

6 His Only Son Is Comprehensive!

By David Lee Burris



This Old Testament Story Scared Me As A Child!



This 1956 Movie Only Added To My Anxiety!!



BAR: The Binding or Sacrifice of Isaac?

How Jews and Christians see it differently



Detail of the upper left scene on the marble sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (see the next photo). The story of how God tested Abraham by ordering him to sacrifice his son Isaac on Moriah is depicted. Abraham stands with the knife (now broken off) in hand, prepared to follow God's command. Isaac kneels in front of the altar. A servant stands at right, and the ram, which Abraham will sacrifice in Isaac's place, is at left.

The *Akedah* (ah-kay-DAH), or binding of Isaac, is one of the most powerful narratives in the Hebrew Bible. For nearly 2,000 years, however, it has been read somewhat differently by Jews & Christians. It is even portrayed differently in the pictures they make. For most Christians, the Hebrew word *akedah* is unfamiliar; more often than not, they will refer to the episode as the sacrifice of Isaac rather than the binding of Isaac.

According to the narrative in Genesis 22:2–18, God, without any warning, [commands Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son](#) as a burnt offering. Father and son travel three days to Moriah, the place of sacrifice, where they build an altar. [Abraham binds Isaac](#), lays him on the firewood and raises his knife to slay him. At the last moment, however, an angel calls out to Abraham to do no harm to the lad, and a ram caught in a nearby thicket is substitute for Isaac.

In Judaism and Christianity, Abraham is the paradigm of the man of faith, put to the ultimate test & found to be steadfast. Isaac, however is variously interpreted according to time and tradition. In Jewish literature around the turn of the era, Isaac is portrayed as the prototype of the voluntary and joyful martyr, willing to go bravely to his death. The first-century [Jewish historian Flavius Josephus](#) describes Isaac as a 25-year-old who rushes to the altar, knowing that he is to be the victim. According to this portrayal, in future times of distress, God will remember Isaac's binding, the *Akedah*, and heed the prayers of the Jewish people for deliverance from enemies. As the text says, "Because you have done this...I will bestow my blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore" (Genesis 22:16–17). **That is why the shofar ram's horn is blown at Rosh Hashanah to remind God of the *Akedah* and his promise; the shofar represents the horn of the ram that was substituted for Isaac.**



The marble sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (compare with previous photo), a Roman prefect who died in 359 C.E. Early Christian images of the story of the near-sacrifice of Isaac frequently occur in funerary contexts—in catacombs and on sarcophagi. The highly popular scene often appears among other images depicting salvation and deliverance from death, as, for example, on this sarcophagus, which includes a panel showing Daniel in the lion's den (lower register, second from right). *Photo: Tetraktyz.*

[The Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D.](#) may have stimulated a profound new understanding of the *Akedah* in Jewish tradition. Since sacrifices could no longer be offered at the Temple, Isaac became the archetypal sacrifice, a kind of substitute for the now-defunct sacrificial system of the Temple. In Jewish tradition, until the destruction of the Temple the episode was referred to as the “offering” of Isaac; after the destruction it was called the “binding” of Isaac, a reference to the tying of a lamb’s feet in the days when this sacrifice was carried out at the Jerusalem Temple. After the Temple’s destruction, the word *akedah* was used to show that Isaac’s offering was a vicarious atonement that was perfected and complete in itself; the former Temple offering was only a memorial to this archetypal sacrifice.

In later rabbinic collections, Isaac is portrayed as an adult of 37 years, fully aware of what is going to happen to him. He not only accepts the role he is to play, but begs Abraham to bind him lest he struggle in fear, invalidating the sacrifice. The Jerusalem Talmud summarizes the tradition that Isaac’s release is the equivalent of all Israel’s release. Abraham received from God, as a reward for his obedience, God’s own future intercession for Isaac’s descendants when they should fall into sin. Remembering the *Akedah*, God will suppress his wrath and have mercy on his people.

According to the Genesis story, Isaac’s sacrifice was interrupted and the ram substituted. However, several ancient traditions also refer to Isaac’s ashes or blood; some accounts even say that Isaac actually died and was revived. Does Genesis itself hint at this? After God tells Abraham that, because of what he has done, his descendants will be like the stars of the heaven and the sands of the sea, “Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for [Beer-sheba](#)” (Genesis 22:19). Why no mention of Isaac? What happened to him? Was there another version of the story with a different ending? In any event, in all these traditions, Isaac’s ashes are the symbol of his merit, and the *Akedah* is the fulfilled expiatory sacrifice.

To resolve the seeming **conflict between Jewish tradition** that he was sacrificed **and the Biblical text** that says a ram was substituted, later Jewish sages suggested that Isaac was laid upon the altar after the wood was kindled (in accordance with priestly law [Leviticus 1:7–8]); although the angel prevented Abraham from slaying his son, Isaac was burned to death and his ashes cast on Moriah. Moriah, in Jewish tradition, is [the Temple Mount](#), where the Temple was later built and where sacrifices were offered in commemoration of the *Akedah*.

Christians, on the other hand, have from earliest times understood Isaac as a prefiguration of Christ, [the beloved son offered as the expiatory sacrifice for sin](#). The textual parallels between Jesus and Isaac are striking. Isaac, like Jesus, was miraculously conceived. (Sarah, Isaac's mother, was 90 years old when she bore Isaac & had been barren all her life; Abraham was a hundred [Genesis 17:17].) **Isaac was his father's beloved son. Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice (Genesis 22:6), just as Christ carried his own cross. The journey to Moriah took three days, parallel to the three days Jesus spent in the tomb [before his resurrection](#). And of course, Jesus did Isaac one better: Isaac was not sacrificed; Jesus was.**

Although these parallels are not explicitly drawn in the New Testament, later exegetes made them quite specifically. [Paul](#) may even have intended his audience to make the connection when he described God as “He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us” (Romans 8:32).

Very early in post-New Testament Christian literature the story of Abraham's offering of Isaac becomes the “old covenant” counterpart of and paradigm for God's sacrifice of his own son on Calvary. This challenge was met with a direct response as the rabbis developed their own Passover atonement theology. The rabbis, aware of the Christian typological interpretation of Isaac's sacrifice, developed the *Akedah* tradition in which the word *akedah* was interpreted to refer to the tying of the lamb's feet in a *tamid* sacrifice, the twice-a-day burnt offering at the Temple when it still stood.

Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement and Origen also cited the Isaac-Christ parallels. **Tertullian saw the firewood Isaac carried as a figure of the cross and emphasized Christ's self-sacrifice: "Isaac, being led by his father to be a victim, and carrying himself the firewood, at that moment was a figure of Christ's death, submitting himself to his father as a victim and lugging the [fire]wood of his own passion."**

Jewish tradition identified Moriah, the site of the *Akedah*, as the Temple Mount, where the Temple was later built.

Christians, on the other hand, conflated Moriah with [Calvary, the site of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross](#).

By the end of the sixth century the common identity had been accepted. In a famous travel account, an anonymous writer gave the following description of Golgotha: "You can see the place where [Jesus] was crucified, and on the actual rock there is a bloodstain. Beside this is the altar of Abraham, which is where he intended to offer Isaac, and where Melchizedek offered sacrifice."



Christian depictions of the sacrifice of Isaac appear most frequently in the artistic programs of tombs and sarcophagi. In the Roman catacombs, the sacrifice of Isaac appears near the raising of Lazarus (John 11:43–44); [the story of Jonah](#) (who returned from the belly of the fish after three days [Jonah 1:17]), just as Jesus emerged from the tomb after three days); [the healing of the paralytic](#) (John 5:8–9); and the three youths who emerged from the fiery furnace unscathed (Daniel 3:24–26). **This juxtaposition sends a message of deliverance from illness and death, symbolized in part by Isaac, who was delivered by God.** On two sarcophagi - the sacrifice of Isaac is balanced by scenes from the arrest and [trial of Jesus](#), as if to emphasize the sacrifice of Isaac as a metaphor for the vicarious and atoning sacrifice of Christ. In another catacomb fresco in Rome Isaac carries his own firewood.



“But where is the Lamb?” (Genesis 22:7) queries Isaac, right, pictured in this late third century wall painting from the catacombs. Peering out from under his heavy burden of firewood, Isaac reminds the viewer of Jesus under the burden of his cross—each carried the means of his own death.

In several Christian images, the sacrifice of Isaac is associated with the offerings of Abel (Genesis 4:4) and Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18–20). One lunette in the sanctuary portrays a kind of Abraham cycle. To the left, Abraham and Sarah hear the announcement of Isaac’s promised birth. Abraham offers a small calf on a platter to his three angelic visitors, who sit at a table on which three loaves are spread out. To the right is the scene of Abraham sacrificing Isaac. Here Isaac is placed on the altar. Abraham’s sword is aloft, but the hand of God has stayed it from striking. The ram substitute stands at Abraham’s feet. Directly across is a complementary lunette that depicts Abel & Melchizedek offering their sacrifices at an altar. Thus, the offering of Isaac is identified with the Christian Communion. — *Biblical Archaeology Review*

Selected Words from the Primary Source Analyzed

וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה (vayehi achar hadevarim ha'eleh) **And it came to pass after these things** (22:1)

This sentence appears numerous times in the Bible. It is a bridging sentence between the story that has just been told and the one that will appear next. This sentence indicates a special type of connection between the stories, one that the Bible wants us readers to pay attention to.

Things can be put this way: After we heard about God's promise to Abraham, and after Sarah's joy at the miracle that occurred to her, and after Abraham escaped safely from the incident with Abimelech, the story suddenly changes—God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, the very son they were just blessed with. The Biblical story changes direction from joy and miracles to something that opposes that miracle.

קַח נָא (kach na) **Take now** (22:2)

It's interesting to note that none of the translations relate to the second word in the phrase—נָא (**na**)—which means **please**. This word expresses a request. Meaning, God doesn't command Abraham to sacrifice his son, He asks him. Various interpreters try to understand this unique language. Some of them make the argument that **this is the real test that God tests Abraham with. God doesn't force Abraham to sacrifice his son. He doesn't command him.** Nonetheless, Abraham rises to the occasion and fulfills God's request in this greatest test.

מֹרְיָה (Moriyah) **Moriah** (22:2)

God tells Abraham that He wants him to sacrifice Isaac in the land of Moriah. Now, we can identify the place as Jerusalem. But what is the literal meaning of the name? There are different answers to this question.

The Land of the Amorites

There are scholars who think that the land of Moriah is the land of the Amorites (the Amorites were a people who lived in Canaan at that time). The words מֹרְיָה (Moriah) and אַמּוֹרִיִּם (Amorites) have similar letters and sound similar as well.

The Land from Which Wisdom Emanates

Another explanation is that the land of Moriah is the place from which teaching and wisdom go out into the world. The words מְרִיָּה (Moriah) and הוֹרָאָה (*hora'ah*) **teaching** come from the same root letters. The destiny of the land is to be the place from where the Torah goes out to the whole world. By the mere fact that Abraham came there on God's command, the land started to fulfill its destiny.

The Land that Smells Nice

Another interpretation makes a connection between the word מְרִיָּה (*moriyah*) and מוֹר (*mor*) **myrrh**. Myrrh is a type of herb that was used in the Temple which, as we all know, was built on Mount Moriah many years later.

הֶעֱלֵהוּ (*ha'alehu*) **offer him** (22:2)

First of all, let us explain the literal meaning of this word.

הֶעֱלֵהוּ = הֶעֱלֵה אוֹתוֹ (*ha'aleh oto*) **raise him**. In other words, the word הֶעֱלֵהוּ indicates the raising of something from one point to another, higher, point. In our case, God is asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. People sacrificed on an altar. Obviously, the act of lifting the sacrifice from the ground onto the altar involves an act of raising something off the ground.

Abraham and Isaac Go to Mount Moriah. Maurycy Lilien.

However, the simple, physical description of this act eventually turned into an independent phrase which means "to offer up as a sacrifice," with no connection to the act of raising something.

Pay attention to the words הֶעֱלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה (*ha'alehu sham leolah*) **offer him there as a sacrifice**. An עֹלָה (*olah*) is a type of sacrifice that is completely burnt, as opposed to other sacrifices, that can be partially eaten. Therefore, it could be that the word הֶעֱלֵהוּ is used because it is referencing a specific type of sacrifice—an עֹלָה that is completely burnt.

Another explanation for the term הֶעֱלֵהוּ in the context of a sacrifice is that when you offer a sacrifice you raise it a level, from a regular animal to one sanctified to God. In other words, a spiritual lifting.

וַיִּבְקַע (*vayevaka*) **and he cleaved** (22:3)

The word וַיִּבְקַע (*yevaka*) expresses **cleaving and the breaking into pieces**. It connotes splitting—a strong separation between two parts that is done physically, with strength.

וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת עֵינָיו (*vayisa Avraham et eynav*) **Abraham lifted up his eyes** (22:4)

This is the second time that the Bible uses this phrase in order to describe a specific moment in Abraham's life. The first time we encountered this phrase was when Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent and saw three men from afar (Genesis 18:2).

Now, Abraham is making his way to the land of Moriah, to a mountain that he isn't sure exactly where it is. Remember, God did not tell him where it was. He just said to him: "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah ... upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." And behold, he lifts his eyes and sees the mountain from afar. Suddenly he feels that this is the mountain that God was referring to.

Abraham and Isaac on the way to Mount Moriah.

According to the interpreters, every time the phrase וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת עֵינָיו "lifted his eyes" appears in the Torah, this means that something important is going to happen, this is not a simple incident of seeing.

For instance, in verse 13, Abraham lifts his eyes and sees the ram stuck in the bush. Again here is an important event, just like we saw in the other examples; not a mere sighting, but an important one.

הַמֵּאֲכֶלֶת (*hama'achelet*) **the knife** (22:6)

This word appears only twice in the Bible and in both places it is used in the context of sacrifices.

It is interesting to note that Biblical Hebrew doesn't use the more commonly known word for knife—סַכִּין (*sakin*)—in order to describe this object that Abraham took with him and which is meant to serve as the blade for the sacrifice. The text uses the term מַאֲכֶלֶת (*ma'achelet*) instead. This word comes from the word אוֹכֵל (*ochel*) **food**. It is as if the knife eats the sacrifice that is slain by it.

הִנְנִי (*hineni*) **Here am I** (22:7)

This word in fact contains two Hebrew words הִנֵּה אֲנִי (*hineh ani*) **Here** and **I am**. This word represents presence and full readiness.

In our story, the word הִנְנִי appears three times. Each time it is said by Abraham. The first time he says it to God, when God turns to him with the request to sacrifice his son (22:1); the second time when Isaac, his son, turns to him on the way to Mount Moriah (22:7); and the third time when God's angel calls to him and tells him not to harm his son (22:11). These words indicate Abraham's enthusiasm to do God's command. He doesn't hesitate. He stands ready for every commandment and order.

וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת הָעֵצִים (*vaya'aroch et ha'etsim*) **and laid the wood in order** (22:9)

Abraham arranged the wood on top of the altar he built in a specific way—he didn't just lay the wood out haphazardly. Other words that are related to the word וַיַּעֲרֹךְ (*vaya'aroch*) and share the same root letters, express an **arrangement in a specific order**.

For instance, in the Temple there was wood that was called אֶצֵי הַמַּעֲרָכָה (*atzei hama'aracha*) the **array of wood** for the altar. Meaning, wood that was supposed to be arranged in a specific way. During the time of the Second Temple, it was a great honor to bring that wood to the Temple, and there are various descriptions of how it was done.

In Modern Hebrew, one can לַעֲרֹךְ **arrange** various different things: One can לַעֲרֹךְ לְשִׁלְתָן “arrange” (set) a table; לַעֲרֹךְ עֵתוֹן “arrange” (edit) a newspaper; לַעֲרֹךְ מִסְבָּה “arrange” (organize, hold) a party.¹

¹ Tzadka, Y., Krakowski, T., & Kihaly, O. (Eds.). (n.d.). [Choice Words from the Story of the Isaac's Birth](#) (pp. 23–35). Jerusalem: Good Times Ltd.

GENESIS 22:2, 6–14—ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND THE RAM

In the book of Genesis chapter twenty-two, we have the account of Abraham as he is called to offer up Isaac. God never intended for Abraham to literally offer up Isaac. We are told from the very beginning that the Lord was simply testing Abraham's faith. It is also clearly in the context a statement against Canaanite child sacrifice. God condemned the practice that went on in the Canaanite religion of the ancient Near East. So, when we look at this text, having made a statement against child sacrifice we then see a substitute for Isaac in the ram.

This whole text becomes a beautiful picture of God the Father sending God the Son to die for the sins of the world. That is, his only begotten Son. The ram becomes a type of Christ in the sacrifice that he offers. Abraham is a type of the Father. Isaac is a type of the Son in his obedience to the Father. Isaac then becomes like us in that he is rescued from death by the ram that takes the place of Isaac. The ram represents Jesus Christ who took the place of us and we like Isaac have been saved from spiritual death through Jesus Christ. This text looks ultimately at the victory Christ gives us in the resurrection leading to eternal life.

2.5 Application/Interpretation

Abraham arose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men and Isaac his son. He cut the wood for the burnt offering and he went to the place that God had told him. On the third day we are told that Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar off. Then Abraham said to his young men, abide here with the donkey and I and the lad will go unto yonder place and we will worship and we will come back to you. It is at this point with that anticipation of coming back to them that we pick up this text of verse six.

As I look at this text, I am reminded of how Isaac becomes a type of Jesus Christ in that Isaac took the wood and carried it. It was Jesus Christ that carried the wood of his Cross up to Calvary. Furthermore, the two of them went together, the father and the son. This becomes a type of God the Father and God the Son. Together they go up to Calvary. The Father accompanied Jesus through his trial and through the Via Dolorosa up to Calvary. So here again is a type of the Father and Jesus in Isaac and Abraham.

3.5 *Application/Interpretation*

Here we see pathos as the two are talking and Isaac asks his father where the lamb is for the burnt offering. Everything else was there—the wood, and that which would create a fire, but Isaac is saying, “Where is the lamb?”

As the Apostle John would say, “Behold the Lamb of God” and “Here is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” This question anticipates the ram and ultimately the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

7.5 *Application/Interpretation*

The Angel of the Lord here as well in other Old Testament texts such as Judges 13 is, I believe, a reference to the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. This would be a theophany or appearance of Christ before the incarnation. It was this same pre-incarnate Jesus that wrestled with Jacob and would not let him go until he blessed him. Because the Angel of the Lord is also divine as is God, I believe we have here an anticipation of what we will be seeing in a full orbbed revelation in the New Testament, that is, that the messenger of the Lord is none other than Jesus Christ.

In this text, the Angel of the Lord is able to give a command and speak as God with divine authority. This is an indication that we are looking at the divinity of the Angel of the Lord, being none other than the one sent by the Lord, that is Jesus Christ. Here is Jesus in an appearance of God (a theophany) prior to the incarnation as the second person of the Trinity.

8.5 *Application/Interpretation*

This again shows that God never intended for Abraham to offer up Isaac. God was only testing his faith in him and the writer of Hebrews said that Abraham believed God to the point that God could even raise his son from the dead in resurrection. This is stated in Hebrews chapter twelve in the great faith chapter.

The context here becomes a type of God the Father who did not spare his son. At this point, however, Isaac is no longer a type of Christ because he was spared from any kind of harm. Isaac now becomes a type of us as believers in Jesus Christ. We have been spared because of Jesus who becomes the Lamb of God to take our place. This text illustrates our salvation like Isaac's who was delivered by the Angel of the Lord. We now have been delivered from death as well by Christ and by his word toward us. This is because of his death which he has accomplished on our behalf by his becoming the Lamb of God. This leads us to the next two verses where we see the ram becoming the sacrifice and the type of Christ that took Isaac's place and takes our place in his death upon the Cross, in Jesus Christ.

9.5 *Application/Interpretation*

This is a beautiful depiction of Jesus Christ who again becomes the lamb of God and who is offered in our stead. Just like this ram was offered instead of Isaac and took Isaac's place, so Jesus Christ becomes a sacrifice that takes our place. He is offered in our stead. It is interesting that the preposition $\tau\eta\tau\eta$ and the preposition $\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota$ in the Greek has the same idea. It looks at substitution in that one takes the place of another.

10.5 *Application/Interpretation*

In this beautiful text, we are told that the name of that mountain is called, "The Lord will be seen". It is significant that on the Cross of Calvary, the Lord was seen on that mountain in which Jesus Christ the Son of God who was God incarnate, the second person of the Holy Trinity, offered himself as the Lamb of God for us.

"And the Angel of the Lord then said to Abraham a second time from heaven, "Because by myself I have sworn says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and you have not withheld your son, your only son". The Lord promised to bless Abraham. His seed would be as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore. The Lord goes on to say that in Abraham's seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed because Abraham had hearkened to his voice.

It is significant that the Angel of the Lord who speaks to Abraham is none other than Jesus Christ in his pre-incarnate appearance or theophany of God in this second person of the Trinity. He is making an announcement that in Abraham's seed all nations would be blessed.²

² Staats, G. (2010). [A Study of Genesis 22](#) (pp. 3–44). Gary Staats.

Abraham's Willing Sacrifice Of His Only Son Is A Pre-Figure Of Christ

The Bible says that "God tested Abraham." "Tested" means that God was giving Abraham an opportunity to have his faith in Him made visible so that he could realize the strength of his own faith in God. God never intended to have Abraham kill his son. But when Satan "tests" people, he is trying to "trip them up" and get them to give in to sin, like when he tempted Jesus in Matthew 4. But God never does that! "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone" (James 1:13). God wants everyone to be saved, so He would never tempt a person to try to get him to sin. Keep in mind, also, that God already knows how we will react to those moments when we are being tested.

Abraham's faith in God was so strong that he got up early the next morning, made the preparations for the offering, and headed out with his son Isaac and two others to go to the place that God would show him. On the third day of travel, Abraham arrived in the area and told the two young men to stay with the donkey while he and Isaac went further in order to worship God. Being an obedient son, Isaac went right along with his father, carrying the wood for the burnt offering. In fact, when they arrived at the sacrificial site, Abraham built an altar, arranged the wood on the altar, and bound Isaac and laid him on the altar - yet Isaac complied with his father's actions. When he raised his hand to kill his son, the angel of the Lord speaking from heaven, ordered Abraham not to harm his son. The angel noted how Abraham's willingness to offer his son was proof that he respected God and was willing to obey Him.

Abraham's strong faith was seen in these three ways:

(1) he told the young men who traveled with them to remain with the donkey and he and Isaac would "come back," showing that Abraham believed that Isaac would survive the sacrifice; (2) when Isaac asked where the lamb was that would serve as sacrifice, Abraham answered, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering,"

This would suggest that Abraham did not believe God intended for Isaac to be killed, but would provide a lamb; and (3) we learn something about what Abraham was thinking—what was actually going on in his mind - when the Hebrews writer stated Abraham had concluded “that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (11:19).

In other words, knowing that Isaac was the son that God promised through whom a great nation would arise, even if Abraham killed the boy, God would simply raise him from the dead! Wow! That’s incredible trust in God! Indeed, Paul explained that Abraham “did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith...and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Romans 4:20-21).

Isn’t it amazing how God planned for historical events to foreshadow His incredible plan to bring Jesus into the world and offer Him as a substitute Lamb for our sins!? Think about these five: (1) Isaac carried the wood that was to be used for his death, even as Jesus carried His own cross; (2) Abraham saw a ram caught in a nearby thicket by its horns and used this sheep as a substitute sacrifice, even as God used Jesus as a substitute sheep for us—as John announced: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29); (3) Some think that the Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac (Genesis 22:2) was the same Moriah where the Temple was built in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3:1), and where sacrifices under the Law of Moses were carried out. The same location is also linked to Jesus’ death when the Temple curtain was torn from top to bottom at the moment Jesus died (Matthew 27:51); (4) Isaac is said to be Abraham’s “only begotten” son (Hebrews 11:17)—the same word used to describe Jesus (John 3:16); (5) And did you notice that when the Hebrews writer tells us that Abraham believed God could raise Isaac from the dead, that is precisely what He did with the body of Jesus?!

Faith and trust in God can’t get much stronger than Abraham’s faith. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? (James 2:21-22). - *Apologetics Press*

SOME SERIOUS BIBLE STUDENTS BELIEVE GENESIS 22 WAS MORE THAN TESTING BECAUSE OF JUDGES 11:29

Jephthah's Daughter by DAVE MILLER, Ph.D.



ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES

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In Judges 11, Jephthah vowed to God that if he were victorious in battle, he would give to God whoever came through the doors of his house upon his return from battle. The term used in 11:31 is *'olah*, the normal Hebrew word for a burnt offering or sacrifice (used 286 times in the Old Testament). Did Jephthah intend to offer his daughter as a human sacrifice? **Are the ethics of God and the Bible shown to be substandard by this incident?**

In the first place, if, in fact, Jephthah offered a human sacrifice, he did something that was strictly **forbidden by Mosaic law and that is repugnant to God** (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10). It would be a bit bizarre for Jephthah to think that he could elicit God's favor in battle by promising to offer Him a human sacrifice, that is, to do something that was in direct violation of the will of God. Such a proposal would be equivalent to a person requesting God's blessing and assistance by offering to rape women or rob banks. God certainly would not approve of such an offer—though He may go ahead and assist the individual (11:32). **God allows people to make wrong choices, even while He works out His own higher will in the midst of their illicit actions. He can even use such people to achieve a higher good (e.g., Judas).**

When Israel clamored for a king—in direct opposition to God’s will—He nevertheless allowed them to proceed with their intentions, and even lent His assistance in the selection (1 Samuel 8:7,18-19; 10:19; 12:19; Psalm 106; Hosea 13:11; Acts 13:21).

Second, if Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, no indication is given in the text that God actually approved of the action. The Bible records many illicit actions carried out by numerous individuals throughout history, without an accompanying word of condemnation by the inspired writer. We mustn’t assume that silence is evidence of divine approval. Even commendation of Jephthah’s faith in the New Testament does not offer a blanket endorsement to **everything** Jephthah did during his lifetime. It merely commended the faith that he demonstrated when he risked going to war. Similarly, the Bible commends the faith of Samson, and Rahab the harlot, without implying that their behavior was always in harmony with God’s will. Abraham manifested an incredible level of faith on many occasions, and is commended for such (Romans 4:20-21). However, he clearly sinned on more than one occasion (Genesis 16:4; cf. Romans 3:23).

Third, Jephthah’s action may best be understood recognizing that **he was using ‘olah in a figurative sense**. We use the term “sacrifice” in a similar fashion when we say, “I’ll sacrifice a few dollars for that charity.” Jephthah was offering to sacrifice a member of his extended household to permanent, religious service associated with the Tabernacle. The Bible indicates that such non-priestly service was available, particularly to women who chose to so dedicate themselves (Exodus 38:8). Even in the first century, Anna must have been one woman who had dedicated herself to the Lord’s service, since she “did not depart from the temple” (Luke 2:37).

Several contextual indicators support this conclusion. First, the two-month period of mourning that Jephthah granted to his daughter was not for the purpose of grieving over her impending loss of life, but over the fact **she would never be able to marry**. She bewailed her virginity (*bethulim*)—not her death (11:37). Second, **the text goes out of its way to state that Jephthah had no other children**: “[S]he was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter” (11:34). For his daughter to be consigned to perpetual celibacy simply meant the **extinction of Jephthah’s family line** — an extremely serious and tragic matter to an Israelite (Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1ff.). Third, the sacrifice is treated as unfortunate—not for any concern over her death, but because **she wouldn’t become a mother**. After stating that Jephthah “did with her according to his vow which he vowed,” the inspired writer follows with, “and knew no man” (11:39). This statement would be completely superfluous & a callous remark if she had been put to death. Fourth, the declaration of Jephthah’s own sorrow (11:35) follows immediately after we are informed that he had no other children (11:34).

Jephthah was not upset because his daughter would **die** a virgin. He was upset because she would **live and remain** a virgin.

Jephthah's Daughter, the Levites, and Symbolic Sacrifices



ERIC LYONS, M.Min.



DIFFICULT PASSAGES

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If Jephthah actually burned his daughter in sacrifice to the Lord, he did so without God ever having approved his actions. Judges 11:29 indicates that “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah” prior to his journey through Gilead, Manasseh, and Mizpah. Having “the Spirit of the Lord,” however, does not mean a person could never sin and do foolish things (e.g., Samson). This phrase is found seven times in Judges. It can indicate God’s consecration of a judge, such as in Othniel’s case, when “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel” (Judges 3:10). At other times, it refers more to the courage and superhuman strength that the Lord provided them, such as in the case of Samson (Judges 14:6; 14:19; 15:14). Jephthah was a courageous leader, but he wasn’t without sin (Judges 11:3; Romans 3:23).

A much better explanation to the Jephthah question centers around the fact that sometimes a “sacrifice” is offered in a **figurative sense**.

Interestingly, Numbers 8 indicates that the consecration of the Levites was a type of offering—a symbolic wave offering. After God instructed the Israelites to “lay their hands on the Levites” (as they were “offering” them as a sacrifice to the Lord; cf. Leviticus 4:13-15), He said:

Aaron shall **offer** the Levites before the Lord **as a wave offering from the people of Israel**, that they may do the service of the Lord. Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, and you shall offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the Lord to make atonement for the Levites. And you shall set the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and shall **offer them as a wave offering to the Lord**.

Thus, you shall separate the Levites from among the people of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine. And after that the Levites shall go in to serve at the tent meeting, when you have cleansed them and **offered them as a wave offering**. For they are wholly given to me from among the people of Israel.

Instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them for myself. For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, and I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel (Number 8:10-18).³

Like the Levites, who were symbolically offered before the Lord, it is very likely that Jephthah similarly “sacrificed” his daughter. She could have been “sacrificed” as a “burnt offering” at the tabernacle **in the sense** that she became one of the “serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle” (Exodus 38:8; cf. 1 Samuel 2:22). Perhaps like Anna centuries later, Jephthah’s daughter was “offered” to serve God “with fastings and prayers night and day,” never again to leave the area of the tabernacle (cf. Luke 2:36-38). Such a figurative offering makes perfect sense in light of the fact that Jephthah’s daughter and her friends **never lamented her death**. They mourned—just not her death. What was their sorrow? They “bewailed her **virginity**” (Judges 11:38). In fact, three times her virginity is mentioned (11:37-39), the last of which is noted immediately following the revelation that Jephthah “carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. **She knew no man**” (11:39).

If Jephthah sinfully killed his daughter as a literal burnt offering, the repeated bewailing of her virginity makes no sense. On the other hand, if Jephthah’s daughter was about to be “offered” to God to serve perpetually at His tabernacle, and also to live the rest of her life as single, a childless servant of the Lord, it makes perfect sense that she and her friends would lament her lasting virginity. When we allow the Bible to explain the Bible, the **symbolic offering** of Jephthah’s daughter makes perfect sense.

God, Abraham, and Child Sacrifice



DAVE MILLER, Ph.D.



AMERICA'S CULTURE WAR/EXISTENCE OF GOD

NATURE OF GOD MORALITY OF GOD

The usual ploy of atheists in their efforts to discredit the inspiration and integrity of the Bible is to attempt to pit one passage against another, claiming they have pinpointed a discrepancy. Typical of these attempts is the refusal to evaluate the textual data objectively and fairly.

In his debate with Apologetics Press staff writer Kyle Butt on the campus of the University of South Carolina, atheist Dan Barker insisted that God endorsed human sacrifice by His alleged morally irresponsible act of ordering Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

The passage in question is found in Genesis 22. The stated purpose of the incident pertains to God's desire to "test" Abraham (Genesis 22:1), i.e., enable Abraham to recognize and demonstrate the level of his own faith in God. God's instruction to Abraham is found in these words: "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2).

A series of events then transpire over a period of three days—giving Abraham sufficient time to assess in his own mind the depth of his faith and commitment to God.

James spotlights this very feature:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that **faith was working together with his works**, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only (2:21-24, emp. added).

Observe that James wrote as if Abraham actually completed God's directive ("offered"), which shows that the objective was to test Abraham's willingness to obey—without actually completing the deed.

The Bible clearly affirms that God would never require an immoral act—including child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2). In the book of Kings, God condemned the Israelites for mimicking the abominable practice of the Amorites who offered their children as sacrifices to their pagan gods. He vehemently insisted: "I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination."

It did not enter God's mind to actually have Abraham kill his son. Here, then, is the salient question: is it morally wrong for God to test a person's faith and commitment by ordering him to perform an act, while not actually intending to require (or allow) the person to do so?

The Bible is its own best interpreter, one can ascertain whether the Bible actually contradicts itself and whether God is morally irresponsible. The inspired writer of the book of Hebrews solves the dilemma posed by Dan Barker.

Read his assessment of Abraham's action regarding his son:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," **concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead**, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Hebrews 11:17-19, emp. added).

Observe that in Abraham's mind, Isaac was as good as dead, i.e., he fully intended to sacrifice his son as directed. However, one cannot successfully maintain that Abraham was guilty of agreeing to commit an immoral act—since **he fully believed that the death of his son would be immediately reversed**.

The strength of this conviction (which is the central feature of Abraham's great faith) is further seen in the fact that he informed the servants: "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and **we will come back** to you" (Hebrew plural, nasucach, Genesis 22:5, emp. added). **Abraham fully recognized that the moral nature of deity would not sanction child sacrifice.**

God's prior declaration, that Isaac would be the one through whom He would work to fulfill His promises to Abraham, was sufficient proof God would circumvent his action by raising Isaac from the dead.

After a careful evaluation of the textual data, we are forced to conclude that, though God had instructed Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice, the purpose of the command was merely to enable Abraham to manifest the strength of his faith and trust in God, and that it did not enter God's mind actually to have Abraham kill his son. Isaac was, in fact, a foreshadowing of the coming Christ. Incredibly, the perfect nature of God required that He sacrifice **Himself** in the person of His Son in our behalf: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all...demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 8:32; 5:8).

MY FILM RECOMMENDATION

Although I am NOT a fan of the “Chosen” Series and this is a spinoff of that series – “His Only Son” has two aspects that positively set it apart. (1) By way of it’s John 3:16 title – it looks forward *micro-cosmic* to Christ’s free-will life sacrifice (2) By way of a wave of flashbacks - it looks back to the flow of events arbitrarily interrupted by the translators ill-advised choice of chapter division.

Genesis 22 Verse 1 indicates events that follow are to be understood within a wider context of those that preceded.

Through the strategic insertion of flashbacks over the long three-day journey – Abraham’s continued revisit of those doubtful mistakes or distrustful errors - of great consequence - the viewer can comprehend that God had been strength training Abraham’s faith well before this extreme testing. God has been preparing Abraham his entire life for the ultimate challenge of chapter 22. – D. L. B.

