* 29.9).

3. The claim by medieval sources that Isaac was actually killed and resurrected from the ashes of the altar (e.g., *Pirqe R. El.* 31:3623) has earlier antecedents, though how early is disputed. *Mek. R. Ishmael* (*Pisha* 7:78–82; 11:85–96), reflecting material from the second century a.d., mentions the “blood of the binding of Isaac” when commenting on the biblical Passover: “And when I see blood, I will pass over you” (Exod 12:13). This midrash by the term (“see” *rāʾâ*) interprets the deliverance of the Hebrews from the Passover plague (Exod 12:13) and from the plagues against Jerusalem at the temple location (1 Chr 21:15) in terms of Abraham’s naming of the site (22:14).

“… and when I see the blood” (Exod 12:13):

“When I see the blood of the binding of Isaac.”

Thus it is said, “And Abraham called the name of that place, ‘the Lord will see’ ” (Gen 22:14); “And as he was about to destroy, the Lord beheld and regretted” (1 Chr 21:15).

What did he see? He saw the blood of the binding of Isaac, as it is said, “God will see to a lamb for himself” (22:8).

“I will pass over you”

Although rabbinic references to the blood of Isaac are rare, some think his death is implied in the Palestinian targums’ retelling and in the tribute to his martyrdom in *4 Maccabees.*626 Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities* (*L.A.B.* 18:5–6) mentions the merit of “his blood,” and as though deliberately reacting to the idea of death, Philo remarks that the act was not actually carried out but was perfect as if completed (*Abr.* 177). Later, *Gen. Rab.* 56.7 insists that not one harmful thing occurred, no blemish happened, and the medieval commentator Ibn Ezra specifically rejected the idea of Isaac’s actual death and resurrection. With this mixed testimony among Jewish sources, the question arises as to how early and pervasive the doctrine of Isaac’s blood atonement was and what was its relationship to Christian soteriology. Before speaking to these issues, we will consider the Christian interpretation of Gen 22 first.

Early Christian Interpretations. The Akedah influenced New Testament writers, but not in the same way or extent. Uniformly in the Gospels and Acts, Isaac is treated as a historical figure. He appears as a historical figure in Jas 2:21 and Heb 11:17–19, but in Hebrews his survival is termed a *parabola*, a “figure” (v. 19) of resurrection. The writer to the Hebrews recognized that Abraham believed the boy would return (22:5), which can only mean that Abraham trusted the Lord to raise him from the dead to fulfill his promise (21:12). This God did when the angel halted the knife, for the lad was as good as dead in the mind of his father—as well as in the reckoning of God (22:12, 16). In both Hebrews and James the mention of Isaac is overshadowed by the faith and obedience of his father, though in Heb 11:20 Isaac does receive a brief commendation for his faith in blessing his sons. Paul mentioned Isaac collaterally as a historical illustration buttressing his argument in Rom 9:7, 10 regarding Israel’s election. Galatians 4:28 includes Isaac as a type in his *allēgoroumena* (“speaking figuratively,” v. 24) of the two covenants represented by Hagar and Sarah (vv. 24–31). Through this survey it is important to observe that there is no *explicit* reference to an Isaac-Christ typology.

The most likely Pauline allusion to the Akedah proposed by commentators is Rom 8:32. “He who did not spare [*epheisato*] his own son” has the same verb used in Gen 22:12, 16, LXX, “You have not spared [*epheisō*] your beloved son.” Yet the verb occurs in the similar expression of 2 Sam 18:5, LXX, “Spare [*pheisasthe*] for my sake the young man Absalom.” Moreover, the root verb “spare, withhold” (*pheidomai*) is very common in the LXX, occurring ninety-five times (10x in the nt, including Rom 11:21). If Paul were intent on echoing the Akedah, he could have made an explicit reference (as in Gal 4:28) or repeated the LXX’s translation *agapētos* (“beloved”) for the passage’s common term *yāḥîd*, “only” (22:2, 12, 16), especially with the passage’s emphasis on the father’s love. Rather, Rom 8:32 has “his own [*tou idiou*] Son.” Hebrews 11:17 also avoids this language, preferring “his one and only [*monogenē*] son.” It is not self-evident that the apostle had the Akedah specifically in mind.

The church fathers, however, often read the Akedah episode typologically as the redemptive story of Christ’s crucifixion, including the Greek, Latin, and Syrian branches of the church. The first explicit reference to Isaac’s sacrifice as a type of Christ’s atonement was the *Letter of Barnabas* 7.3. Melito of Sardis (second century) is the earliest known to have related the wood borne by Isaac to the cross shouldered by our Lord (also, e.g., Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.5.4; Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.18.2; *Adv. Jud.* 10.6; Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns Nat.* 8.13; *Virg.* 8.16; *Comm.* *on Gen.* 20.3). Melito designates Isaac a *tupos*, a “type” of Christ (*Frag.* 9). He makes much of the astonishing deed of the father and his son who “carried with fortitude the model [*tupos*] of the Lord.” And for Melito the sacrificed ram also represented the Lord who was the “lamb” (*Frag.* 10); moreover, the ram “caught in a Sabek-tree … displayed the cross” (*Frag.* 11). Augustine too pointed to the wood and the horned ram caught in the thicket as the cross of Christ and his crown of thorns (*City of God* 16.32). Even the otherwise reticent Chrysostom draws parallels between Gen 22 and the crucifixion (John 8:56; Rom 8:32), indicating that both the ram and Isaac foreshadowed the Savior (*Hom. Gen.* 47).

Christian and Rabbinic Exegesis. The relationship between the Jewish Akedah interpreted as expiatory and Paul’s doctrine of forgiveness of sin by faith in the atoning blood of Christ has been an important topic among scholars. A popular view is that Paul was indebted to contemporary Jewish notions about the Akedah (perhaps in conjunction with Isaiah 53), which informed his own development of the atoning death of Christ. Just as Isaac’s “death” conveyed forgiveness and deliverance for future generations, the Passover death of Christ achieved salvation for the world (Rom 5:9; 1 Cor 5:7). Abraham represented God, and Isaac became the Christ. H. J. Schoeps summed it up this way: “Through the Aqeda the son of the promise became the Son of God.” The opposite view contends that the rabbinic interpretation of Isaac’s blood as a doctrine of vicarious atonement was actually a post-Christian development, initiated by the Tannaim (first–second centuries a.d.) at the collapse of the temple (a.d. 70) and developed further by the Amoraim authorities (ca. a.d. 200–500) in reaction to Christian soteriology by offering its own version of expiation, drawing on features of the Christian Passover/resurrection account. Somewhere between these two opinions is this middle of the road view: the Jewish Akedah antedated the first century a.d. and included the expiatory interpretation of Isaac’s sacrifice, but it did not originate in relation to the Christian paschal story and was not the source of Paul’s development of blood atonement. Rather, a common body of tradition regarding the Akedah was the source of the Jewish and Christian versions, each view formed to meet the respective theological needs. Two encumbrances hinder the interpreter when considering this question. First, the date of the material contained in the Palestinian targums as to whether it is pre- or post-Christian remains disputed. G. Vermes contends, however, that a Qumran fragment (4Q225) dating in the pre-Christian era assures that the Jewish Akedah was current in the first Christian century.637 Yet the broken text, although it contains elements of the Jewish Akedah, does not make any reference to the highly disputed points: the Passover, the lamb sacrifice, or Isaac’s blood and ashes. Second, that there was clearly a pre-Christian view of the Akedah as a vicarious shedding of Isaac’s blood is simply not demonstrable. The Qumran evidence does not solve the second interpretive hurdle either. Moreover, one cannot assume that Paul’s soteriology relied on an Isaac-Christ typology, since it also cannot be substantiated. P. Stuhlmacher shows that Paul’s view of the atonement (e.g., Rom 3:25–26) is best explained conceptually in light of Leviticus 16, not a current theology of martyrdom. Whether or not one dates the inception of the Jewish doctrine of expiation in relation to the Akedah as pre-Christian, the similarities between the Jewish and Christian traditions are superficial and do not require that the “blood of Isaac” was conceptually related to Paul’s soteriology.640 H. Maccoby rightly concludes, “It is clear, however, that even though a story did exist about the sacrifice, or partial sacrifice, of Isaac, this was of no central significance in Judaism, and therefore cannot really be compared to the Christian concept of the Crucifixion.” There is a fundamental theological difference between the substitutionary doctrine of Christ’s atonement and the developed Jewish Akedah, so that a simple exchange of Abraham for God and Isaac for Christ is not a satisfactory explanation for Paul’s soteriology.[[1]](#footnote-1)

# Final Exams (Genesis 22:1-24) Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/23-final-exams-genesis-221-24*](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-final-exams-genesis-221-24)

### Introduction

Fourteen years ago I applied for admission to Dallas Theological Seminary. As I was filling out my application, there were some questions which I had to answer. One concerned an area of biblical interpretation over which many Christians disagree. I well remember saying on my application that while I personally agreed with the seminary’s position, I did not see it proven by the passage cited in its support. Nothing was said about this matter for over three years. So far as I was concerned, it was all forgotten.

Just before my final year in seminary I was called into the dean’s office for a little discussion. To my amazement the matter of the difference between my position and the school’s was brought up. You might be interested to know that my position changed little, even through years of study and after learning a little about the original languages of the Bible. Somewhat reassured by my answers, the seminary allowed me to continue my educational program and graduate the next year.

The point of my illustration is that while this difference of interpretation was allowed to persist, there was a time when it would become an important issue. I find that God often does this same thing. He may allow a particular problem to continue for some time, but sooner or later the problem will become an issue of import and one that must be resolved.

Such was the case with Abraham. At the very outset of his relationship with God he was given a clear command concerning his family:

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And *from your relatives* And *from your father’s house*, To the land which I will show you” ([Genesis 12:1](javascript:%7b%7d); emphasis added).

We know, however, that it took years for Abram to be separated from his father; and when it did occur, it was the result of death rather than of deliberate obedience. Next it was Lot from whom Abram was reluctant to separate. In chapter 21 there was the painful act of sending away Ishmael, a son deeply loved by Abraham. In chapter 22 Abraham has come to his ultimate test. Abraham was an elderly man, and Sarah was soon to die. Abraham’s love was now focused upon Isaac, who after chapter 21 is his only son (22:2). God has brought Abraham to the point where he must give priority to either his faith or his family. The greatest test of his faith now confronts Abraham in [Genesis 22](javascript:%7b%7d).

### The Command (22:1-2)

We are not told the exact time of the ultimate test in Abraham’s life, only that it came after the events of chapter 21. Personally, I believe that it was at least ten years later, which would make Isaac a young man of at least the age of Ishmael when he was sent away. This would give ample time for the affections of Abraham for his first son to have been transferred to his second, Isaac. Isaac is thus accurately called his “only son” and the son whom Abraham loved (verse 2).

Contrary to the connotation of the term “tempted” employed by the King James translators in verse 2, God tested Abraham to demonstrate his faith in tangible terms. We know from Scripture that while God tests men to prove their godly character as saints, He never solicits them to sin (cf. [James 1:12-18](javascript:%7b%7d)). Thus, in [James 2](javascript:%7b%7d) the apostle can point to this event in Abraham’s life as an evidence of a living faith:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ([James 2:21](javascript:%7b%7d))[197](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-final-exams-genesis-221-24#P2350_604409)

God’s command to Abraham must have caught him totally unprepared: *And He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you”* ([Genesis 22:2](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The greatest difficulty I find in this chapter is not the conduct of Abraham but the command of God. How can a God of wisdom, mercy, justice, and love command Abraham to offer up his only son as a sacrifice? Infant sacrifice was practiced by the Canaanites, but it was condemned by God (cf. [Leviticus 18:21](javascript:%7b%7d); [Deuteronomy 12:31](javascript:%7b%7d)). Furthermore, such a sacrifice would have had no real value: *Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my first-born for my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* ([Micah 6:7](javascript:%7b%7d))

To point out that God stopped Abraham short of carrying out the command does not solve the problem. How could God have given the order in the first place if it were immoral? To hold that God could ever command His children to do wrong, even as a test, is to open the door to all kinds of difficulties.

Several factors must be considered to understand this test in a proper light. First of all, we must admit a strong bias in the matter. We who are parents are repulsed by the thought of sacrificing our children upon an altar. We thus project our abhorrence upon God and suppose that He could never consider such a thing either. Secondly, we view this command from the vantage point of the culture of the day, which did practice child sacrifice. If the pagans did it and God condemned their practice, it must be wrong in any context.

We are forced to the conclusion that the sacrifice of Isaac could not have been wrong, whether only attempted or accomplished, because God is incapable of evil ([James 1:13](javascript:%7b%7d)ff; [I John 1:5](javascript:%7b%7d)). Much more than this, it could not be wrong to sacrifice an only son because God actually did sacrifice His only begotten Son: *All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand* ([Isaiah 53:6,10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life ([John 3:16](javascript:%7b%7d); cf. [Matthew 26:39,42](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 22:22](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 3:17](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 2:23](javascript:%7b%7d); [II Corinthians 5:21](javascript:%7b%7d); [Revelation 13:8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In this sense, God did not require Abraham to do anything that He Himself would not do. Indeed, the command to Abraham was intended to foreshadow what He would do centuries later on the cross of Calvary.

Only by understanding the typological significance of the “sacrifice of Isaac” can we grasp the fact that God’s command was holy and just and pure. Abraham’s willingness to give up his only son humanly illustrated the love of God for man, which caused Him to give His only begotten Son. The agony of heart experienced by Abraham reflected the heart of the Father at the suffering of His Son. The obedience of Isaac typified the submission of the Son to the will of the Father (cf. [Matthew 26:39,42](javascript:%7b%7d)).

God halted the sacrifice of Isaac for two reasons. First, such a sacrifice would have no benefit for others. The lamb must be “without blemish,” without sin, innocent (cf. [Isaiah 53:9](javascript:%7b%7d)). This is the truth which Micah implied (6:7). Second, Abraham’s faith was amply evidenced by the fact that he was fully intending to carry out the will of God. We have no question in our mind that had God not intervened, Isaac would have been sacrificed. In attitude Isaac had already been sacrificed, so the act was unnecessary.

A second difficulty pertains to the silence of Abraham. One of my friends put it well: “How come Abraham interceded with God for Sodom, but not for his son Isaac?” We must remember that the Scriptures are selective in what they report, choosing to omit what is not essential to the development of the argument of the passage (cf. [John 20:30-31; 21:25](javascript:%7b%7d)). In this chapter of Genesis, for example, we know that God was to indicate the particular place to “sacrifice” Isaac (verse 2) and that Abraham went to this spot (verse 9), but we are not told when God revealed this to him.

I believe that Moses, under the superintending guidance of the Holy Spirit, omitted Abraham’s initial reaction to God’s command in order to highlight his ultimate response—obedience. Personally (although there is no Scripture to support my conjecture), I believe that Abraham argued and pled with God for the life of his son, but God chose not to record this point in Abraham’s life because it would have had little to inspire us. I know that many of us would not want God to report our first reactions to unpleasant situations either; it is our final response that matters (cf. [Matthew 21:28-31](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This helps me as I read the evaluation of Old Testament saints in the New Testament. Except for the words of Peter I would never have considered Lot to be a righteous man ([II Peter 2:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d)). In [Hebrews 11](javascript:%7b%7d) and [Romans 4](javascript:%7b%7d) Abraham is portrayed as a man without failure or fault, yet the book of Genesis clearly reports these weaknesses. The reason, I believe, is that the New Testament writers are viewing these saints as God does. Because of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary, the sins of the saints are not only forgiven but also forgotten. The wood, hay, and stubble of sin is consumed, leaving only the gold, silver, and precious stones ([I Corinthians 3:10-15](javascript:%7b%7d)). The sins of the saints are not glossed over; they are covered by the blood of Christ. When these sins are recorded, it is only for our admonition and instruction ([I Corinthians 10:1](javascript:%7b%7d)ff, especially verse 11).

### Abraham’s Obedience (22:3-10)

Regardless of the struggles which are not reported, Abraham arose early to begin the longest journey of his life: *So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him* ([Genesis 22:3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I have said previously that while the early hour may reflect the resolve of Abraham to do God’s will, it may contain some human factors also. First, I would imagine that sleep completely evaded Abraham on that night, especially after God had clearly commanded the sacrifice of Isaac. Some people rise early because all hope of sleep is gone. Then, too, I would not have wanted to face Sarah with my plans for the coming days. While Abraham was resigned to do God’s will, Sarah is not informed of this test (at least so far as the Scriptures record).

After a heart-breaking three-day journey the mountain of sacrifice was in view. At this point Abraham left his servants behind and went on alone with Isaac:

And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you.” And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together ([Genesis 22:5-6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In the midst of great anguish of soul there is a beautiful expression of hope and faith in verse 5: *“Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there.* ***We*** *will worship and then* ***we*** *will come back to you”* (NIV; emphasis added).

I do not believe these words were idly spoken but that they reflected a deep inner trust in God and His promises. The God Who had commanded the sacrifice of Isaac had also promised to produce a nation through him (17:15-19; 21:12).

As the two went on alone climbing the mountain to the place of sacrifice, Isaac put a question to his father which must have broken his heart: “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (verse 7)

The answer was painfully evident to Abraham, and yet there is in his answer not only a deliberate vagueness but also an element of hope: “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (verse 8).

At every step Abraham must have hoped for some change of plans, some alternative course of action. The place was reached, the altar built, and the wood arranged. At last there was nothing left but to bind Isaac and place him upon the wood and plunge the knife into his heart.

### God’s Provision (22:11-14)

Only when the knife was lifted high, glistening in the sun, did God restrain Abraham from offering up his son:

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” And he said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” ([Genesis 22:11-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

At the point of death it was evident that Abraham was willing to forsake all, even his son, his only son, for God. While God knew the heart of Abraham, Abraham’s reverence was now evident from experiential knowledge.

Also at the point of total obedience came the provision of God. God did not halt the act of sacrifice; He provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac:

Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son (verse 13).

From this experience it was seen that Abraham’s faith that God would provide a sacrificial offering (verse 8) was honored and that God does indeed provide: *And Abraham called the name of that place The Lord will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the Lord it will be provided”* (verse 14).

### God’s Promise (22:15-19)

In addition to God’s intervention to prevent Abraham’s sacrifice of his son, there was the confirmation of God’s promises to Abraham through his son:

“… By Myself I have sworn,” declares the Lord, “because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” ([Genesis 22:16-18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

There is little in this divine confirmation that is new,[198](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-final-exams-genesis-221-24#P2393_615267) although there is one striking change. In previous instances these promises were made unconditionally (cf. 12:1-3; 15:13-16, 18-21). Now the blessings are promised Abraham because he had obeyed God in this test (22:16,18).

The change is not as dramatic as it might first appear, however. In chapter 17 God reaffirmed His promises, beginning with these words: “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant … ” (verses 1-2).

Furthermore, Abraham was instructed to “keep My covenant” (17:9,10,11). Then in chapter 18 we read:

… Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him (18:18-19).

We must realize that God’s choice of Abraham included not only the end God purposed (blessings) but also the means (faith and obedience). After his ultimate test on Mount Moriah God can say that the blessings are a result of the obedience which stems from faith. This same sequence is evident in the New Testament:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them ([Ephesians 2:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified ([Romans 8:28-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The work of God begins with a promise which must be accepted by faith. Ultimately this faith, if it is genuine, will be demonstrated by good works (cf. [James 2](javascript:%7b%7d)). The promises of God are sure to every believer because God is sovereign at every step—from faith to obedience to blessing.

### Conclusion

This incident in Abraham’s life had several results for the patriarch.

**(1) It dealt with a problem that had plagued him all of his life—unhealthy attachment to family.** It was here that Abraham had to choose between Isaac and God for his first loyalty. His obedience finally put this problem to rest.

**(2) His obedience to the revealed will of God justified his profession of faith:**

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God ([James 2:17-23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

James is not disagreeing with Paul here. He would agree that a man is saved by faith, apart from works (cf. [Romans 4](javascript:%7b%7d)), but James insists that a saving faith is a working faith. A faith which is professed but not practiced is a dead faith. While Abraham was justified before God by believing the promise of God ([Genesis 15:6](javascript:%7b%7d); [Romans 4:3](javascript:%7b%7d)), he was justified before men by his obedience ([Genesis 22](javascript:%7b%7d), [James 2](javascript:%7b%7d)). God could look on Abraham’s heart and know that his faith was genuine; we must look at his obedience to see that his profession was genuine.

**(3) Abraham’s obedience resulted in spiritual growth and deeper insight into the person and promises of God.** No experience in Abraham’s life made the person and work of Christ more evident. This is why our Lord could say to the Jews of His day: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad” ([John 8:56](javascript:%7b%7d)). Times of testing are also times of growth in the lives of believers today.

**(4) Abraham’s trial on Mount Moriah prepared him for the future.** It is no surprise that the next chapter (23) deals with the death of Sarah. What we need to fathom is the fact that God used the offering of Isaac to prepare Abraham for the death of his wife. We know from Abraham’s words (22:5) and from their interpretation by the writer to the Hebrews (11:19) that Abraham’s faith evidenced on Mount Moriah was a faith in the God Who could raise men and women from the dead (cf. also [Romans 4:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). While he did not face death until chapter 23, he dealt with it in chapter 22. God’s tests are often preparatory for greater things ahead (cf. [Matthew 4:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Besides dealing with Abraham, God used this incident on Mount Moriah to instruct the nation Israel, who received this book and the other four books of the Law from the pen of Moses. For those who had just received the Law with its complex sacrificial system, this event in the life of Abraham gave a much deeper understanding of the significance of sacrifice. They should perceive that sacrifice was substitutionary. The animal died in place of man just as the ram was provided in Isaac’s stead. But they should also perceive that ultimately a Son, an only Son, must come to pay the price for sin, which no animal can possibly do. Against the backdrop of the sacrifice on Mount Moriah the whole sacrificial system of the Law was seen to have a deeper, fuller significance.

This incident in the life of Abraham was also intended for our edification and instruction ([I Corinthians 10:6,11](javascript:%7b%7d)). Let me suggest several ways that we should learn from the life of Abraham as it is depicted in [Genesis 22](javascript:%7b%7d).

**(1) This event is a beautiful foreshadow, a type, of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Abraham represents God the Father, Who, out of love for mankind, gave His only Son as a sacrifice for sinners ([John 3:16](javascript:%7b%7d)). Isaac is a type of Christ, Who submits to the will of His Father. Isaac bore the wood as our Lord bore His cross ([Genesis 22:6](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 19:17](javascript:%7b%7d)). It was three days from the time Abraham left to sacrifice his son until they returned together. After three days Abraham received his son back ([Hebrews 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). After three days our Lord arose from the dead ([John 20](javascript:%7b%7d); [I Corinthians 15:4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Even beyond all this, Isaac was “sacrificed” at the place where our Lord would give His life centuries later, on Mount Moriah outside Jerusalem. We know from [II Chronicles 3:1](javascript:%7b%7d) that this was the place where the Lord appeared to David and where Solomon built the temple. And so it was that Abraham took his son to a mount near Jerusalem to offer his son, even the same place (or nearly so) where our Lord was to die in years to come. What a beautiful illustration of the infinite wisdom of God and of the inspiration of God’s holy Scriptures.

**(2) This passage also reminds us of the importance of obedience for the Christian.** It was because Abraham obeyed God that the promised blessings were confirmed once again at the climax of our passage (verses 15-18). While man’s works never save him, saving faith must inevitably be manifested in good works ([Ephesians 2:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)). Trust and obey is the way of the Christian.

**(3) We see also that the Christian life is paradoxical.** It would seem that it is self-contradictory. Abraham gained his son by giving him up to God. We get ahead in God’s eyes by putting ourselves behind others ([Matthew 23:11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Philippians 2:5](javascript:%7b%7d)ff). We lead by serving; we save our lives by losing them ([Matthew 16:25](javascript:%7b%7d)). God’s ways are not man’s ways.

**(4) The Christian life is not lived without reason or rationality.** I greatly fear that many have read this account in Abraham’s life and concluded that God tests us by directing us to do that which is totally unreasonable.

The danger is that we will tend to assume that whatever does not make sense is likely to be the will of God. Many critics have suggested that Christians are those who take their hats and their heads off when they enter the church. This is not so.

On the other hand, we must acknowledge that what Abraham was commanded to do seemed to be unreasonable. Through Isaac Abraham was to be the father of multitudes. How could this be so if Isaac were dead? Putting a son to death must have seemed totally beyond the character of God. Was God not asking Abraham to act on faith without reason? Notice what the writer to the Hebrews says:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, “IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED.” He ***considered*** that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type ([Hebrews 11:17-19](javascript:%7b%7d); emphasis added).

The Greek word here, *logizomai*, clearly expresses the fact that Abraham acted upon reason.[199](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-final-exams-genesis-221-24#P2421_625244) This was no blind “leap of faith,” as it is sometimes represented. Faith always acts upon facts and reason.

My point is simply this. The world likes to believe that they act upon reason while Christians act without thinking. That is wholly false. The truth is there are two kinds of reasoning: worldly reasoning and godly reasoning. Peter, when he rebuked our Lord for talking of His sacrificial death, was thinking humanly:

But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” ([Matthew 16:23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

There are two mind sets: the godly mind and the worldly mind:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so ([Romans 8:5-7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The appeal of Paul in [Romans 12](javascript:%7b%7d) is addressed to both our emotions and our minds:

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith ([Romans 12:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The sacrifice we are called to give to God is that of our living bodies, and it is our logical or rational (Greek, *logicos*) act of worship. This is accomplished by the renewing of our minds (verse 2). Man’s whole being has been affected by the fall: emotions, intellect, and will. All of these must therefore undergo a radical transformation for us to be conformed to the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. In [Romans 12:3](javascript:%7b%7d) we are told to think, think, think. This is the use of our new minds. Christianity is rational, but of a vastly different kind than that of the world.

Christian reasoning is based upon the presuppositional belief that there is a God, Who is both our creator and redeemer ([Hebrews 11:1](javascript:%7b%7d)ff). Christian reasoning is based upon the belief that God’s Word is absolutely true and reliable. God had promised a son through Sarah through whom the blessings were to be given. Abraham believed God in this ([Genesis 15:6](javascript:%7b%7d)). God also commanded Abraham to sacrifice this son. Abraham believed God and obeyed Him even though human reasoning would question the wisdom of it.

Abraham’s reasoning was also based upon his experience with God over the years. God had continually proven to be his provider and protector. God’s sovereign power had repeatedly been demonstrated, even among the heathen such as Pharaoh and Abimelech. While Abraham and Sarah were “as good as dead” so far as bearing children were concerned, God gave them the promised child ([Romans 4:19-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Abraham did not understand why he was told to sacrifice his son nor how God would accomplish His promises if Abraham obeyed, but he did know Who had commanded it. He did know that God was holy, just, and pure. He did know that God was able to raise the dead. On the basis of these certainties Abraham obeyed God, contrary to human wisdom, but squarely based upon godly reason. Godly reason has reasons. We may not know how or why, but we do know Who and what. That is enough!

**(5) There is a beautiful principle taught in our text:** “… In the mount of the Lord it will be provided” (verse 14).

In verse 8 Abraham assured his son that God would provide a lamb, and so He did (verse 13). The principle is not that God will provide at a certain place, but under a certain condition. At the point of faith and obedience, at the point of helplessness and dependence, God will provide. Often, I believe, we do not see God’s provision because we are not at a point of despair.

I remember the story of two sailors who alone survived a shipwreck. They were adrift at sea on a makeshift raft. After all hope of rescue was lost, one asked the other if they should pray. Both agreed, and one had just begun to cry to God for help when the other interrupted, “Hold it, don’t commit yourself, I think I see a sail.”

God sometimes must bring us to the point where we find Abraham on Mount Moriah—totally depending upon God for deliverance. It is there that we must acknowledge that God has provided. This is the point men and women must come to in order to be saved. They must see themselves as lost sinners, deserving of God’s eternal wrath. They must forsake any faith in themselves and any work they might do to win God’s favor. They must look only to God to provide the forgiveness of sins and righteousness required for salvation. God’s provision has been made by the death of His sinless Son, Jesus Christ, on Calvary 2000 years ago. If you have reached the point of despair, my friend, I want you to know it is also the point of help and salvation. Cast all your hope upon the Christ of Calvary, and you will surely find salvation.

**(6) Finally, this passage has been used for a tragic evil, the sacrifice of our sons and daughters on the pretext of obeying a divine command.** God has never instructed His saints to sacrifice their families for any ministry or any calling. We must put God first, this is true ([Matthew 10:37](javascript:%7b%7d)), but obedience to God necessitates provision and instruction of our families (cf. [I Timothy 5:8](javascript:%7b%7d); [Ephesians 6:4](javascript:%7b%7d); [I Timothy 3:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d), 12).

Many parents, like Abraham, view their future as wrapped up in their children. They wish to manipulate their lives so as to live out their hopes and dreams in them. We must give our children to the Lord and submit them, as ourselves, to His keeping and care. Then will we, and they, find God’s blessing.

I must sadly admit that the problem of Abraham is surely foreign to our world today. How little we must worry about undue attachment to our children in this day when abortion is rampant, and mothers and fathers are forsaking their families for a freer lifestyle. In this we see the prophecy of conditions for the end times being fulfilled in our midst:

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these ([II Timothy 3:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In verse 3 the first word, “unloving,” means literally “without love of kindred.” These are days when the natural paternal affections are becoming rare. Surely the Lord’s return is near. May God enable us to love our children so much that we commit them to God’s will for their lives.

197 In this chapter James is not debating Paul’s theology but is stressing a complementary truth: While works cannot save, only a faith that works does save. The justification of which James speaks in chapter 2 is not before God but before men. The faith a man has in his heart justifies him before God, but the faith a man demonstrates by his life justifies his claim to be saved before men.

198 Stigers’ remarks, however, are worthy of repetition: “The phrase ‘gates of their enemies’ (v. 17) is of far-reaching significance as to the future of God’s redemptive program. The other elements of the oath-promise, the innumerable descendants and the blessing to come upon the nations, are the same as those found in 12:1-3; however, the phrase ‘a land I will shew/give thee’ is now replaced by ‘possess the gate of their enemies.’ This enlarges the meaning of the promise of the land: that of assuming the place and power of the previous peoples. But the promise is not localized in any way; any enemy of any time is designated, unless Israel shall deny her God (cf. [Ps. 89:30-33](javascript:%7b%7d)). The phrase connotes the ultimate victory of holiness over all things, shared in by God’s people.” Harold Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 190-191.

199 “Hence, *logizomai* means: (a) reckon, credit, rank with, calculate; (b) consider, deliberate, grasp, draw a logical conclusion, decide.” J. Eichler, “*Logizomai*,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), III, pp. 822-823.

1. Mathews, K. A. (2005). [*Genesis 11:27–50:26*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac01b?ref=Bible.Ge22.1-19&off=56398) (Vol. 1B, pp. 283–306). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)