

# The Great Test

## *The Sacrifice of the Beloved Son*

- <sup>1</sup> After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."
- <sup>2</sup> He said, "Take 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."
- <sup>3</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.
- <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.
- <sup>5</sup> Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."
- <sup>6</sup> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.
- <sup>7</sup> And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"
- <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.
- <sup>9</sup> When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.
- <sup>10</sup> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.
- <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."
- <sup>12</sup> He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."
- <sup>13</sup> And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.
- <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."
- <sup>15</sup> And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven
- <sup>16</sup> and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,
- <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,
- <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."
- <sup>19</sup> So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Genesis 22:1-19

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### Whose Son?

He was the “**only begotten son**” of his “**father**.” But he was “**bound**” and “**taken**” away to “**[Jeru]salem**,” to “**one of the mountains**” in the “**land of vision**,” near the place where God chose to dwell and put his Name. When he was taken to

the right spot, he was lifted up as a “lamb” of “offering” to atone for sin. His father’s hand was high and ready to strike; it was his determined will to crush him, when suddenly the son cried, “My father!” With tears in his eyes, his father said, “Do not worry, my son. On ‘the third day’ we shall return. Together.”

Meet Isaac, the son of Abraham.

Today, we swim into some of the clearest, but deepest water in Genesis, indeed in the whole Old Testament. It is one of the best known stories in the Bible. Jews love it. Christians probably love it more. It is treasured by children and adults. Yet, it is troubling. It is perplexing. It is fascinating. It is joy-inducing. It teaches us about faith, about works, and most of all, about Christ. It is history that is brimming with a kind of foreshadowing that only an all-knowing God could write. It is the story of a father and his only-begotten son.

### Introduction: The Great Test

The story begins with an introduction that lets the reader in on a secret. “After these things God tested Abraham.” “These things” includes the previous story with Abimelech as well as the story where Abraham sends away Hagar and Ishmael. In fact, our story with Isaac must be read together with the story of Ishmael, for there are many parallels between the two (see below):

Comparing Ishmael and Isaac Stories	
Abraham and Ishmael	Abraham and Isaac
God orders Ishmael’s expulsion (21:12–13)	// God orders Isaac’s sacrifice (22:2)
Ishmael is Abraham’s “seed” (v 13)	// Isaac is Abraham’s “son” (22:2) and “seed” (16, 17)
Abraham is reluctant to follow through (21:11)	Abraham shows no reluctance to follow through (22:3ff)
Abraham rises “early in the morning” (21:14)	// Abraham rises “early in the morning” (22:3)
Food and water taken (21:14)	// Sacrificial material taken (22:3)
Journey (21:14)	// Journey (22:4–8)
Ishmael about to die (21:16)	// Isaac about to die (22:10)
Hagar can’t watch her son die (21:15-16)	Abraham did not shrink from the death of his son (22:10)
Angel of God calls from heaven (21:17)	// Angel of the Lord calls from heaven (22:11)
“Do not fear” (21:17)	// “fear God” (22:12)
“God has heard”	// “You have obeyed (heard) my voice” (22:18)
“I shall make into a great nation” (21:18)	// “Your descendants will be like stars, sand,” etc. (22:17)
God opens her eyes and she sees well (21:19)	// Abraham raises his eyes and sees ram (22:13). (Jubilees actually has a “well” back where Abraham left his men (Jub 18:5) <sup>1</sup>
She gives the lad a drink (21:19)	// He sacrifices ram instead of son (22:14) <sup>2</sup>
Hagar take a wife from Egypt for Ishmael (21:21)	Abraham takes a wife from Mesopotamia for Isaac (ch. 24)

<sup>1</sup> This list is taken from Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 99–100 and John I. Lawlor, “The Test of Abraham: Genesis 22:1-19,” *Grace Theological Journal* 1.1 (1980): 34-35 (19-35).

<sup>2</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 99–100.

The more troubling thing is that it says God is going “test” (Heb: *nasah*; Gk: *periazō*) Abraham. The Greek uses the same word that James does who says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one” (Jam 1:13). Yet, it is also the same word where Jesus tells us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation (*peirasmos*)” (Mark 6:13; Luke 11:4). It doesn’t make sense for us to pray this if there weren’t some sense in which God would lead us into temptation. In fact, the OT continually tells us things like, “Do not fear, for God has come to test (*nasah*; *periazō*) you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin” (Ex 20:20). God “tests” Israel in the wilderness through hunger and thirst (Ex 15:25; 16:4; Deut 8:2); through foreign oppression (Judg 2:22; 3:1), or through false prophets (Deut 13:4).

Because of the words involved, this was a sticky problem even for Jews to handle. Thus, Jubilees (the “Little Genesis”), which follows this story very closely, nevertheless adds a whole paragraph telling us that it is was not God testing Abraham, but Prince Mastema, that is the Devil (Jub 18:9-12; cf. 17:16). And though this might have been an oral tradition, there is little hint of this in the Bible,<sup>3</sup> nor does there need to be. James is concerned with people blaming God for their own sin, not with God testing our faith in order to refine it like gold. In fact, that is exactly what God does.

The way “God” (*Elohim*) tested Abraham was by coming to him and speaking to him. “Abraham!” (Gen 22:1). “And he said, ‘Here I am.’” Before moving on, let us turn to vs. 11 and notice the parallel, for our passage is divided nicely into two sections, with the parallel here serving as the divider. “But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’” We can see clearly that in our story, “God” and “the Angel of the LORD” are the same person, and this is consistent with what we have seen throughout the Abraham saga. Why does this amazing fact escape so many?

### **Take, Go, Sacrifice**

What does the test or trial consist of? There are three verbs: Take, go, and offer (22:2). God says, “Take your son ... go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.” Suddenly, we sit here trying to catch our breath. “Did he just say what I think he said? Let me read that again.” Sure enough, God is commanding Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering.

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<sup>3</sup> Since it is “*elohim*” who is testing Abraham, one could take this to be referring to one of the princes of the divine council (a singular prince, since the verb is singular). This may be what Jubilees is capitalizing on. But see comments below on the Angel of the LORD.

Can this be right? Won't God later **forbid sacrificing children** to foreign gods (**Lev 18:21**). Doesn't he call this an "**abomination**" that "**never entered his mind**" (**Jer 32:35**). Can this really be the God of Christians? Is there something to this idea that the OT God was a horrible, bloodthirsty monster who can't understand the most basic concept: "**Thou shall not murder?**" Well, this is all part of the deliberate tension that not only we face, but Abraham must have faced as well. Can you imagine?

Of course, we have to read the rest of the story to find out what will happen. But let's look a little closer at this verse first. Of interest here is a word that is left untranslated by the ESV. "**Take your son**" (**22:2**) is translated by the Young's Literal Translation as "**Take, I pray thee, your son.**" These added words come from the tiny little Hebrew word *na'*. It may be translated as "now" (NAS) or as "**please.**" Wenham says, "**The way the command is put here tries to soften the blow for Abraham while maximizing our realization of its enormity. 'Please take.'** The use of the enclitic 'please' is rare in a divine command and makes it more like an entreaty, [a] hint that the Lord appreciates the costliness of what he is asking."<sup>4</sup> I think this is correct. The God presented at the very beginning of the story is not some demanding, blood-thirsty tyrant. "Please," he says.

Second, the **name of the place** he is told to go is called "**the land of Moriah.**" This name appears in only one other place in the Bible. "**Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed**" (**2Ch 3:1**). Abraham is being told to head back to Salem, where Melchizedek is king.<sup>5</sup> But for the moment, more important is the word Moriah.

Most have associated its meaning with "seeing" and "vision," so something like "vision of Yahweh" or the Vulgate's "**land of vision.**" Later in the story, Abraham will name it *Yahweh Yir eh*, "**Yahweh will see**" (**vs. 14**),<sup>6</sup> so a word play would make sense. Thus, there would more than likely have been a hint from this name that some kind of vision would be seen. But what?

Before answering, let us consider **Abraham's response**, for if God's request is beyond belief, Abraham's response may be more so. Just here, I want to **contrast a couple of things with the Ishmael story**. In both stories, we read about God commanding Abraham to **get rid of his son**, only in this story it is much worse. In the

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 104.

<sup>5</sup> The Targums have the strange tradition, "**They came to the place of which the Lord had told him, and there Abraham (re) built the altar which Adam had built and (which) had been demolished by the waters of the Flood. Noah rebuilt it, but it was demolished in the generation of the Division.**"

<sup>6</sup> The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* believes this idea is not possible.

Ishmael story, Abraham is very **reluctant**, until God gives the order. In our story, there is **no hesitation** at all.

What does it say, “**So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him**” (22:3). How could it possibly be that Abraham would react the way he does here? There is only one answer. Hebrews says, “**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac**” (Heb 11:17). But faith in what? Wishful thinking? What in the world could a man possibly hope for in taking a “**knife to slaughter his son**” (Gen 22:10)?

The answer is two-fold. First, there was **the promise of God** regarding Isaac. God has told this man repeatedly that he would make Isaac into a great and mighty nation (17:19; 21:12; cf. 12:2). Because God has proven himself time and time again to be faithful to his words, especially in giving Isaac to Abraham and Sarah in their impossible old age, Abraham believed this promise would come true, even though Isaac was yet a boy, let alone married, let alone had children. Great faith trusts the promises of God. It says, “**Yes, God. I believe you when you promise me that if I trust in your Son, I will have eternal life and will not be condemned for my sins.**” Weak faith wavers on the promises. False faith doesn’t believe them at all, because it doesn’t care. It is trusting in something entirely different.

Second, if he kills Isaac, **what hope could he possibly have** for this promise to come true? To put it bluntly, and rather surprisingly for some, Abraham had **hope in the resurrection of the dead**. When it was “the **third day**” (**something I’ll come back to later**), Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place God wanted him to go (Gen 22:4). So he said to his men, “**Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you**” (22:5). Hebrews tells us, “**He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back**” (Heb 11:19). But is Hebrews just making this up? No, this is the most rational interpretation of the words that Abraham said they would both return.

But maybe Abraham was looking for a miracle? Maybe he had no intention of going through with God’s command? No. From the story, we learn that Abraham had every intention of killing his son. Look at what it says. “**And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together**” (Gen 22:6). “**When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the**

wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son” (9-10).

The tension at this point in the story is palpable. Imagine telling it for the first time to your young child late at night, just before bed, pausing just here for effect. The horror! “Daddy, did Abraham really do it?” Yes, Abraham had *every intention* of sacrificing his son. Make no mistake about it. Thus, resurrection is the only logical conclusion to make.

“But,” someone object, “didn’t Isaac say, ‘My father! ... Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering’” (7)? And doesn’t Abraham say, ‘God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ And doesn’t this mean that Abraham expected God to pull some kind of a rabbit out of his hat, so that he wouldn’t have to go through with it, because he knew that God was not a horrible tyrant like this?” My answer is, yes, they did say those things, but no, Abraham was not expecting a miracle. For you see, if that were the case, neither the Angel nor James would conclude as they do. How is that exactly?

### **Now I Know**

Let us look at how the Angel of the LORD responds to Abraham’s actions. Just as the knife reaches its highest point and is about to start its downward trajectory straight for Isaac’s heart, the Angel calls out from heaven. “Abraham, Abraham.” For the third time in the story, Abraham say, “Here I am.” The first time, when God simply comes to him, he is probably startled (vs. 1). The second time, when Isaac inquires into the offering, he is probably shaken (vs. 7). The last time, he is probably in shock. Can you imagine the emotional place you would have to go to put that knife in the air, only to have God speak to you from heaven?

“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (12). This is the verse that gives us the Angel’s answer. But what does it mean? James says something that helps us interpret it. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?” (Jam 2:21). Yet, unfortunately, both of these verses have lead to massive blunders of misinterpretation. Some want to say that God doesn’t know the future, because he says, “Now I know that you fear God,” which implies that he did not know this until just then. Others want to say that James proves that we are justified by our works. I mean, doesn’t the verse say exactly that?

This is where we have to be thinking people, not sound-bite people. Here is most certainly not the time for taking verses out of context. The stakes are much too high for that. Throughout the Bible, we see God (indeed, the Angel) speaking

about things as if he didn't know them.<sup>7</sup> No one doubts that God knows the [present](#), yet he asks Adam, “[Where are you?](#)” Did he not know? Then in speaking about the future he says in another place, “[I knew that you would surely deal treacherously, and that from before birth you were called a rebel](#)” (Isa 48:8). He wasn't just guessing based on past history. God knew. How many prophecies does it take (indeed in this very story as we will soon see) to prove to people that God knows the future? Frankly, I think some people just enjoy [reveling in contradiction](#). It brings God down to their level, though why anyone would want that I have no idea. But we should always seek [to figure out the answers](#) to difficulties, rather than to create inglorious theologies because we are too lazy.

The Angel is [saying this for Abraham's sake](#), because the testing was for Abraham, not for the Angel. Parents do this all the time with their children, saying things as if they didn't know the answer in order to help the child realize what the parent knew all along. “[I don't know, Johnny, what do you think will happen if you touch that really hot boiling pot of water?](#)” So it says, “God tested *Abraham*,” not “God tested the *Angel*.” And read carefully again here. Abraham did not withhold his son *from the Angel* ([vs. 12](#)). The Angel is God. This is Christ we are dealing with here.

[What about James?](#) Is James saying that a man is [justified by works](#)? If he were, then we would have a contradiction, since just two verses later Abraham believed God and *it* was credited to him as righteousness ([James 2:23](#)). James is concerned with a faith that only understands with the head, but not the heart. He is talking about the “faith” of demons, which is no faith at all. They believe there is a God. They are not atheists. But they do not like him, nor do they love him, they do not trust him. It is love for God that causes a person to want to do what he says. But faith creates love. Faith comes first, not duty. “[Faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works](#)” ([Jam 2:22](#)). There is nothing more poisonous to the human soul than the corruption of this doctrine, though a corruption of the previous one—that God doesn't even know the future—may come close. People need to know that God gives grace freely, undeservedly. Otherwise, it is not grace at all, but a wage. When we do not understand this doctrine, it only leads to despair or self-congratulations.

What is the point of our story? It is [to test Abraham](#). It is for Abraham's sake. Did God even intend for Abraham to murder his son? Of course not. “[Now I know](#)

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<sup>7</sup> If open theology actually understood that it was the Angel of the LORD (the Second Person assuming a created form) rather than God the Being speaking, it might stand on better ground in its insistence that God does not know the future. Perhaps as an Angel, he did not? But as we see with Jesus in human flesh from time to time, he does know the future, he has omniscience. So it is with the Angel.

that you fear God” is important for Abraham to hear. For now this man knows that he loves God more than his beloved son Isaac, and not a person in this room can imagine how much Abraham must have loved him, given that everything is entire Abraham cycle really centers upon Isaac and the promise. For none of us have had a child like that.

### **The God Who Provides**

But there is something much, **much greater** going on here **than just Abraham**. Yes, this story **is about God**. And **it is about Christ**. We can see this in a near way and a far way. In the near way, we again return to the Ishmael story (for the following references, see parallels above). We find that in both stories, there is a **journey**. Both reach their greatest tension when the **son** of Abraham is just about to **die**. There is a divergence for a moment. In the Ishmael story, Hagar cannot watch her son die of thirst, but Abraham does not shrink from the death of Isaac.

In both, suddenly, from heaven, **the Angel of the LORD calls out**. He tells Hagar not to **fear**. He says to Abraham that now he knows that he does **fear**. Then, God extends great favor and grace to the boys. God opens Hagar’s eyes so that she sees a well. The boy recovers and God swears to make him into a great nation, something he had already sworn to do, unconditionally. Similarly, God opens Abraham’s eyes and he sees a ram. He sacrifices it and Isaac not only recovers, but is **“figuratively (as Hebrews puts it) raised from the dead.”** Then, God swears yet again to Abraham that he will multiply Isaac’s seed and turns him into a great nation. **Gen 22:16-17** repeat those promises of a seed like the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore.<sup>8</sup>

Both of these stories show that God is **a God of his word**. Both show that God is **a dispenser of grace**. But they diverge at this point. For the former story is a story of **common grace**. He will not let the Egyptian slave woman or her son born

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<sup>8</sup> **GOING DEEPER:** A True Story about “Replacement Theology.” The doctrine of the “seed” is something very important in covenant theology, because it is important in the Bible. Christ is the final “seed” of Christ. Reformed Christians believe that the language used in the NT for the church that its people are the true circumcision, the Israel of God, the branches of the vine, the *ekklesia*, true Jews, and sons of Abraham, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (all OT ideas for Israel), means that the church fulfills in Christ (True Israel), what the theocratic people of God were supposed to be. But some call this “Replacement Theology,” and teach that this is the greatest evil of our times, because it spiritualizes away the Jews, making them irrelevant to eschatology and the end times. I was watching (don’t ask why) **John Hagee**, the Dispensationalist Word-of-Faith televangelist one time absolutely berate Replacement (i.e. Reformed Christianity) because it “spiritualizes” “everything.” So he went on his soap box telling the congregation how instead of this nonsense, we are to believe God gave Abraham a “literal” son, Isaac and a “literal” land, Israel. He sent Jesus a “literal” man to a “literal” earth where he died on a “literal cross,” (because, apparently, no Reformed Christian believes these things; beware the either/or fallacy). However, within thirty seconds, I saw his turn to our text whereupon he began to teach how the “stars of the sky” are “Jews” and the “sand of the seashore” are “Gentiles.” I couldn’t believe what I was watching, but just a couple of days later, while flipping the channels, the same sermon came back on, and I watched it again just to make sure that’s what he said. Indeed, it was. Such is the duplicity of the “literal hermeneutic” so often espoused by those who can’t stand people that “spiritualize” the text.



of a faithless act die. He will give him many descendants, even though he knows he will be a wild man who will make war on everyone for generations to come. But that is the kind of God this God is, not some cruel, heartless vicious deity, but one who loves even his enemies. In this way, common grace is given and shown in order to lead those with ears to hear to the well-spring of eternal special grace.

The story with Isaac is certainly a story of common grace as well. God saves Isaac from physical death. God keeps his chosen friend Abraham from experiencing a terrible horror. God provides a way wherein a different and surprising sacrifice might be offered in the place of Isaac. The ram acts as a substitute.

### **The Only Begotten Son**

*Begotten, Unique, Beloved*

But there is **something much more profound** than even this, as amazing as this grace is. It is something that I seriously doubt anyone back then could have comprehended. Yet, it was hidden in plain sight by an all-knowing God. The things it shows us are beyond comprehension in their proof that this is a God who knows the future. Let me tell my story again:

He was the “**Only Begotten Son**” of his “**Father**.” But he was “**bound**” and “**taken**” away to “**Jerusalem**,” to “**one of the mountains**” in the “**land of vision**,” near the place where God chose to dwell and put his Name. When he was taken to the right spot, he was lifted up as a “**lamb**” of “**offering**” to atone for sin. His **father’s hand** was high and ready to strike; it was his **determined will to crush him**, when suddenly the son cried, “**My father!**” With tears in his eyes, his father said, “**Do not worry, my son. On ‘the third day’ we shall return. Together.**”

Meet Jesus, the Son of God.

The story is the same, and each of the items I have chosen have been carefully worded and woven together from the story of Abraham and Isaac and from Jesus in the NT. Let us take a look at them now. The story of Isaac begins with the command to take “**your son, your only son Isaac**” (**Gen 22:2**). Hebrews puts this verse this way, “**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son**” (**Heb 11:17 NAS**).<sup>9</sup> This is a curious way to put it, but it is shared by one no less than **Josephus** the Jew.<sup>10</sup> They do not get this from the LXX, which translates it as, “**Take your son,**

<sup>9</sup> I use the NAS because the ESV consistently obscures the ‘begotten’ (monogenes) in its translations of this word (i.e. “his only son”).

<sup>10</sup> “Now Abraham greatly loved Isaac, as being his only begotten” (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 1.222). The note in the volume says, “Note, that both here and Heb. 11:17, Isaac is called Abraham’s only begotten son, though he at the same

the beloved one, whom you have loved—Isaac” (Gen 22:2 LXE). So “beloved” from the Greek and “only” from the Hebrew is being rendered as “only begotten” by Hebrews. How strange? Why?

On dictionary says, “Undoubtedly an only child is particularly dear to his parents.”<sup>11</sup> It then adds that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke where they talk about the beloved son of God (Jesus), that this is very close to “only begotten” (Matt 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22). Of course, John’s favorite term is “only begotten” (cf. John 1:18; 3:16; etc). The word can mean “begotten,” but it can also mean “unique,” and now we see that it has shades of “beloved.” What a rich word! But what should strike us is how *Isaac is not the only son of Abraham*. Hebrews catches this and adds the word *monogenes*—unique. We have spoken much about Ishmael his oldest and firstborn son this very sermon. Yet, Isaac is the only begotten son. Why?

### *The Bound Lamb of The Offering*

Though Josephus wouldn’t have this in mind, in the context of Hebrews 11 and the rest of the NT, it is easy to see. But let’s stay in Genesis 22 just for fun. It says that this only begotten son was to be “offered” (*anaphero*) as a sacrifice, a burnt offering (Gen 22:2). The NT says, “Christ” was “offered (*anaphero*) once to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28; cf. 7:27).

Regarding this offering, Isaac asks, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen 22:7)? Saying something I’m sure he did not understand, Abraham replied, “God will provide for himself the lamb ... my son” (8). John the Baptist exclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (John 1:36)! This is the lamb “who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29).

Where did this offering of this lamb take place? “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed” (Matt 16:21). “When they had come to the place, which is called Calvary,<sup>12</sup> there they crucified him” (Luke 23:33 NKJV). Mt. Calvary. Curiously, Genesis does not say that Isaac was to be sacrificed on Mt. Moriah (the temple mount), but one of the other mountains near it, which God would name.

How did the lamb of God get to this destination of death? “The band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him”

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time had another son, Ishmael. The Septuagint expresses the true meaning, by rendering the text *the beloved son*. Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> “Monogenes,” Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 739.

<sup>12</sup> *Golgwlt’* in Hebrew transliterates into *golgotha* in Greek, and is translated *Kraniou Topon* (“Place of the Skull”). “Calvary” comes from the Latin *Calvariae locum*. Calvary has been called a little mountain since The Bordeaux Pilgrim (a.d. 333) who wrote of it as “*monticulus Golgotha*.”

(John 18:12). “Abraham built the altar there ... and bound Isaac his son” (Gen 22:9).<sup>13</sup> Then, “As they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on (GK: *epitithemi*) him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus” (Luke 23:26). What is a cross made of? Wood. “Abraham took (*paralambano*) the wood of the burnt offering and laid it (*epitithemi*) on Isaac his son” (Gen 22:6). Jubilees says he “put it on [his] shoulder” (Jub 18:5). John says, “And they took (*paralambano*) Jesus, and led *him* away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha” (John 19:16-17 NKJV).

### *The Father’s Crushing Hand*

As he was preparing his heart, as he saw the moment coming, our Lord Jesus cried out “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt 26:39). As a young boy of enough age and mental capacity to ask about the offering, you must read Isaac’s cry to Abraham in this same kind of desperation, “My father! ... Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen 22:7)? Isaac was no fool. He knew what lay ahead for him.

And so did father Abraham. For when that terrible moment finally came, with tears in his eyes, he was nevertheless going to go through with it, because it had to be done. And he “reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son” (Gen 22:10). Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). But the prophet said, “It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief” (Isa 53:10). The horror of such a plan that the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ would crush his Son like that. For surely, as it was evil for men to crucify Jesus, nevertheless it was “whatever [God] hand and [God’s] plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:28). This line was preached by Peter as being at the very heart of the Gospel.

### *The Third Day*

Yet Isaiah does not linger long upon the sufferings of the Servant. He sees the vision and continues, “When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand” (Isa 53:10). Resurrection. Seed. Christ.

In the Apocalypse John says, “I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rev 5:6). Those who stand after they have been slain have been raised from the dead. Again, not realizing how prophetic his words would be, Abraham tells his

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<sup>13</sup> The LXX’s *sumpodizō* is not used in the NT. It prefers *deō* for “bind.”

men, “On the third day ... I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you” (Gen 22:4-5). When Jesus predicted he would go to Jerusalem to suffer and die he added, “and on the third day be raised” (Matt 16:21). Incredibly, when John sees the Lamb Jesus coming, it is the third day of that first great week of John’s gospel (John 1:35-36 and “the next day”; cf. 1:29).

In the OT, the “third day” is the day of resurrection.<sup>14</sup> “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him” (Hos 6:2). “Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17). Jesus says, “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:40). But then he will be raised, and this is the “sign of Jonah” (vs. 39). Thus, one of the earliest creeds of all says, “He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:4).

Jesus makes this strange statement in John’s Gospel, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56 NAS). The Jews believed this rejoicing referred only to Isaac’s birth, when he laughed (Gen 17:17). But Christians know it is more than that. “We shall truly grant that he saw the day of the Lord’s slaughter ... when, as a type of Christ, he was enjoined to offer up for a sacrifice his only begotten and firstborn, Isaac.” (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 6.1). John of Damascus (*Ode I, of the Canon for Easter*) writes,

’Tis the day of Resurrection:  
Earth! tell it abroad!  
The Passover of gladness!  
The Passover of God!  
From death to life eternal,  
From earth unto the sky,  
Our Christ hath brought us over,  
With hymns of victory.<sup>15</sup>

Abraham saw this in type and shadow by faith here in Moriah—the Land of Vision.

Spurgeon concludes from all of this, “If the Messiah is anywhere symbolized in the Old Testament, He is certainly to be seen upon Mount Moriah where the be-

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<sup>14</sup> The Church Father Origen writes, “The first day is the passion of the Savior for us. The second is the day on which he descended into hell. The third day is the day of resurrection. Therefore on the third day ‘God went before them, by day in a column of cloud, by night in a column of fire’ (Ex 13:21).” (Homilies on Exodus 5, in Alberto Ferreiro, “Introduction to the Twelve Prophets,” in *The Twelve Prophets*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], 27).

<sup>15</sup> George A. Jackson, *The Post-Nicene Greek Fathers*, ed. George P. Fisher, Early Christian Literature Primers (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), 217.

loved Isaac willingly bound, and laid upon the altar, is a lively foreshadowing of the Well-Beloved of Heaven yielding His life as a ransom! We doubt not that one great objective of the whole transaction was to afford Abraham a clearer view of Christ's day" (Sermon # 869). He agrees with one of the earliest sermons ever written. The Epistle Barnabas says, "But he also was given vinegar and gall to drink when he was crucified ... as a sacrifice for our sins, in order that the type established by Isaac, who was offered upon the altar, might be fulfilled" (Barn 7:3).<sup>16</sup>

### **Why?**

But beloved, **why did this all occur?** Why did God do this to Abraham? We have seen that it was a test of his faith, and so it is of yours. God commanded this most horrible of all the commands in the Bible, because without the sacrifice of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. People in our day want a happy, bloodless religion. Dr. **Delores Williams** infamously said at the 1994 Reimagining Conference, "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses, and blood dripping, and weird stuff." Yes, Dr. Williams. Yes we do.

At the same time, it is one thing to try to reconcile the need for **animals** to be killed so that people can have forgiveness. It is quite another thing for a **human** to have to die as a burnt offering to satiate the wrath that sin has created. How much more when this human is your only begotten son, your beloved dear son, your most treasured possession, the greatest miracle of your life, the only hope of your future, the one upon whom all the promises will fall?

Yes, sin is that horrific, beloved, that it deserves such punishment as this. Your sin. Those things that you know in your conscience you are not to be doing, but you do anyway. Those things that accuse you in the quiet moments of your life. Those things you know are wrong, have been taught are wrong, but you turn your back on and commit anyway:

- Do not have other gods before God.
- Do not create images of God in any way.
- Do not take God's Name in Vain.
- Do not break his holy Sabbath, his Great Day.
- Do not disobey your parents.
- Do not murder or hate in your heart.
- Do not commit adultery or fornication or even lust.
- Do not steal or rob or take anything that does not belong to you.
- Do not lie to hurt your neighbor.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Clement of Alexandria *Paed.* 1.5.1; Tertullian *De paen.* 6; *Adv. Jud.* 10; Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 4.5.4; Augustine *Civ. Dei.* 16.32.

Do not even covet a single thing that belongs to someone else.

The life is in the blood.

Why do you do such things, when you know that for doing them, you deserve death? **The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)**. Why do you continue in them when you now know how much it cost God? The **Father** had to forsake eternal fellowship with the Son because of this. The **Son** had to be brutally, unjustly, tortured, mocked, ridiculed, suffocated, and cursed because of this, though he had done no wrong and there was no guilt in him. The **Spirit** had to look on, helpless as the offering was made. It had to be ... if you were to be forgiven.

But forgiveness does not just come. It is not automatic. **Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness**. His **faith** worked itself out in just this way, that he was fully prepared to take Isaac's life, in order to worship the God who had rescued him from darkness and promised him all the wonders of the world. He considered it all rubbish for the sake of knowing Christ.

Beloved, we are all God's children, all his offspring. He created us. He died for us. Therefore, **forsake** yourselves as Isaac did. **Trust** in God as Abraham did, with all his flaws and sins and failures. Rely upon nothing else, for there is nothing else that will save you. One day, soon enough, you will have to stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account for your sins. Do not stand there without an advocate and defense attorney pleading your case. Atonement is only found in his blood. Rely, hold on to, grip firmly, tightly this hope of forgiveness, of salvation, and of resurrection. And know it is certain, because God has provided the Lamb, and he has given "**assurance to all by raising him from the dead**" (**Acts 17:31**).

## Isaac a Type of Christ<sup>17</sup>

	Isaac (Gen 22)	Christ
Only Son	“Take your son, your <b>only son</b> , Isaac” (22:2). “Take thy son, the <b>beloved one</b> , whom thou hast loved—Isaac” (Gen 22:2 LXE) “He who had received the promises was offering up his <b>only begotten son</b> ” (Heb 11:17).	“A voice from heaven said, “This is my <b>beloved Son.</b> ” (Mat 3:17) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His <b>only begotten Son.</b> ” (Joh 3:16)
Bound	Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and <b>bound Isaac</b> (Gen 22:9)	The band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and <b>bound him.</b> (John 18:12)
Taken	Abraham rose early in the morning ... and <b>took (paralambano)</b> two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. (Gen 22:3)	And they <b>took (paralambano)</b> Jesus, and led him away. (John 19:16-17)
Moriah / Jerusalem	Go to the land of <b>Moriah</b> (Gen 22:2) Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in <b>Jerusalem</b> on Mount <b>Moriah</b> (2Ch 3:1)	From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to <b>Jerusalem</b> and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed. (Mat 16:21)
One of the mountains	Go to ... <b>one of the mountains</b> of which I shall tell you (Gen 22:2)	When they had come to the place, which is called <b>Calvary</b> , there they crucified him. (Luke 23:33)
Lamb	“Where is the <b>lamb</b> for a burnt offering?” “ <b>God will provide for himself the lamb.</b> ” (Gen 22:7, 8)	“Behold, the <b>Lamb of God</b> ” (John 1:36)
Offering	The wood of the burnt <b>offering.</b> (Gen 22:6)	Christ [was] <b>offered</b> once to bear the sins of many. (Heb 9:28) When his soul makes <b>an offering</b> for guilt... (Isa 53:10)
Wood	Abraham took <b>the wood</b> of the burnt offering. (Gen 22:6)	He, bearing His <b>cross</b> , went out to a place called the Place of a Skull. (John 19:17)
Laid on him	Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and <b>laid it (epitithemi)</b> on Isaac his son (Gen 22:6)	And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and <b>laid on (epitithemi)</b> him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. (Luke 23:26)
Father’s hand	He reached out his hand and took the knife <b>to slaughter his son.</b> (Gen 22:10)	It was the will of the LORD <b>to crush him</b> ; he has put him to grief. (Isa 53:10)
Son’s Cry to the Father	“ <b>My father!</b> ... Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Gen 22:7)	“ <b>My Father</b> , if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” (Matt 26:39)
Resurrection / Third Day	After two days he will revive us; on <b>the third day</b> he will raise us up, that we may live before him. (Hos 6:2) Jonah was in the belly of the fish <b>three days</b> and three nights. (Jon 1:17)	He was raised on <b>the third day</b> in accordance with the Scriptures. (1Co 15:4) ... and on <b>the third day</b> be raised. (Mat 16:21) For just as Jonah was <b>three days</b> and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Mat 12:40) Abraham rejoiced to see <b>my day</b> , he saw it and was glad. (John 8:56). He shall see his offspring; he shall <b>prolong his days.</b> (Isa 53:10) The <b>next day</b> (the third day) ... “Behold, the Lamb of God” (John 1:35-36) I saw a Lamb <b>standing</b> , as though it had been slain (Rev 5:6)

<sup>17</sup> A resource on these things is Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac*, 80–85; and J. Edwin Wood, “Isaac Typology and the New Testament,” *NTS* 14 (1967/68) 583–89.