

**February 19, 2017 - Gen. 22:1 – 23:20 - Binding of Isaac, Death of Sarah**

**Psalm 16**

**Haftarah - (1) Isaiah 33:7-16 + 22**

**(2) Judges 3:1-9 + 15**

**(3) 1 Kings 10:1-9 +23-24**

### **The Akedah**

The account of Abraham's binding of Isaac for sacrifice is called the Akedah (va-ya'akod = binding) by the Jewish sages.

**Gen. 22:1–19** describes God's command to Abraham to offer Isaac, the son of his old age, as a sacrifice. Obedient to the command, Abraham takes Isaac to the place of sacrifice and binds him on the altar. The angel of the Lord then bids Abraham to stay his hand and a ram is offered in Isaac's stead. The Akedah became in Jewish thought the supreme example of self-sacrifice in obedience to God's will and the symbol of Jewish martyrdom throughout the ages.

Philo argues Abraham's sacrifice was unprecedented in that he was not governed by motives of custom, honor, or fear (as in pagan stories of men who had sacrificed their children), but solely by the love of God.

For Christians, the story resonates with the Father's act of giving up of his only begotten Son to die on the cross for the salvation of humanity. In early Christian doctrine, the sacrifice of Isaac is used as a type for the sacrifice of Jesus (see Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 3:18; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogica*, 1:5, 1) There are early Christian artistic representations of the story in the third-century Roman catacomb of Priscilla.

The phrase "only begotten son" is a reference to Isaac as well as Christ.

**John 3:16** - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

**Genesis 22:16** - "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:"

### **Ethics vs. Obedience**

The Akedah incident is puzzling, even horrific, because it seems God contradicts his own character by ordering Isaac's sacrifice. Abraham is faced with eliminating his one heir, and watching God's promise disappear, through an act that we would consider criminal, and Abraham would consider unthinkable.

The Existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, in "Fear and Trembling," interprets the Akedah as an illustration of how far the "knight of faith" is ready to go in his "teleological suspension of the ethical." He argues the universal norms of morality have been

“overruled by God himself” and that there is “a higher and quite different source and form of obligation” than the simply ethical. Kierkegaard was the first thinker to posit the believer's *doubts* as the characteristic of religious life itself.

Similarly, in Jewish legal literature, the Akedah served as a paradigm for the right of a prophet to demand the temporal suspension of a law. Isaac obeyed his father and made ready to become the victim of what would normally have been considered a murder, but Abraham, as an established prophet, could be relied upon that this was really God's will (Sanh. 89b).

Reformed theologians argue there can't be a “suspension of the ethical.” God never intended for Isaac to be killed, thus there was not a reason for a suspension of ethics on God's part. The Divine “telos” or goal was accomplished when the knife was raised rather than when the knife fell. Even so, since we are all “children of wrath” by nature, Abraham has every moral justifiable reason to carry out the final sentence upon Isaac as God commands him.

Elsewhere, the scripture is solidly against any human sacrifice.

Jewish commentary on **Jeremiah 19:5** says: "which I commanded not" – this refers to the sacrifice of the son of Mesha, the king of Moab (II Kings 3:27); "nor spake it" – this refers to the daughter of Jephthah (Judg. 11:31); "neither came it to my mind" – this refers to the sacrifice of Isaac, the son of Abraham (Ta'an. 4a).

### **The Test**

To obey out of fear, i.e. to be forced to obey, would prove nothing. God wanted to learn of Abraham's love for him through this test. On the other hand, if Abraham and Isaac had known for sure that sacrifice would not be required, they would just be “going through the motions.”

According to Maimonides (Guide 3:24), the words "God tested Abraham" do not mean that God put him through a test, but that He made the example of Abraham serve as a test case of the extreme limits of the love and fear of God. The word for “test” (i.e., nissayon) is rabbinically similar to "banner" or "miracle" (i.e., nes) in Hebrew. Since God already knows the outcome of the test, its purpose is to "raise up" the righteous by lifting them up to a new spiritual level. "For now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12) means that God has made known to all men how far man is obliged to go in fearing Him.

God had already said Isaac would be Abraham's heir, to inherit after Abraham died:

**Genesis 15:4** - "...he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir."

Unlike a schizophrenic person who hears God ordering him to do something, Abraham had seen the God he conversed with do miraculous things like destroy Sodom, plague

Abimelech's household, and allow Sarah to conceive Isaac. Somehow, God would provide...

Still, the actual offering up of Isaac would have been the hardest thing anyone could be asked to do.

The writer of Hebrews gives us insight into his thinking:

**Genesis 22:5** - Abraham told the servants "we will return to you." Rashi states this was a prophecy of Isaac's resurrection.

**Hebrews 11:17-19** - "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: **Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead**; from whence also he received him in a figure."

Abraham believed Isaac would be somehow brought back to life. In fact, Isaac was brought back from the dead typologically.

The Midrash Hagadol states, "Although Isaac did not die, Scripture regards him as though he had died. And his ashes lay piled on the altar. That is why the text mentions Abraham and not Isaac."

## **Christ**

Christ was torn by a similar agony in the Garden of Gethsemane:

**Luke 22:42-44** - "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

**Romans 4** talks about the radical faith of Abraham, both in relation to Isaac's miraculous birth and his faith at Isaac's binding:

**4:3** - "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

**4:13** - "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."

**4:17-18** - "(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be."

**4:23-24** - "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;"

And also, his works followed his faith:

**James 2:21-22** - "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?"

### **Christ's crucifixion**

The faith and obedience of both Abraham and Isaac in this incident combine in Christ's self-sacrifice.

God sacrificed himself, thus bringing the ethical to a new level of "mystery" which human beings have yet to fully comprehend.

**John 15:13** - "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

See "The Sacrificed Seed of Abraham: Thoughts about the Akedah "  
<http://buff.ly/2loLS5V>