

# Abraham and Isaac.

## INTRODUCTION

I suspect that, if ever we have reason to link together the names of Abraham and Isaac, our minds go directly to Genesis 22.<sup>1</sup> And well they might, for in all likelihood that passage records the most significant incident in either of their lives; certainly it records the most meaningful (and the most moving) incident in the long life of Abraham.<sup>2</sup>

In this study, we will concentrate on that which happened on 'one of the mountains' in 'the land of Moriah', and, to that end, our scripture reading comes from Genesis 22, commencing at verse 1:

And it came to pass after these things that God tested<sup>3</sup> Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am'.<sup>4</sup>

And He said, 'Take now your son, your only<sup>5</sup> 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 shall tell you'.<sup>6</sup>

And Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he clave the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.<sup>7</sup>

On the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.<sup>8</sup> And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come back to you'.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and the knife,<sup>9</sup> and the two of them went together.

And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son'. And he said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide Himself<sup>10</sup> the lamb for a burnt offering'. So the two of them went together.

And they came to the place of which God had told him.<sup>11</sup> And Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid<sup>12</sup> him on the altar upon the wood.

And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

And the angel of the Lord<sup>13</sup> called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am'. And He said, 'Stretch not out your hand against the lad, neither do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God,<sup>14</sup> seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me'.

And Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

And Abraham called the name of the place, Jehovah-jireh (literally, 'the Lord will see {to it}<sup>15</sup>); as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be seen (or 'shall be provided')'.<sup>16</sup>

And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said: 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, that, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you,<sup>17</sup> and I will surely multiply your seed (your offspring) as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is on the seashore;<sup>18</sup> and your seed (your offspring) shall possess the gate of their enemies, and in your seed (your offspring)<sup>19</sup> shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice'.<sup>20</sup>

## Isaac is born

If we are properly to appreciate what took place in Genesis 22, it is necessary that we first run the story back over several decades. Because, although we do not read of Isaac by name until chapter 17,<sup>21</sup> he (together with his descendants) was in view right from the very beginning of God's dealings with Abraham. For, when 'the God of glory' had appeared to Abram at the very first, when Abram came from an idolatrous background<sup>22</sup> in Ur of the

Chaldees. The God of glory had not only called him out, but had promised to make of him 'a great nation',<sup>23</sup> implying, of course, that Abram was to father one child at the very least.

And, consistent with this, when (at the age of seventy-five<sup>24</sup>) Abram reached Shechem in the land of Canaan, the Lord appeared to Him again, and promised that He would give the land of Canaan to Abram's 'seed' (to his 'offspring').<sup>25</sup>

And then, sometime after, following the strife between Abram's herdsmen and those of Lot, the Lord undertook to make that 'seed' of Abram as plentiful (hyperbolically speaking) as 'the dust of the earth',<sup>26</sup> and sometime later again, when revealing to Abram that at some point he was to father a son of his own, He added that his seed would become as numerous (again hyperbolically speaking) as 'the stars'.<sup>27</sup>

But it was not until Abram was ninety-nine years old<sup>28</sup> that the Lord appeared to him, and told him, not only that his own *name* was to be changed from Abram to Abraham, and that his wife's *name* was to be changed from Sarai to Sarah, but that the following year his wife would bear a son to him, and that he was then to *name* that son 'Isaac';<sup>29</sup> Isaac being the second of only seven men who, in scripture, were named by God before their birth, our Lord Himself being the last.<sup>30</sup>

And, sure enough, as recorded in the opening three verses of Genesis 21, 'The Lord visited Sarah as He had said ... and Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him, and Abraham called the name of his son ... whom Sarah bore him, *Isaac*'.

As God Himself expressed it succinctly in Joshua 24, when speaking about Abraham, 'I ... gave him *Isaac*'.<sup>31</sup>

### **Isaac is loved**

And we know that, from the very first, Abraham greatly appreciated God's gift to him. For we read that he 'made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned'.<sup>32</sup> And, what is more, when speaking to Abraham, God Himself referred to Isaac as 'your only son, whom you love'.<sup>33</sup>

### **The supreme test of Abraham's faith**

And now, in the opening words of our chapter, we come face to face with the last recorded trial in Abraham's life, and not only the last but that which was beyond dispute by far the severest test he ever encountered.

Over the past fifty years or so, Abraham has demonstrated the greatness of his faith. His was a faith which had enabled him:

- (i) to exchange his comfortable villa in Ur for the tent of a nomad;<sup>34</sup>
- (ii) to yield up his rights as head of the clan, relinquishing the choice of the best pasture land to his nephew Lot;<sup>35</sup>
- (iii) to refuse point blank to accept any goods or property proffered to him by Bera, the King of Sodom;<sup>36</sup> and
- (iv) to part (albeit painfully and reluctantly) with Ishmael, his biological son who had been born to Hagar, Abraham's concubine.<sup>37</sup>

It has been well pointed out that:

Genesis 22 'brings to a close Abraham's spiritual odyssey that began with God's call at Haran. The curtain rises and falls on the patriarch as he receives a divine word that demands agonizing decisions. The first time God bids him to take leave of his father and to cut himself off from his past; now, in this last theophany that he is to receive, God asks that he sacrifice his beloved, longed-for son and thereby abandon all hope of posterity.

'On both occasions Abraham responds with unquestioning obedience and steadfast loyalty. This correspondence between Haran and Moriah encases the biography of Abraham within a framework of unwavering faith. For added emphasis, the two crucial events are cast in a common literary mould so that chapters 12 and 22 share many connecting links.

'God's first call to Abraham is introduced by the declaration, "Go forth. . . to the land that I will show you"; and His last employs almost identical language, "Go forth. . . to the land of Moriah. . . on one of the heights that I will point out to you". The Hebrew phrase *lekh lekha*, "go forth",

does not occur again in the Bible, a fact that underscores the deliberate and meaningful nature of its use in these two passages.

'In both instances, the precise ultimate destination of the trek is withheld, and in both the tension of the drama is heightened by the cumulative effect of several Hebrew epithets, the last of which is the most potent: "your land, your homeland, your father's house"; "your son, your favoured one, Isaac, whom you love".

'Both episodes culminate in promises of glorious posterity, the second one containing striking verbal echoes of the first.

'One blessing was received at the terebinth of Moreh, the other at the similar sounding Moriah; and at both sites, it is stated, Abraham "built an altar there".

'Finally, just as the account of the initial call is preceded by a genealogy that introduces the main character of the next episode, so the story of the final call from God is followed by a genealogical note having the same function'.<sup>38</sup>

Through the intervening period, Abraham had come a long way, not only geographically but in spiritual development. Over the past half-century his faith had grown enormously.

But now he faced the final and supreme test. For 'after these things' God put His finger on Abraham's most treasured possession ... on the most important thing in his life ... on that which he 'loved' the most ... on *his Isaac!*

## EXPOSITION

### Verses 1 and 2

When we read in verses 5 and 12 of Isaac as a 'lad' or 'boy', we need to know that the word there indicates a male child at *any age from infancy to adolescence*. It is, in fact, the exact same word<sup>39</sup> which is used (in the plural) in verses 3 and 5, where it is translated 'young men' when describing Abraham's two servants who accompanied him and Isaac into the land of Moriah.<sup>40</sup> And I note that Abraham's other biological son, Ishmael, was described, not only as a 'lad',<sup>41</sup> but also as a mere 'child',<sup>42</sup> when he was all of 17 years of age.<sup>43</sup>

And I suspect that the first-century Jewish historian Josephus may not have been far off the mark when he asserted that Isaac was 25 years old at the time when Abraham took him with him to the appointed place of sacrifice.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps the main point to note in verse 2 is that God spoke with *agonising precision*. There was no ambiguity, and, in making everything painfully clear to Abraham, God left His servant absolutely no room to manoeuvre.

#### ***(i) When to obey***

First, God made it clear to Abraham **when he was to obey**. 'Take now'; 'Now, Abraham ... not at some unspecified time in the future ... not when it suits you ... not after some interval sufficient either:

(a) for me to change my mind; for me, that is, to 'repent', as, for instance, I once did that I had made man,<sup>45</sup> or

(b) for you to attempt to talk me out of it, as, for example, you did when I announced my intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, bartering me down then from fifty righteous persons to ten'.<sup>46</sup>

'Now, Abraham ... long after (on my instructions) you sent away Ishmael, your only other son, and that, you will recall, to make room for Isaac'.<sup>47</sup> 'Now, Abraham ... when you must know that there is no prospect whatever of Sarah bearing you another son'.<sup>48</sup> **NOW!**

#### ***(ii) Whom to take***

Second, God made it clear (*very clear!*) to Abraham **whom he was to take**. Following the word order of the Hebrew text, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac'. How each successive word of this identification served to underscore Abraham's special relationship with Isaac, and must have sunk as a knife, deeper and deeper, into the heart of the aged patriarch.

'Your son'; not some heifer, goat, ram or birds, as Abram had slaughtered back in chapter 15.<sup>49</sup> And, so that there could be no doubt, it must be 'your only son' ... so no, it could not be Ishmael (first needing to be brought back from the wilderness of Paran<sup>50</sup>), but 'your one remaining and altogether unique<sup>51</sup> son'.

'And, yes, Abraham, I mean the son "whom you love", the very object and centre of your affection. I know well, Abraham, how reluctant you were to give up Ishmael ... how upset you were at the thought of losing him.<sup>52</sup> And I know too that your feelings for that now absent son were as nothing compared to your feelings for your remaining son. But, yes, I require you to take the son "whom you love".'

And, then, held back to the end as the very climax of identification – 'Isaac'!<sup>53</sup>

'Isaac': the one with whom God had promised Abraham that He would establish His covenant<sup>54</sup> ... the one in and through whom Abraham's seed would be called ... the one through whom, that is, they would continue, so as to be known as his.<sup>55</sup> And now, here, Abraham is directed to take and to slay 'Isaac', before he was even married, let alone had fathered any son of his own to carry on the line.<sup>56</sup>

There certainly could be no misunderstanding about whom God meant Abraham to take. ISAAC!

### **(iii) Where to go**

Thirdly, God made it clear to Abraham **where he was to go**. 'Go to the land of Moriah', God specified, 'and offer him *there* as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you'.

In many ways it is startling that God should stipulate exactly where the offering was to take place. On previous occasions, it had always been Abraham who had chosen the sites for his altars, whether at Shechem,<sup>57</sup> between Bethel and Ai,<sup>58</sup> or at Hebron.<sup>59</sup> On each of those occasions we are explicitly told that '*there* he built an altar to the Lord'. But on this occasion it is God who pinpoints exactly where Abraham was, in effect, to build his altar.<sup>60</sup> Now it is God who decides where the 'there' is to be.

It is to be on 'one of the mountains' in 'the land of Moriah'. The appointed location would require Abraham to undertake a round journey of some 90 miles<sup>61</sup> through fairly rough and inhospitable terrain, a journey which would actually take him past the altar he had built at Hebron many years before.

The fact that God was so insistent about the precise location for Abraham's planned offering of Isaac (involving Abraham in a long journey which would take him over two days in each direction), raises, of course, the obvious question, 'What was so important about "the place of which God had told" Abraham'<sup>62</sup>? What, that is, was so important about 'one of the mountains' in 'the land of Moriah'?

We begin by noting that the name which Abraham later gave to the 'place' of his altar is directly linked with the saying, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be seen (or 'shall be provided')'.<sup>63</sup> To me, the fact that this future popular saying is based on this episode in Genesis 22 establishes beyond doubt that the mountain in 'the land of Moriah' on which Abraham bound Isaac was actually the same mountain which was subsequently named 'the mount of the Lord'. And we know from several Old Testament references that 'the mount of the Lord' was none other than the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.<sup>64</sup>

I note that, in confirmation of this, it is of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem that the author of 2 Chronicles records that 'Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in *mount Moriah*, where the Lord appeared to David his father'; namely, in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite.<sup>65</sup> It was concerning this site that David had previously declared, 'This is the house of the Lord God; and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel'.<sup>66</sup>

Now we know *why* the Lord was so insistent that Abraham was to undertake his arduous journey. For the very site of Abraham's altar served not only (a) to foreshadow the many thousands of animal victims to be offered there from the days of David onwards, but (b) to point forward no less than two millennia to that once-for-all sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, who suffered and died in that very vicinity.

### **(iv) What to do**

But God not only made it clear to Abraham (i) when he was to obey, (ii) whom he was to take, and (iii) where he was to go. For fourthly (and finally), He was equally precise in spelling out to Abraham **what He was to do**.

And we note that, according to God's own words, Abraham was required, (a) not only to lead his unsuspecting son to the place of his death, and (b) not only himself to slay him there, but (c) then to 'offer him ... as a burnt offering'.<sup>67</sup> Abraham was, that is, to reduce Isaac's body to ashes ... which ashes would likely as not soon be scattered abroad by the mountain breeze!

There is some evidence that ritual child sacrifice was practised in Mesopotamia when Abraham lived there.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, no less than three passages attest that Abraham later dwelt among the Canaanites,<sup>69</sup> and we know from scripture that, at least in later days, it was common practice for the inhabitants of Canaan to burn their children (both boys and girls) as sacrifices to their various deities.<sup>70</sup>

It is possible that, as Abraham viewed it, the One he had come to know (a) as the God of glory,<sup>71</sup> (b) as the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth,<sup>72</sup> (c) as God almighty,<sup>73</sup> and (d) as the everlasting God<sup>74</sup> was now demanding the same of him. If so, Abraham faced the challenge whether he would be willing to match the devotion of the heathen nations around him.

I said above that in verse 2 God had left His servant with no room to manoeuvre.

Abraham was well and truly fenced in. The Lord had covered every angle. He had covered every detail. Or had He?

#### **(v) Why required**

Certainly God had answered clearly (if anything *too* clearly for Abraham's comfort) the questions 'when?', 'whom?', 'where?' and 'what?'. But we can hardly miss that the Lord had made no attempt to answer what was perhaps the most obvious question ... 'why?' ... why did God require this of him?

Abraham had no way of knowing. For although, sometime before, God had deigned to give Abraham a brief explanation of why he needed to relinquish Ishmael,<sup>75</sup> He now offers His 'friend'<sup>76</sup> not so much as one word of explanation when He calls on him to relinquish his specially-loved Isaac, and, indeed, to relinquish him most violently.

#### **(a) A severe test**

Oh, we know the explanation of course, because we have the benefit both (i) of the beginning and (ii) of the end of the episode. For (i) we knew from the very outset, when the Lord, as it were, pulled back the curtain on the incident, that His real concern lay with putting Abraham to the test, and **not** with putting Isaac to the knife.<sup>77</sup>

#### **(b) A divine oath**

And (ii) in the closing section, we see the sequel and happy outcome; namely, that, 'because'<sup>78</sup> Abraham had passed this (the extreme test) with flying colours, God renewed (and indeed extended<sup>79</sup>) His earlier promises to Abraham,<sup>80</sup> but with this one all-important change that God now reinforced His promise<sup>81</sup> with a solemn 'oath'<sup>82</sup>, thereby 'confirming' (indeed, 'guaranteeing') that His promise<sup>83</sup> to Abraham would never (indeed, *could* never) be changed.<sup>84</sup>

This was, of course, a huge step for God to take. And, clearly, *before* God was willing to commit Himself *this* far, He had required to see the ultimate demonstration of Abraham's faith in action.<sup>85</sup>

Yes, we (the readers) know that God's desire to see Abraham's faith exhibited in his total and unqualified obedience had been the reason for Abraham's most severe trial. But of this, of course, the patriarch knew nothing at the time.<sup>86</sup>

#### **(c) An unquestioning trust**

Scripture records clearly that, at earlier stages in his spiritual pilgrimage, Abraham had proved that he was both able and willing to trust God when, we are told, he didn't know where,<sup>87</sup> and that he had proved that he was able and willing to trust God when he didn't know how<sup>88</sup> ... his

ignorance as to 'how' being evident from the device which he and Sarai adopted later to help God, as they saw it, to fulfil His promise.<sup>89</sup>

But the question now was whether he was able and willing to trust God, not when he didn't know where, or when he didn't know how, but when he didn't know why.

We know that, when in the past God had said something which had troubled or perplexed him, Abraham had not hesitated to pose appropriate (and very direct) questions to the Lord about that which God had said.

For example, when, following Abram's refusal to accept so much as 'a thread or sandal strap' from the King of Sodom, the Lord had revealed himself to Abram as his 'shield' and 'exceeding great reward', he (Abram) had immediately fired at Him the question, 'O Lord God, *what will you give me*, since I continue childless, and the heir of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?'<sup>90</sup>

And when the Lord then assured Abram that one day he would father a son to be his heir, and that, one day, He (the Lord) would give the land of Canaan to Abram and his descendants, Abram had fired at Him a second question, 'O Lord God, how shall I know that I shall possess it?'<sup>91</sup>

And on another occasion, when the Lord alerted Abraham to the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham had immediately come back on Him with the questions, 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ... shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'<sup>92</sup>

Oh, no, Abraham was not averse to asking God questions.

Yet now (when I would have let fly with a veritable barrage of questions) this great man, who had been so daringly articulate when pleading on behalf of Sodom,<sup>93</sup> said nothing! Silently, and with breath-taking faith, he meekly submitted to the revealed will of the God whom he had known and loved for half a century.

### **Verse 3**

And verse 3 stresses for us just how complete and comprehensive Abraham's submission proved.<sup>94</sup>

#### ***(i) When to obey***

God had said, 'now'; and so, we read, Abraham 'rose early in the morning'.

We know that prompt (even instant) obedience was one of Abraham's many praiseworthy characteristics,<sup>95</sup> and, in spite of the heart-wrenching circumstances, this occasion proved no exception.

Abraham could well have claimed for himself the words of David a full millennium later, 'I made haste, and did not delay to keep your commandments'.<sup>96</sup>

But we must note that Abraham's obedience was not only swift and unhesitating, it was unwavering. This was no 'flash in the pan' affair. For the long trek on which he set out that morning would afford him plenty of time for sober reflection. Yet at no point did his original resolve weaken.

#### ***(ii) Whom to take***

God had said, 'take ... your son ... Isaac', and so, we read, 'Abraham ... took ... Isaac his son'. And how, I wonder, must Abraham have felt about the repeated reminder<sup>97</sup> of that very relationship as he and Isaac made their way alone together<sup>98</sup> to the place of intended sacrifice?

#### ***(iii) Where to go***

God had said, not only 'go to the land of Moriah', but had specified Abraham's precise destination as 'one of the mountains of which I shall tell you', and so we read: (a) that Abraham 'arose and went to the place of which God had told him', (b) that 'on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off',<sup>99</sup> and, finally, (c) that 'they came to the place of which God had told him'.<sup>100</sup>

#### **(iv) What to do**

God had required that Abraham should *'offer' Isaac 'as a burnt offering'*, and so we read that Abraham first 'clave the wood for the burnt offering' before setting out on his journey. And Abraham did this, even though it meant that the wood would then have to be carried (whether by ass or by Isaac) for several days to the appointed place in 'the land of Moriah'.

We know that, in the event, Abraham would have found no shortage of fuel on Mount Moriah, a fact confirmed by the presence of the thicket in which the hapless ram's horns were caught.<sup>101</sup> But, when God spoke to him, Abraham was not to know that. Indeed, his precise destination was then unknown to him. And he was taking no chances.

Clearly, this remarkable man wasn't hoping to avoid sacrificing his much loved son on the ground that there didn't happen to be sufficient wood available when he finally reached the site to which God directed him. Abraham *wasn't looking for a way out*. He wasn't looking for any backdoor!

Oh yes, Abraham's submission to God's revealed will was complete and comprehensive alright.

And the impression I get from one repeated expression is that, throughout the entire episode, his soul remained calm and altogether at peace. I refer to the words *'Here I am'*, spoken in response (a) to *God's opening call* in verse 1, (b) to *Isaac's gentle summons* in verse 7, and (c) to *the angel of the Lord's timely intervention* in verse 11. And at no point do I detect even the faintest tremor in Abraham's voice.

And the writer to the Hebrews put his finger on the secret of Abraham's calm, willing and unqualified surrender of that which, to him, was his dearest and best possession. It was, the writer assures us, 'by *faith*' that 'Abraham, when he was tried ('tested'), offered up Isaac'... meaning, of course, that Abraham offered him up in *intention*, and not in *reality*.<sup>102</sup>

#### **Verses 10 to 12**

'Not in reality', I say, because, in the event, at the very last moment, when Abraham's outstretched hand clasped the knife, ready 'to slay his (now bound) son, the angel of the Lord' (whose words clearly identify Him with God Himself) intervened, suddenly addressing 'him from heaven' with the first of seven 'double name' addresses spoken by the Lord in scripture,<sup>103</sup> thereby stressing both the urgency and the importance of what He was about to say.

How different the scene here then to that many centuries later, not on Mount Moriah, but on 'Mount Carmel',<sup>104</sup> when another of God's servants stood by his altar, with his planned sacrificial victim laid on the wood which had been 'placed in order' there.<sup>105</sup> For on that occasion there came, *not a voice from heaven to save the 'burnt offering'*,<sup>106</sup> but *fire from heaven to consume the burnt offering*.<sup>107</sup>

However, here and now we find Isaac spared, not only from *God's fire* from above, but from *Abraham's fire* from below.

#### **Hebrews 11. 8- 9, 17-19**

And yet, although Abraham was therefore delivered from actually slaying Isaac, there can be no question that he was ready to have done just that.<sup>108</sup> Clearly, in God's reckoning, the will was accepted for the deed; in God's reckoning, Isaac was as good as offered up in sacrifice to Him.

And so the writer to the Hebrews is able to summarise Abraham's life of faith neatly in three simple statements: 'By faith' he *'went out'*,<sup>109</sup> 'by faith' he *'sojourned in'*;<sup>110</sup> and 'by faith' he *'offered up'*.<sup>111</sup>

'By faith Abraham', he writes, 'when he was tested, offered up Isaac'. And yet, as the writer strongly hints, humanly speaking this was the height of folly, for the man who would have offered up his son was the self-same man 'who had received the promises', and who had, most notably, received God's explicit promise that 'in Isaac shall your seed be called'.<sup>112</sup>

#### **Faith in the God of resurrection**

In what then did Abraham's faith rest? Let the inspired writer tell us in his own words. When Abraham took the knife to slay his son, the writer says that he did so 'accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead'.<sup>113</sup>

And such faith was the more remarkable for at least two reasons.

(i) First, because there was no precedent for Abraham's faith to plead. Scripture records no past case of resurrection. In the genealogy recorded back in chapter 5, for example, (a genealogy spanning at least some 1,600 years<sup>114</sup>) we read over and over again the gloomy comment 'and he died'.<sup>115</sup> And in every one of those cases death was final.<sup>116</sup>

(ii) And the second reason that Abraham's faith was remarkable was that it stretched to God being able, not only to raise to life a young man who had been stabbed to death, but to raise to life a young man whose body had then been reduced to ashes.

But, in spite of the lack of precedent, and (humanly speaking), the enormity of the undertaking (!), Abraham firmly believed (he 'accounted'<sup>117</sup>) that God was able to raise his son back from death to life again.

But then, in one sense, Abraham had been there before!

Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote in the context of God having promised a seed to Abraham: 'Abraham', we read, 'believed in the God ... who gives life to the dead ... He considered<sup>118</sup> his own body now as good as dead ... and the deadness of Sarah's womb ... but he was empowered by faith ... being fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised'.<sup>119</sup>

And the man who had once experienced resurrection power in his own body, and had known God to raise Isaac from the dead womb of Sarah, was fully assured that God was able to raise that same Isaac from the altar site of Moriah. And so, if Sarah had once reckoned God 'faithful' to His promise, and had therefore been given the strength to give birth to Isaac,<sup>120</sup> Abraham now reckoned God 'able' to raise Isaac from the dead to fulfil that promise and was therefore prepared to offer him up in sacrifice.<sup>121</sup>

But note that word 'able'. For, although Abraham had no doubt that the One he knew as 'the almighty God',<sup>122</sup> to whom nothing was 'too hard'<sup>123</sup> could raise up Isaac from ashes if He so willed, he was not committed to believing that He would do so.

Frankly, Abraham didn't know what God would do. He knew only that it wasn't merely the life of his son which was at stake, nor just the existence of an entire nation,<sup>124</sup> nor even the blessing of all the nations of the world,<sup>125</sup> but that, given God's repeated promises to him,<sup>126</sup> it was God's own veracity and reputation which were at stake. And that was enough for Abraham!

As far as he was concerned, how to reconcile God's promises to him (to be fulfilled through Isaac<sup>127</sup> and his seed<sup>128</sup>) with God's command to him was God's problem, and not his.

### **Abraham's two young men**

At this point, Abraham knew only one thing. As he assured the two young men who accompanied him and Isaac to within sight of Moriah,<sup>129</sup> he was as certain that he and his son would walk down from the mountain together as he was that they would walk up it. His trust in God and His word was that complete.

And Abraham's words to the young men remind me of two very different extracts which I have read. The first is practical, and comes from one of George Whitefield's many sermons:

'He [Abraham] said to his young men – *as we should say to our worldly thoughts, when about to tread the courts of the Lord's house* – "Abide you here ... and I ... will go up yonder and worship, and come again to you".<sup>130</sup>

Good point, Mr Whitefield.

The second extract comes from an old American newspaper. At the beginning of December 1897, Indiana's Saturday Evening Mail carried an article which ran ...

A clergyman in the West Country had two curates, one a comparatively old man, the other very young. With the former he had not been able to work agreeably, and on being invited to



another living he accepted it and took the young curate with him. Naturally there was a farewell sermon, and we can imagine the feelings of the curate who was to be left behind when he heard *the text given out, "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship"*.<sup>131</sup>

I don't know whether the story was true, or just apocryphal. But if it was true, that biblical text must have provided the springboard for a very interesting sermon!

## **Romans 8. 32**

No doubt most of you have heard many times the (very true) statement, that *the God who spared Abraham's son, did not spare His own Son* ... who some 2,000 years later died in the very same vicinity as Isaac was spared. But it isn't possible for us to pursue that now,<sup>132</sup> any more than it is for us to consider Abraham's cryptic reply to Isaac that 'God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering'.

But let me just drop in a second short quote from George Whitefield:

'A ram is offered up in Isaac's room, but *Jesus has no substitute*; Jesus must bleed, Jesus must die.'<sup>133</sup>

## **Abraham on the altar**

But, returning to the historical account of that which took place between Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, the reader is greatly relieved to find that, as it turned out, Abraham was not required to slay Isaac.

And this because, all along, *God had wanted, not the death of Isaac, but the devotion of Abraham*.

All along, what mattered to the Lord was:

(i) **not** having *Isaac* on the altar, **but** having *Abraham* on the altar.

(ii) **not** the *sacrifice of a human life*, **but** the *surrender of a human will*.

And all of this the Lord most certainly had from Abraham.<sup>134</sup>

Abraham had passed his supreme and severest test with flying colours.

As far as the record goes, this was the last time that God communicated directly with Abraham. Certainly, there was nothing more that God could ask of him.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Frankly, I feel altogether unworthy to write or speak of the patriarch Abraham's unhesitating, unquestioning and unwavering obedience and his total consecration.

The year before the American newspaper article about the 'clergyman in the West Country' appeared, a hymn book was published in America which included a hymn written by one of the editors, Judson Van De Venter.

As a young man, Judson had struggled for some time between developing his talents in the field of art and going into full-time evangelistic work. 'At last', he wrote, 'the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. I became an evangelist - and I discovered down deep in my soul a talent hitherto unknown to me'.<sup>135</sup> The 'talent' to which Judson referred was the ability to write and to sing sacred songs.

The hymn book mentioned above included Judson's hymn:<sup>136</sup>

All to Jesus, I surrender;  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and serve Him,  
In His presence daily live.

All to Jesus, I surrender;  
Humbly at His feet I bow,  
Worldly pleasures all forsaken;

Take me, Jesus, take me now.

I surrender all, I surrender all,  
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour,  
I surrender all.

Clearly, Abraham and Judson Van De Venter have much to teach us about wholehearted consecration.<sup>137</sup>

**May God help each of us to get a little nearer to it.**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 22. 1-19 is known within Judaism as the 'Akedah' (the 'binding of Isaac'). The narrative is the traditional reading from the Torah for the second day of the Jewish New Year ('Rosh Hashanah' {ראש השנה, literally meaning "head [of] the year}).

<sup>2</sup> Abraham lived to the 'good old age' of 175 years, Gen. 25. 7.

<sup>3</sup> 'The term נָסָה ('tested') is employed, in addition to the usage in Genesis 22, eight other times in a context where Elohim/Yahweh is said to be the "tester." In six (Exod. 15. 22–26; 16. 4; 20. 18–20; Deut. 8. 2, 16; Judg. 2. 21–22; 3. 1–4 ) of these cases, Israel was the object of His testing; in 2 Chron. 32. 31 Hezekiah, king of Judah, was the one tested; in Psa. 26. 2 David appealed to Yahweh to test him', John I. Lawlor, *The Test of Abraham: Genesis 22. 1-19*, Grace Theological Journal 1.1 (1980), page 28.

<sup>4</sup> 'Here I am', vv. 1, 11, is the only thing Abraham says to God in the entire episode.

<sup>5</sup> Since Isaac was not Abraham's only son (in that he had fathered Ishmael by Hagar earlier), the Hebrew term for 'only' stresses value not number.

<sup>6</sup> It may well be that Abraham received God's call in a *night* dream or vision; cf. v. 3 and Gen. 15. 1

<sup>7</sup> Abraham ‘although attached to his child by an indescribable fondness, neither changed colour, nor wavered in his soul, but remained firm in an unyielding and unalterable purpose, as he was at first. And being wholly influenced by love towards God, he forcibly repressed all the names and charms of the natural relationship: and without mentioning the oracular command to any one of his household out of all his numerous body of servants, he took with him the two eldest, who were most thoroughly attached to their master, as if he were bent upon the celebration of some ordinary divine rite, and went forth with his son, making four in all ... and when his son saw everything else prepared for the celebration of the sacrifice, but no animal, he looked to his father and said, “My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the victim for the burnt sacrifice?” ... but Abraham, betraying no alteration of voice, or countenance, or intention, looking at his son with steady eye, answered his question with a determination more steadily still ... And so Isaac is saved, God supplying a gift instead of him, and honouring him who was willing to make the offering in return for the piety which he had exhibited. But the action of the father, even though it was not ultimately given effect to, is nevertheless recorded and engraved as a complete and perfect sacrifice’, *The works of Philo, Book 22: On Abraham*, chapters XXXII and XXXIII (Yonge’s translation); available at ... <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book22.html>.

<sup>8</sup> ‘If one walks (NE) from Beer-sheba to Jerusalem, he is able, after a journey of two days, to see on the morning of the third day the mountains of Jerusalem from afar’, Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, page 76. From Beersheba to the region of Moriah is about 45 miles (72 kilometres), a journey that would have taken several days. It is likely that, in general, people walked 20 miles in a day.

<sup>9</sup> The use of the same (rare) Hebrew term *ma’akhelet* in Judges 19. 29 in connection with the dissection of a human body and in Proverbs 30. 14 in parallelism with “sword” suggests that a large and heavy implement is intended, not an ordinary knife.

<sup>10</sup> Literally, ‘see for Himself’.

<sup>11</sup> By this time, apparently, he had been told the exact location.

<sup>12</sup> The Greek Old Testament uses the same word (*επεθηκεν*) for ‘laid’ both in connection with the wood and with Isaac; the Hebrew doesn’t.

<sup>13</sup> The Angel, speaking in the first person, identifies Himself with Jehovah; cf. Gen. 16. 10, 21. 18, 31. 13.

<sup>14</sup> ‘To hold God in awe’.

<sup>15</sup> Meaning ‘the Lord will see to it’, and so, He ‘will provide’.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Although the etymology of the word (Moriah) is in doubt, it is not the original etymology of the designation that is of primary importance ... it is the ideas attached to the appellation that concern us most. Now Scripture linked it, in accordance with the technique utilized in the exposition of names, to the stem ראה [‘saw’], which occurs a number of times in the section in succession. In verse 4 it is stated: ‘Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw [וַיִּרְאֵ] the place afar off’; in verse 8: ‘And Abraham said, God will provide [יִרְאַה] literally: ‘see’] Himself the lamb’; in verse 13: ‘And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked [וַיִּרְאֵ], and behold a ram’; in verse 14: ‘And Abraham called the name of that place The Lord will provide [יִרְאַה]’ ... Of particular importance in these repetitions is verse 14, which connects the name by which Abraham called the place with the saying that was apparently widely current among the Israelites when the section was written: בַּהַר ה’ יִרְאַה [‘On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided’]. This nexus can be understood only if we posit that the mountain on which Abraham bound his son Isaac—that is, one of the mountains of the land of Moriah—was actually the mountain that was subsequently named ‘the Mount of the Lord’, Umberto Cassuto, *ibid.*, pages 75-76.

<sup>17</sup> The ‘I will bless you’ (וְאַבְרָהָם) of Gen. 12. 2 now becomes ‘I will surely (or ‘greatly’) bless you’ (בְּרַךְ אֶבְרָהָם).

<sup>18</sup> The comparison with the number of the stars and to the sand is clearly not meant to be understood literally. The expressions are intended to convey that Abraham’s descendants would be countless/innumerable.

<sup>19</sup> The Hebrew word for 'seed' or 'offspring' is a collective singular that can refer either to one descendant or many descendants. An English collective singular, for example, is 'sheep', which can refer to one sheep or many sheep. Both 'seed' and 'offspring' are also collective singulars in English. At times the term 'seed' refers to a large number of descendants; at other times it refers to one unique and special descendant, the Messiah. Paul explained that the seed God had in mind in Gen. 22. 18 was the Lord Jesus, Gal. 3. 16. This verse has excited much criticism. Even Luther says: 'My dear brother Paul, this argument won't stick'.

But see especially: C. John Collins, '*Galatians 3. 16: What kind of exegete was Paul*', Tyndale Bulletin 54.1 (2003), pages 75-86, and T. D. Alexander, '*Further Observations on the Term "Seed" in Genesis*', Tyndale Bulletin 48. 2 (1997), pages 363-67. Also, 'He is not laying stress on the particular word used, but on the fact that a singular noun of some kind, a collective term, is employed ... Avoiding the technical terms of grammar, he could not express his meaning more simply than by the opposition, "not to thy seeds, but to thy seed". A plural substantive would be inconsistent with the interpretation given; the singular collective noun, if it admits of plurality (as it is interpreted by St Paul himself, Rom. 4. 18; 9. 7), at the same time involves the idea of unity', J. B. Lightfoot, '*Galatians*', on Gal. 3. 16, page 142.

<sup>20</sup> Gen. 22. 1-18. There is no explicit statement that Isaac returned with his father (although he clearly did, v. 5). That the text is silent on the point directs the reader's attention toward Abraham rather than Isaac.

<sup>21</sup> Gen. 17. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Josh. 24. 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> Gen. 12. 1-2 with Acts 7. 2-3; cf. Gen. 17. 4-6, 16; 18. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Gen. 12. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Gen. 12. 5-7.

<sup>26</sup> Gen. 13. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Gen. 15. 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> Some 24 years after he had first entered Canaan, Gen. 12. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Gen. 17. 1, 5, 15-16, 19, 21.

- <sup>30</sup> (i) Genesis 16. 11 ... You bear a son, and shall call his name *Ishmael*.  
(ii) Genesis 17. 19 ... Your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name *Isaac*.  
(iii) 1 Chronicles 22. 9 ... A son shall be born to you ... his name shall be *Solomon*.  
(iv) 1 Kings 13. 2 ... A child shall be born to the house of David, *Josiah* by name.  
(v) Isaiah 44. 28 ... I am the Lord ... who says of *Cyrus*, 'He is my shepherd ...'.  
(vi) Luke 1. 13 ... Elisabeth shall bear you a son, and you shalt call his name *John*.  
(vii) Matthew 1. 21 ... She shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name *Jesus*.

<sup>31</sup> Josh. 24. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Gen. 21. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Gen. 22. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Acts 7. 2-4; Hebrews 11. 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> Gen. 13. 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> Gen. 14. 21-24.

<sup>37</sup> Gen. 21. 9-14.

<sup>38</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, page 146.

Compare: 'Both experiences began with a divine emphatic imperative, "go". Both situations involved going to an "undesignated place": "...to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12. 1); "...upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen. 22. 2). In both cases a "sacrifice of family" was required: in the former experience, it was to leave family behind; in the latter, it was an actual sacrifice of his son. This final confrontation by Yahweh was, in a sense, not a completely new experience for the patriarch, although obviously the most trying. Abraham's entire experience with Yahweh, beginning with the initial call and promise, may be viewed as preparing him for this final, supreme test. While the general direction of Abraham's response in both cases was toward obedience, in the first situation there was only partial obedience, while in the last situation there was total obedience ... The great difference between the two events is what constitutes the measure of Abraham's progress in his relationship to God. The first divine communication carried with it the promise of reward. The final one held no such expectation. On the contrary, by its very nature it could mean nothing less than the complete nullification of the covenant and the frustration forever of all hope of posterity', John I. Lawlor, *op.cit.*, pages 32-33.

<sup>39</sup> והנער

<sup>40</sup> This is true of the Hebrew text. In the Greek Old Testament, Isaac is spoken of as 'παιδαριον', a derivative of 'παισιον' (the word used to describe the two young men).

<sup>41</sup> Gen. 21. 17-19.

<sup>42</sup> Gen. 21. 14-16.

<sup>43</sup> Ishmael had been conceived after Abram had been 10 years in Canaan, Gen. 16. 3, and was born when Abram was 86 years old, Gen. 16. 16. Ishmael was later expelled for mocking Isaac, when Isaac was weaned, Gen. 21. 8-20. At that point, Isaac would have been three years old, and Abraham would therefore have been 103 years old (\*); cf. Gen. 21. 5. That is, *Ishmael was expelled 17 years after he was born.*

(\*) 'A (Jewish) chronologer says it was in the hundred and third year of Abraham [R. Gedaliah, Shalshalet Hakabala, fol. 2. 2.], that is, when Isaac was three years old, which agrees with the Apocrypha: "But she bowing herself toward him, laughing the cruel tyrant to scorn, spake in her country language on this manner; O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee such three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age, and endured the troubles of education", 2 Maccabees 7. 27', *John Gill's Exposition*, Genesis 21. 8.

'This period in ancient Israel extended to about 3 years', *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; article 'weaning'.

<sup>44</sup> Abraham and Isaac 'had brought with them everything necessary for a sacrifice, excepting the animal that was to be offered only. Now *Isaac was twenty-five years old*', Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 1, Chapter 13, Paragraph 2. We know that Isaac was now old enough to carry a load of firewood and was well able to ask an intelligent question based on experience and observation.

<sup>45</sup> Gen. 6. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Gen. 18. 17-32.

<sup>47</sup> Gen. 21. 10-14.

<sup>48</sup> See 'the way of women had ceased to be with Sarah', Gen. 18. 11, and remember that that had been some 25 years before. There was, of course, no way of Abraham knowing about the six sons he would later father through Keturah, Gen. 25. 1-5.

<sup>49</sup> Gen. 15. 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> Gen. 21. 20-21.

<sup>51</sup> יחידך ... a word signifying 'darling', and occurring only 11 or 12 times in the Old Testament, including Judges 11. 34; Prov. 4. 3; Jer. 6. 26; Amos 8. 10; Zech. 12. 10. It signifies 'special and one-of-a-kind'.

<sup>52</sup> Gen. 21. 11-12.

Note:

(a) 'Genesis 22 is organically connected with the preceding chapter. Abraham has lost one son and now seems about to lose the other. In both narratives, the child is saved by divine intervention at the critical moment, the only two biblical instances of an angel calling from heaven to human beings. In both cases there is a fortuitous discovery: a well of water in the earlier story, a ram in the thicket here', Nahum M. Sarna, *ibid.*, page 146.

(b) 'The paradox is seen in the fact that Abraham became quite distressed over Sarah's instructions to cast Hagar and Ishmael out, yet when God instructed him to slay Isaac, the favoured son, there was no evidence of any reluctance whatsoever on the father's part.

A number of interesting contrasts and comparisons can be drawn between the two events - Ishmael in Genesis 21 and Isaac in Genesis 22.

*Contrasts:*

Crisis created as a result of a human directive: Sarah tells Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael (v. 10)

Crisis created as a result of a divine directive: God tells Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering (v. 2)

Abraham shows real reluctance to follow through (v. 11)

Abraham shows no real reluctance to follow through (vv. 3ff)

God refers to Ishmael as "Abraham's seed," זָרַע (v. 13)

God refers to Isaac as "Abraham's son," בֵּן (v. 2)

Sarah aware of the circumstances she was the "perpetrator" (vv. 9-10)

Sarah apparently not aware of the circumstances.

Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, could not stand to watch her son die (vv. 15-16)

Abraham, the father of Isaac did not shrink from observing (in fact, participating in) the death of his son.

Action takes place in the wilderness of Beer-sheba (v. 14)

Action takes place in the land of Moriah (vv. 2-4)

*Comparisons:*

Firstborn cast out, becomes a nation.

'Only-begotten' cast out, becomes a great nation.

God promised to make a nation of Ishmael because he was Abraham's seed (v. 13)

God promised to make a great nation of Isaac because Abraham had not withheld him (vv. 16-18)

Abraham "rose up early in the morning" to follow through (v. 14)

Abraham "rose up early in the morning" to follow through (v. 3)

Divine intervention occurs; angel of God calls out to Hagar; reversal of danger (v. 17)

Divine intervention occurs; angel of Yahweh calls out to Abraham; reversal of danger (vv. 11ff)

Water (life-preserving) was providentially provided (v. 19) – not seen at first

Ram (life-preserving) was providentially provided (v. 13) – not seen at first

Hagar saw the heretofore unseen well (v. 19)

Abraham saw the heretofore unseen ram (v. 13)

Hagar appropriates the water without a specific divine directive (v. 19)

Abraham appropriates the ram without a specific divine directive (v. 13)

Hagar, an Egyptian, takes a wife from Egypt for Ishmael (v. 21)

Abraham, a Mesopotamian, takes a wife from Mesopotamia for Isaac (Genesis 24)',

John I. Lawlor, *ibid.*, pages 33-35.

<sup>53</sup> There is a noticeable ascending order of endearment, much as there had been in God's first call to Abraham, Gen. 12. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Gen. 17. 19, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Gen. 21. 12: 'in the person of Isaac shall there be posterity to thee, *which shall pass as such*', Keil and Delitzsch, *The First Book of Moses*, page 244; 'in the line of Isaac will those descendants from thee come, who shall bear thy name, and as such be heirs of the divine promise', G. J. Spurrell, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Book of Genesis*, page 185.

<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, we are introduced to 'Rebekah', in passing, at the close of this chapter, Gen. 22. 23.

<sup>57</sup> Gen. 12. 7.

<sup>58</sup> Gen. 12. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Gen. 13. 18.

<sup>60</sup> Gen. 22. 9.

<sup>61</sup> From Beersheba to the region of Moriah is about 45 miles (72 kilometres), a journey that would have taken several days.

<sup>62</sup> Gen. 22. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Gen. 22. 14. This is not part of the story, but is an editorial note; cf. Gen. 10. 9.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Isa. 2. 3; 30. 29; Micah 4. 1-2; Zech. 8. 3.

<sup>65</sup> 2 Chron. 3. 1. This identification can be found in many Jewish sources; e.g. the Book of Jubilees 18.13, together with the Targums, and the Talmud (Ta'an.16a). Curiously, the surviving copies of *'The Antiquities of the Jews'* by Josephus record, 'It was that mountain upon which *king David afterwards built the temple!*' This is at Book 1, Chapter 13, Paragraph 2 ... not quite!

<sup>66</sup> 1 Chron. 22. 1.

<sup>67</sup> 'The *'olah* (burnt offering) is a particular type of sacrifice. It was the sacrifice that was completely consumed by the fire on the altar. It is significant that the sacrifice of Isaac is not called a *minhah* (a gift, present, or offering), a more general term that would have more suitably described a so-called 'spiritual sacrifice' had that been intended. Neither is it called a *zebah*, the general name for sacrifices eaten at the feasts. It is not a *hata't* nor an *asam* or trespass offering. The sacrifice of Isaac was not intended as a sacrifice for sin. It was an expression of Abraham's own worship and devotion to the Lord', David R. Dilling, *'The Atonement and Human Sacrifice'*, Grace Theological Journal 12.2 (Spring, 1971), page 37.

<sup>68</sup> 'The evidence that such sacrifices were actually carried out remains intact. In Mesopotamia, for example, we have the positive evidence of a published Babylonian cylinder seal which unmistakably portrays the actual execution of a human sacrifice. (R. A. S. Macalister, *Human Sacrifice: Semitic, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Volume VI, page 863). A. H. Sayce, British Assyriologist of a generation ago, has called attention to an Akkadian poem of pre-Semitic times with its later Assyrian translation concerning the sacrifice of a firstborn son. It says distinctly, "His offspring for his life he gave." (A. H. Sayce, *Patriarchal Palestine*, page 183). Biblical evidence that human sacrifice was known in Mesopotamia in later times is found in 2 Kings 17. 31, "And the Sepharvites burnt their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." ... Although rejecting the idea that human sacrifice was ever a legitimate or recognized element of the religion of Israel, it cannot be denied that the cult did exist as an idolatrous abomination in times of religious declension and national apostasy', David R. Dilling, *The Atonement and Human Sacrifice*, Grace Theological Journal 12.2 (Spring, 1971) 3-22. (Available at ... [https://archive.org/stream/GenesisArticle/AA-GenesisArticlesatGordonVol1\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/GenesisArticle/AA-GenesisArticlesatGordonVol1_djvu.txt), on page 25.) Also see ... <https://archaeology-world.com/new-evidence-of-ancient-child-sacrifice-found-from-bronze-age-mesopotamia/> and Laerke Recht, *'Human sacrifice in the ancient Near East and Egypt'*, accessed at <http://www.asor.org/anetoday/2020/02/human-sacrifice>.

<sup>69</sup> Gen. 12. 6; 13. 7; 24. 3.

<sup>70</sup> 'When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess ... take care that you be not ensnared to follow them ... for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods', Deut. 12. 29-31; cf. Lev. 18. 21; 20. 2-3 – and at a later period, 2 Kings 23. 10; Jer. 7. 31; 19. 5; 32. 35; Micah 6. 7 (to atone for a father's sin).

We read that, some 1200 years (being from around 2,050 BC to around 850 BC) after the binding of Isaac, the king of Moab thought that the offering up of his son as a burnt-offering would enlist the aid of his god to turn the tide of battle, 2 Kings 3. 26-27.

<sup>71</sup> Acts 7. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Gen. 14. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Gen. 17. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Gen. 21. 33.

<sup>75</sup> Gen. 21. 12-13; cf. Gen. 17. 20-21.

<sup>76</sup> 2 Chron. 20. 7; Isa. 41. 8; James 2. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Gen. 22. 1; cf. Heb. 11. 17.

<sup>78</sup> Gen. 22. 16, 18. These are the last words spoken by God to Abraham in Genesis, and therefore their significance should not be underestimated.

<sup>79</sup> Gen. 22. 17.

<sup>80</sup> God's oath guarantees the fulfilment of the promises God first gave to Abraham in Gen. 12: 1–3.

<sup>81</sup> His promise, that is, of a numerically great, territorially prosperous, and spiritually influential posterity – climaxing in the One 'seed' in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed (see Gal. 3. 16).

<sup>82</sup> One of several He has sworn: see Psa. 110. 4; Isa. 5. 9; 14. 24; 45. 23; 54. 9; 62. 8; Acts 2. 30; Heb. 7. 21.

<sup>83</sup> Now unbreakable promise.

<sup>84</sup> Heb. 6. 13-18. This is the only case of God's confirming a promise with an oath. God's oath is frequently recalled and invoked; see Gen. 24. 7; 26. 3; 50. 24; Exod. 32. 13; embracing the land, Deut. 19. 8; 31. 7 etc., and establishing the nation, Deut. 28. 9; Josh. 21. 44. Note 'the oath which He swore to Abraham our father', Luke 1. 73.

<sup>85</sup> James 2. 22.

<sup>86</sup> The writer informs the reader from the very outset that this is only 'a test'. Abraham, of course, was not privy to this information. It goes without saying that it would not have been a genuine test if he had been informed that this was all it was. Nothing would then have been proven by it. And so this information is given to the reader, but not divulged to Abraham.

<sup>87</sup> Heb. 11. 8.

<sup>88</sup> Gen. 15. 5, 6.

<sup>89</sup> Gen. 16. 2-4.

<sup>90</sup> Gen. 15. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Gen. 15. 8.

<sup>92</sup> Gen. 18. 23, 25.

<sup>93</sup> Gen. 18. 22-32.

<sup>94</sup> Don't miss the seven connecting 'ands' in English.

<sup>95</sup> See Gen. 17. 9-12, 23, 26; 21. 1-12, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Psa. 119. 60.

<sup>97</sup> 'My father!' ... 'Here I am, my son ... My son, God will provide Himself the lamb', Gen. 22. 7-8.

<sup>98</sup> Gen. 22. 6, 8.

<sup>99</sup> Gen. 22. 4.

<sup>100</sup> Gen. 22. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Gen. 22. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Heb. 11. 17; 'By faith Abraham, being tried, *offered up* Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises *was offering up* his only begotten son' (Revised Version). 'Both tenses, "*offered up*" (perfect) and "*was offering up*" (imperfect), are characteristic of the author's views of Scripture as a permanent record of events which may be still regarded as present to us. James (Jam. 2. 21) uses the aorist', F. W. Farrar, '*Cambridge Greek Testament: Hebrews*', page 145.



<sup>103</sup> Gen. 22. 11; 46: 2; Exod. 3: 4; 1 Sam. 3: 10; Luke 10. 41; 22. 31; Acts 9. 4. Cf. 1 Kings 13. 2; Matt. 7: 21, 22; 23. 37; Mark 15. 34.

<sup>104</sup> 1 Kings 18. 20.

<sup>105</sup> Gen. 22. 9; 1 Kings 8. 31-33.

<sup>106</sup> Gen. 22. 11-12.

<sup>107</sup> 1 Kings 18. 38.

<sup>108</sup> 'The act was already consummated so far as Abraham was concerned', *Robertson's Word Pictures* on Heb. 11. 17.

<sup>109</sup> Heb. 11. 8.

<sup>110</sup> Heb. 11. 9.

<sup>111</sup> Heb. 11. 17.

<sup>112</sup> William Barclay speaks of Abraham as 'the man who accepts what he cannot understand. To him there had come this incomprehensible demand. It did not make sense. The promise was that in Isaac his seed would grow and grow until he became a mighty nation in which all others would be blessed. On the life of Isaac depended the promise; and now God seemed to want to take that life away. As Chrysostom put it: "The things of God seemed to fight against the things of God, and faith fought with faith, and *the commandment fought with the promise*", William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*, on Heb. 11. 17-19.

<sup>113</sup> Heb. 11. 19.

<sup>114</sup> See <http://www.linearconcepts.com/theology/bible-timelines/genealogical-ages-of-genesis>.

<sup>115</sup> Eight times.

<sup>116</sup> Enoch sidestepped death, Gen. 5. 24; Heb. 11. 5; he was not raised again from its clutches.

<sup>117</sup> Heb. 11. 19. Interestingly, God 'accounted' (*λογίζομαι*) righteousness to Abraham on account of his faith, Gen. 15. 6 (Greek Old Testament), and, by faith, Abraham 'accounted' (*λογίζομαι*) that God was able to raise Isaac, Heb. 11. 19.

<sup>118</sup> There is a well-known textual variant at verse 19 which introduces the word 'not' at this point, yielding the translation, 'he considered not his own body' (so KJV, MKJV, JND, YLT, as opposed to RV, ESV, NIV, NASB). But, interestingly the variant does not affect the drift of the apostle's argument in any way.

<sup>119</sup> Rom. 4. 16-21. 'That God who brought Isaac out of a dead womb, and the Messiah out of a virgin's womb, what cannot He do?' Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, page 145.

<sup>120</sup> Heb. 11. 11.

<sup>121</sup> Heb. 11. 17-19.

<sup>122</sup> Gen. 17. 1.

<sup>123</sup> Gen. 18. 14.

<sup>124</sup> Gen. 12. 2.

<sup>125</sup> Gen. 12. 3.

<sup>126</sup> Genesis 12. 7; 13. 14-16; 17. 7. 'Four verbs are used with reference to "receiving" the promises, *ἀναδέχασθαι* (Heb. 11. 17), *λαβεῖν* (Heb. 9. 15), *ἐπιτυχεῖν* (Heb. 11. 33), *κομίσασθαι* (Heb. 11. 39). The word used [in Heb. 11. 17] implies a joyous welcome of special promises. The context generally shews with sufficient clearness the sense in which the Patriarchs may be said both to have "received" and "not to have received" [Heb. 11. 39] the promises. They received and welcomed special promises, and those were fulfilled; and in those they saw the germ of richer blessings which they enjoyed by faith but not in actual fruition', F. W. Farrar, *op.cit.*, page 145.

<sup>127</sup> Gen. 17. 19, 21; 21. 12.

<sup>128</sup> Gen. 17. 19.

<sup>129</sup> If the young men had accompanied Abraham up the mountain, it is possible that they might have tried to restrain him.

<sup>130</sup> George Whitefield, 'Abraham's Offering Up His Son Isaac', Selected Sermons of George Whitefield:.. accessed from ... <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/whitefield/sermons.v.html>.

<sup>131</sup> See towards the bottom of the third column of page 3 of the Saturday Evening Mail, Volume 28, Number 23, Terre Haute, Vigo County, 4 December 1897; accessed at ... <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=SEM18971204.1.3>. An enlarged photo of the item can be accessed at ... <http://oldnews.aadl.org/node/150707>, and is reproduced at note 137 below.

<sup>132</sup> For those interested, further comments can be found at the top half of page 3 of the document 'He spared not His Son', which accompanied the Monday Musings on 15 June 2020.

<sup>133</sup> George Whitefield, *ibid.*.

<sup>134</sup> Small wonder that it was in this very vicinity that a millennium later David declared that he was unwilling to offer to the Lord that which *cost him nothing*, 2 Sam. 24. 24.

<sup>135</sup> 'This hymn text was written by the author as he recalled the day that he had surrendered his life to Christ and dedicated himself completely to Christian service. It was first published, in 1896, in the collection, "Gospel Songs of Grace and Glory" compiled by Weeden, Van de Venter and Leonard.

'Mr. Van de Venter has left this account of the writing of his hymn text:

"The song was written while I was conducting a meeting at East Palestine, Ohio, and in the home of George Sebring (founder of the Sebring Camp-meeting and Bible Conference in Sebring, Ohio, and later developer of the town of Sebring, Florida). For some time, I had struggled between developing my talents in the field of art and going into full-time evangelistic work. At last the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. A new day was ushered into my life. I became an evangelist and discovered down deep in my soul a talent hitherto unknown to me. God had hidden a song in my heart, and touching a tender chord, He caused me to sing".

Source: <http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=6023>.

See also ... <http://themennonitepages.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/judson-wvdeventer.html>, and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hO3BouKcDs>.

'Perhaps the most important influence that Van de Venter had was on the young evangelist Billy Graham. The Rev. Graham cites this hymn as an influence in his early ministry. His account appears in *Crusade Hymn Stories*, edited by Graham's chief musician, Cliff Barrows: "One of the evangelists who influenced my early preaching was also a hymnist who wrote 'I Surrender All' -- the Rev. J. W. Van de Venter. He was a regular visitor at the Florida Bible Institute (now Trinity Bible College) in the late 1930's. We students love this kind, deeply spiritual gentleman and often gathered in his winter home at Tampa, Florida, for an evening of fellowship and singing".

Source: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-i-surrender-all>.

'I Surrender All was put to music by Winfield S. Weeden (1847-1908 ), who published this and many other hymns in several volumes. Mr Weeden so loved this song that the words "I Surrender All" were put on his tombstone', <http://www.sharefaith.com/guide/Christian-Music/hymns-the-songs-and-the-stories/i-surrender-all-the-song-and-the-story.html>.

<sup>136</sup> This was number 83 in 'Gospel Songs of Grace and Glory', accessed at ... <https://archive.org/details/gosgra00weed>.

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**A Sermon With a Point to It.**

A clergyman in the west country had two curates, one a comparatively old man, the other very young. With the former he had not been able to work agreeably, and on being invited to another living he accepted it and took the young curate with him. Naturally there was a farewell sermon, and we can imagine the feelings of the curate who was to be left behind when he heard the text given out, "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship."

Sterne once declared in regard to the widely respected maxim, "De mortuis nil nisi bonum," that there was nothing right about it but its Latin. This view was evidently shared by a certain Edinburgh minister who, being asked to preach the funeral sermon of a miserly brother cleric, chose as his text the words, "And the beggar died."—Chambers' Journal.

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