

# Abraham, Akedah and Atonement

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## Introduction

**N**arrative analysis is a more recent discipline in theology. During the years of dominance by the historical-critical method, biblical narratives were perceived as uneven confections of assorted myths. With an increased understanding of the Hebrew language,<sup>1</sup> narratives are now increasingly appreciated as very sophisticated writing informed by particular theological presuppositions. The following analysis of Genesis 22 illustrates this.<sup>2</sup>

The literary excellence of the OT writers was not devised to promote appreciation for their skills. Nor were the writers seeking merely to stoke the emotional needs of human nature. Instead, their desire was to point to the Messiah and his salvation. In fact, it can be argued substantively, as John Sailhamer and others do, that the actual details each writer includes (which are characteristic of the terse narrative style of the canon) are indicative of this.

Jesus Himself seems to substantiate this, by placing Himself as the central focus of the OT: "You search the Scriptures, [the OT at that time]. . . and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).<sup>3</sup>

Also, following His resurrection, to the two walking to Emmaus: "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Jacques Doukhan, to whom this study is dedicated, is my esteemed professor of the Hebrew language and thought.

<sup>2</sup>With the abbreviation of Genesis 22, I am referring to Genesis 22:1-19.

<sup>3</sup>Bible texts are quoted from the NKJV unless noted otherwise.

Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Luke 24:27); and again later that day: "Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45).<sup>4</sup> This seems to strongly suggest that the OT narrative materials are not simply an eclectic collection of unrelated and random details.<sup>5</sup>

One caveat needs attention: Narrative analysis is a valuable tool. However, I submit that a present weakness of this method, besides its leaning toward a non-historical interpretation of biblical narratives, is the proclivity to overlook the possibility of any overarching theological stance operant in the biblical writer's mind.

The interpretations of Genesis 22 vary. However a long historical consensus exists in theological studies regarding the profound nature and significance of Gen 22:1-19. There are wide differences in *interpretation*, but not on the fact of its supreme importance in biblical narratives. This

<sup>4</sup>The Apostles continued this. For example, Peter: "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness. . ." (Acts 10:42-43).

<sup>5</sup>Calvin Seerveld so argues: "the Bible is not a heterogeneous collection of fragments. The Bible is not shards of supernatural information, plus empirical insights, plus thrilling flights of fancy which, when absorbed, lead to the Christian life. No, the Bible, I believe is at bottom simply one true story of the great deeds of the Lord fraught with promises" (*Rainbows for the Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Task* [Toronto: Toronto Tuppence Press, 1980], 90). Christ, in Luke 24, brings the focus even closer—on Himself.

Ellen White is eloquent: "In every page, whether history, or precept, or prophecy, the Old Testament Scriptures are irradiated with the glory of the Son of God. So far as it was of divine institution, the entire system of Judaism was a compacted prophecy of the gospel. To Christ 'give all the prophets witness.' Acts 10:43. From the promise given to Adam, down through the patriarchal line and the legal economy, heaven's glorious light made plain the footsteps of the Redeemer. Seers behold the Star of Bethlehem, the Shiloh to come, as future things swept before them in mysterious procession. In every sacrifice Christ's death was shown. In every cloud of incense His righteousness ascended. By every jubilee trumpet His name was sounded. In the awful mystery of the holy of holies His glory dwelt" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* [Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1940, 211-212]).

attention has not been limited exclusively to Christianity. All three monotheistic traditions that claim Abraham as their "father" (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), insist on the significance of this passage for their theology.<sup>6</sup>

#### Analysis of Genesis 22:1-19

*Verse 1:* "Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham." The formula "after these things" is found only four times in the Pentateuch—all four in Genesis (15:1; 22:1; 22:20; 48:1).<sup>7</sup> Notably, two of the four are within the Abraham narratives.

This brings questions to mind, such as: after *what* "things"? And why is *this* pericope being singled out? With the many narratives in Genesis, what was the author's intent in "tagging" so few narratives in this particular manner?

In Gen 22:1, "after these things" introduces God speaking again to Abraham. Perhaps this is to remind us of Abraham's long, complex life, as

<sup>6</sup>For example, Islam's sacred *Koran* includes this narrative. However, the intended victim of Abraham's knife is *unnamed*. By the end of the third Islamic century, however, Ishmael has become the intended sacrifice. (See R. Firestone, "Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice: Issues in Quranic Exegesis," in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34 [1989]: 117.) References to the "Akedah" (the nomenclature given to the Genesis 22 narrative in most Jewish writings; derived from the verb in v. 9, when Abraham "bound" Isaac) also appear in the earliest extrabiblical Jewish sources. Modern Jewish scholars continue probing Genesis 22 for discussions of their "martyrdom" in the Holocaust and other historical pogroms against their people. They frequently interpret the Genesis 22 narrative to mean that in Isaac the Jewish people were thus "prophesied" and "destined" by God to be "sacrifice" for the world. However, since Isaac, there has been no halting of the knife from heaven. For one example, see Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends* (New York: Random House, 1976), 97.

<sup>7</sup>The first follows Abraham's daring rescue of Lot and the subsequent worship of Yahweh by Abraham and Melchizedek (chap. 14). "After these things" also opens chapter 15 where Yahweh speaks again to Abraham and reaffirms his covenant, with its specific promise of numerous descendants. The third immediately follows Gen 22:1-19 so the reader will separate the next verses from the just completed event. The final appearance of "after these things" (chap. 48:1) introduces the reader to the blessings of Jacob upon Joseph's two sons following the narrative of Jacob's reunion in Egypt with his son Joseph.

recorded in the nine preceding chapters?<sup>8</sup> Abraham now is well over 100 years old—an old man even for his generation. In his earlier years he had been strong to endure hardship and to brave danger, but now the ardor of his youth has passed. The son of Promise has grown to manhood by his side. Heaven seems to have crowned with blessing a life with hopes long-deferred.

But then comes the shock: “God tested Abraham.” The reader is abruptly informed at the outset that the following harrowing experience comes from *God*. The subsequent lethal commands are not a figment of Abraham's imagination nor his misinterpretation of a dream. The test is not instigated by Satan.<sup>9</sup> Neither is it a matter of Abraham losing his mind. The explicit description of *God's* responsibility is underscored both by the reversal in the Hebrew of the usual verb-subject sequence, and also with the unusual use of the definite article with God's name.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>This is Calvin's understanding: “The expression, ‘after these things,’ is not to be restricted to his last vision; Moses rather intended to comprise in one word the various events by which Abraham had been tossed up and down; and again, the somewhat more quiet state of life which, in his old age, he had lately begun to obtain. He had passed an unsettled life in continued exile up to his eightieth year; having been harassed with many contumelies and injuries; he had endured with difficulty an . . . anxious existence, in continual trepidation; famine had driven him out of the land whither he had gone, by the command and under the auspices of God, into Egypt. Twice his wife had been torn from his bosom; he had been separated from his nephew; he had delivered this nephew, when captured in war, at the peril of his own life. He had lived childless with his wife, when yet all his hopes were suspended upon his having offspring. Having at length obtained a son, he was compelled to disinherit him, and to drive him far from home. Isaac alone remained . . . The meaning, therefore, of the passage is, that by this temptation, as if by the last act, the faith of Abraham was far more severely tried than before” (*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948], 560-561).

<sup>9</sup>By comparison, the readers of the Job narratives are carefully informed (Job 1) that Job's severe trials come at Satan's provocation.

<sup>10</sup>Phyllis Tribble correctly notes: “God, indeed God, tested Abraham. Though such a procedure is implicit throughout the preceding [Abrahamic] stories, only here does the verb ‘test’ (*nissah*) appear. The explicit use startles the reader. It portends a crisis beyond the usual tumult. How many times does Abraham have to be tested? . . . After delays and obstacles Isaac, the child of promise, has come. Let the story now end happily, providing readers and characters respite from struggle and suspense. But that is not to be. Vocabulary and syntax show otherwise. The divine generic *Elohim* occurs with the definite article *Ha* suggesting ‘the God, the very God.’ Reversing the usual

The verb “tested” is not uncommon in the OT. It is found 36 times in the Piel. These often point to other divinely-appointed “tests” which generally include explanations of *why* the test is permitted. The reader is often informed of its reasonableness (Exod 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut 8:2, 6; 13:3, 4).<sup>11</sup> However, in this instance, we are not told *why* God is testing Abraham—doubtless suggesting that even Abraham himself wasn't told.

—“He said to him, ‘Abraham!’” God has already spoken to Abraham on several occasions in the preceding narratives (12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15). However, only *this* time does God address Abraham by name *first*—perhaps singling out the solemnity of this moment.

—“And he said, *hinnēni*.” This response by Abraham to God occurs in Gen 22:1, 11. Only two additional times in the entire Pentateuch will an address by God be coupled with this response.<sup>12</sup> Abraham's atypical response perhaps suggests that he himself was recognizing the portent of this occasion, and also his posture of obedience. He responds to God in this manner only in this narrative.

*Verse 2*: “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.” This is the fourth time God's commands to Abraham have involved his family ties.<sup>13</sup> As painful as the earlier sundering of these bonds must have been, this surely is the ultimate devastation. Even the arrangement of the nouns in the Hebrew conveys a particularly strong sense of gravity. The three-fold description increases and intensifies Abraham's attachment to his

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order of a Hebrew sentence, this subject precedes its verb. The narrator makes clear that an extraordinary divine act is taking place. God, indeed God, tested Abraham” (author's emphasis; Phyllis Tribble, *Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah*, Valparaiso University Gross Memorial Lecture, 1989 [Valparaiso, IN: Valparaiso University Press, 1990], 1-2).

<sup>11</sup>I.e., “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’” (Exod 20:20).

<sup>12</sup>When God addresses Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:4), and when He addresses Jacob by name (Gen 31:11). Later, the lad Samuel responds with “*hinnēni*” to whom he thinks is Eli calling, suggesting the attitude of obedience that Abraham exhibits in this narrative.

<sup>13</sup>(1) Gen 12:1, leaving kindred. (2) Gen 13:5-18, separation from Lot. (3) Gen 17:17-18, separation from Ishmael.

son Isaac: literally, “Your son, your only/unique one, Isaac, whom you love.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the triple designation plus name rules out any possible confusion. Abraham couldn’t evade the realization that God was clearly aware of what He was asking Abraham to do—and that He was specifically identifying the promised heir.<sup>15</sup> It could not be Eliezer, whom Abraham once suggested as his heir (Gen 15:2), nor Ishmael, his son by Hagar, whom he begged God to let stand before Him (Gen 17:18).

The phrase—“whom you love” involves the initial use of the word “love” in the OT. With the oft-noted verbal reticence of this narrative, the tender regard Abraham had for Isaac is surely highlighted. God Himself is speaking. Thus the first time He uses this word in all his recorded dialogues in the OT is significant.

—“And go forth” occurs two times in the Abrahamic narratives. Both are at the outset of two signal commands to Abraham.<sup>16</sup> Gabriel Josipovici notes the alliteration:

<sup>14</sup>God’s initial three-fold command to Abraham in Gen 12:1 increases intensity as it unfolds: “Get out of your country/[away] from your family/[away] from your father’s household . . .”

<sup>15</sup>Phyllis Trible is sensitive to the significance of this identification that God announces: “the object of the verb is not a simple word but heavy-laden language. It moves from the generic term of kinship, ‘your son,’ through the exclusivity of relationship, ‘your only one,’ through the intimacy of bonding, ‘whom you love,’ to climax in the name that fulfills promise, the name of laughter and joy, the name *Yishaq* (Isaac). Language accumulates attachments: ‘your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac.’ Thus far every divine word (imperative, particle, and objects) shows the magnitude of the test.” (Trible, 2).

<sup>16</sup>Gen 12:1: “Go forth from your country and your kindred and your father’s house.” It is found only two more times in the OT (in Song of Songs 2:10, 13—feminine form), obviously very rare usage (again underscoring the solemnity of the command).

“The phrase ‘go forth’ serves as a bridge between the two narratives about Abraham. The first tells about the demand at the beginning of his history that he detach himself from his land, his home and his father’s house and go to the unknown country, at God’s command, ‘the land which I will show you.’ The second, at the end of this history, describes the most difficult demand of all, that he go to the land of Moriah and sacrifice his only, beloved son on one of the mountains ‘which I will tell you.’” (Shimon Bar-Efrat, *The Art of the Biblical Story* [New York: Almond Press, 1979], 213).

An arresting alliterative phrase urges us forward and leaves us no chance to pause or look back: *lekh lekha*, orders God, take yourself and go. It is a phrase which is used only once again in the Bible, also by God and also to Abraham: “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and *lekh lekha* to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of” (Gen. 22:2). This time the forward thrust of the alliteration is barely reined in by any compensating sense of return: the brevity of the first word, *lekh*, forces the breath to leap on to *lekha*, and the repetition accentuates the urgency, an urgency carried over into the repeated *kha* sounds of the rest of the phrase: *lekh lekha me’arzkha umimoladtakha umibait avikha el ha’aretz asher arekha*.<sup>17</sup>

—“To the land of Moriah.” No further identification of the divinely-ordained location is given except the assurance that God will signal Abraham at the appropriate time. Again, as in chapter 12, Abraham is commanded to go on a mission with its final destination a mystery. Verse 4 informs the reader that the designated place for sacrifice was a three-day journey away. Abraham would need to travel approximately 70 kilometers (45 miles) from Beer-sheva. However, traveling long distances was not new to Abraham.

—“Offer him there as a burnt offering.” The first two imperatives in v. 2 would not have been alarming for Abraham. He is described in Genesis as regularly offering sacrifices to God. But with the third imperative, the true horror of the command is now made clear. Furthermore, the term “burnt offering” is used not less than six times in this and the next few verses, the repetition keeping before the reader’s mind the extreme nature of the demand.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 71.

<sup>18</sup>Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), includes a whole chapter on biblical repetition. He makes the point that in sparse narratives (of which Genesis 22 certainly is one), any repetition becomes even more significant.

What is Abraham's response? "So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac, his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."<sup>19</sup>

From preceding narratives the reader knows Abraham as a mighty warrior who readily speaks.<sup>20</sup> However, now he only responds "*hinnēnî*," v. 2, and then becomes uncharacteristically silent. There is no more discourse, only actions, until Moriah.<sup>21</sup>

The reader "sees" Abraham "saddle the donkey" and "cut the wood," and should recall how "it is rare to find routine tasks mentioned in biblical narrative."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, one wonders *why* Abraham at his advanced age, and with his great wealth, is doing these tedious chores. Surely these were tasks he didn't normally have to do for himself—this "mighty prince" of God (Gen 23:6) who could arm "318 trained servants who were born in his own house" (Gen 14:14).

*Why* does Abraham saddle the donkey and cut the wood for the sacrifice himself? Is this giving a hint of Abraham's anguish? In his turmoil he perhaps doesn't want to explain the journey (and thus God's command) to anyone. Maybe he knows someone would try to persuade him not to go, telling him he must be mistaken about what God said. Or, perchance, he *wants* to be alone as he wrestles with his thoughts. Thus, he attends to the preparations himself.

Notice also how Isaac is brought into the narrative *after* the two servants, perhaps indicating that Abraham woke him up last in his distress.

<sup>19</sup>One cannot help but compare Abraham's ready obedience to an unwelcome task, to that of the prophet Jonah.

<sup>20</sup>With his relatives to resolve difficulties (Lot, chap. 13), to royalty (kings of the Plains and Melchizedek, chap. 14, and king of Gerar, chap. 20), and most notably to God (chaps. 15, 17, 18).

<sup>21</sup>For example: "Early the next morning Abraham got up." This is an identical response to 21:14 when Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away at God's directive. Even though both this command and that of chap. 21 were devastating for Abraham, one sees careful, prompt obedience.

<sup>22</sup>Bar-Efrat, 80.

Suddenly the narrative alerts us to the fact that the journey to the unknown destination lasted three days.

*Verse 4*: "On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance." The distance traveled before arriving at Moriah surely prolongs the agony for Abraham. He must have reviewed the three-fold command from God over and over in his mind hoping he had made some mistake. There was plenty of time in three days to think. Yet the narrator passes over any mention of the journey. We are not permitted to view those three torturing days.<sup>23</sup>

"Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.": possibly suggesting the height of the mountain that God revealed to Abraham. The more common OT description of "seeing" is "he looked . . . and saw." Thus, the author, by describing Abraham's "seeing" by (literally) "lift[ing] up his eyes" perhaps hints of Abraham's inner struggle, underscoring his deep mental anguish by implying his head was bowed down. Or, is the use of this particular expression possibly suggesting more than just physical sight?<sup>24</sup>

*Verse 5*: "And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.'"

Abraham, from his extensive household, brought only two young servants with him. Now having arrived at the hour of sacrifice, he leaves them with the donkey. Perhaps even yet they might try to restrain Abraham. Or, possibly, he didn't want them to view what was going to happen. Father and son must go alone.

—" [We]. . . will worship." The perceptive reader notices the initial use of this word for "worship" by the narrator in the Pentateuch. Abraham's faith apparently has not wavered throughout the three-day journey. Even

<sup>23</sup> . . . a three-day journey—which according to Kierkegaard lasted longer than the four thousand years separating us from the event . . ." (Wiesel, 72).

<sup>24</sup>Generally speaking, commentators take this expression to indicate a literal upward movement of the eyes. A closer look at its actual usage, however, indicates that this might not necessarily be the case. See below for fuller discussion.

with pain surely stabbing his heart, he can still affirm his intent to worship God.

—“We will come back to you.” This is an electrifying statement in light of what Abraham faces. The verbs are cohortative and thus reveal emphatic determination. The plural “we” should be shocking. Though the narrator does not directly disclose Abraham’s agony, this profound statement of faith perhaps gives a glimpse of Abraham’s mental wrestling during the long three-day journey. The author of the book of Hebrews (11:17-19) suggests this when he writes: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. . . . accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead . . .” The nature of Abraham’s faith on the mountain of sacrifice is astounding when one recalls that he had no precedent of any resurrection on which to base his faith. A 20th-century person looking back through such miracles subsequent to Abraham can only marvel!

*Verse 6:* “[Abraham] took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son; and he took the fire, . . . and a knife, . . . and the two of them went together.”

The verb “[Abraham] took” completes the divine command to “take” in v. 2. God has commanded Abraham, and Abraham has conscientiously obeyed. Notice too, how in this verse the sacrificial implements, “wood for the burnt offering” and “fire and knife,” surround “his son Isaac.”<sup>25</sup>

Isaac now takes the place of the beast of burden. Why is the donkey left behind? The poignant picture is that of the victim bearing the instrument of his death. Father and son go alone. The text states: “the two of them went together.”

The wood has the heavier weight of those items that are needed for sacrifice and Abraham is elderly. Is this why Isaac carries the wood? Even so, notice how the father carries the knife and fire, as if to shield his son from their harm as long as possible.

*Verses 7-8:* “Isaac spoke to his father and said, ‘My father!’ and he said ‘Here I am, my son.’ Then he said, ‘Look the fire and wood, but where is the

lamb for a burnt offering?’ And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So the two of them went together.”

At Isaac’s question, Abraham again responds “*hinnēnū*.” Note this identical response of Abraham to God earlier. Is this alerting the reader to the intensity of the moment?<sup>26</sup>

The poignant dialogue: “My father” . . . “my son” reminds the reader again and again of the relationship between Abraham and Isaac in this narrative—four times in just these two verses. In fact, the word “son” occurs *ten* times between verses 2-16. This constant reminder is not just redundant reference to the blood relationship between Abraham and Isaac. Rather, this obvious repetition pointedly stresses the horror that a father goes to sacrifice his son.<sup>27</sup>

—“God Himself will see/provide.” One of many times this narrative emphasizes “seeing,” God’s involvement dominates Abraham’s guarded response to Isaac. Normal Hebrew syntax is again reversed and the subject precedes the verb. Note, also, how it includes a lingering ambiguity of apposition linking “burnt offering” and “my son.” Was this the only way Abraham could yet speak of what was just ahead?

—“And the two of them went together.” This phrase is repeated the second time in just three verses. Was this the point where Isaac began to understand Abraham’s enigmatic response? If so, he did not try to escape, for we are again reminded that *even yet* father and son “went together.”

*Verses 9-10:* “When they reached the place God had told them about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son

<sup>26</sup>Refer to comments on v. 1, above.

<sup>27</sup>This is not a strained reading of this conspicuous repetition. It is an assumption of this paper that the Genesis book has one author. Thus we find another example of repetition for accentuation. Such is also evident in the narrative of the first murder (Cain and Abel) where in just three verses (Gen 4:8-10) the word “brother” is mentioned five times. The reader already knows Cain and Abel are brothers. Thus, again, repetition accentuates the horror of that scene even more. For the most shocking aspect of the incident is not only that murder has taken place (as terrible as that is), but that fratricide has been committed (point well-taken by Bar-Efrat, 213). In this pericope, the author again repeats family ties in another critical event.

<sup>25</sup>Trible, 5.

Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.”

“Then they came to the place of which God [“God” again with definite article as in v. 1] had told him.” Once more we are reminded of the certainty of God’s instructions and how carefully Abraham had carried them out.<sup>28</sup>

At this point the narrative slows down dramatically with the preparations on the mountain. Why are so many details included here? These preparations for a burnt offering would be unnecessary instruction to OT readers, well-familiar with sacrificial worship. Yet note the calculated accuracy depicted through this sequence of six verbs. Abraham alone is the subject of them all, with Isaac appearing as object after each group of three.<sup>29</sup> Jo Milgrom comments, “These are particularly desperate moments because at each of these pivots Abraham could have turned back.”<sup>30</sup> Even the action of taking the knife is divided into two separate movements—putting forth his hand, and then taking the knife—with the reader reminded yet again of Abraham’s intention “to slay his son.”

We are never informed *when* Abraham told his son of the divine command, or *what* he said to Isaac. Whenever it occurred, there apparently was no resistance. For when Isaac is again mentioned, we find that Abraham has bound him for sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> As a young man, Isaac could easily have

<sup>28</sup>Completing, thus, v. 2, that Abraham was to “. . . go to the land of Moriah . . . on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

<sup>29</sup>Trible suggests the pattern which serves to heighten the tension:

“Abraham built an altar  
arranged wood  
bound Isaac his son  
laid him on the altar, on wood  
put forth Abraham his hand,  
took the knife to slay his son” (Trible, 7)

<sup>30</sup>In *The Binding of Isaac: The Akedah, A Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art* (Oakland, CA: BIBAL Press, 1988), 14.

<sup>31</sup>It is one of these six verbs *wayyāqod*, with its solitary appearance in the OT in this form, that subsequently becomes title for this narrative in Jewish writings—“The Akedah.” The narrative never reveals when Abraham told Isaac of God’s command. Thus, perhaps this verb of the six identifies the last moment when Isaac would have had to know.

overpowered his aged father. But instead, the reader becomes aware of a second profound act of faith and obedience. For Abraham’s beloved son, heir of the promise, lies ready to die by his own father’s hand. The father has given his son. The son has yielded his life. All Christian and Jewish writers pause long over these two verses.<sup>32</sup>

*Verses 11-12*: “But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ ‘Here am I,’ he replied. ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me.’”

At this critical juncture one immediately notices the change of the name of God used up to this point. This name will now be used until the end of the narrative.

The double vocative “Abraham, Abraham!” reinforces the intervention from heaven,<sup>33</sup> as does the father’s third “*hinnēnū*” (as in vv. 1 and 7), all adding to the intensity of this moment.

Also punctuating God’s urgent halt is the double negative to ensure the total safety of Isaac, “do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him.”

—“Now I know that you fear God.” The divine being declares the meaning of Abraham’s act. This direct characterization of Abraham uttered from heaven thus has absolute authority. The reader is left with no doubt that true fear of God consists in complete subjection to His sovereign will.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup>I.e., “Few narratives in Genesis can equal this story in dramatic tension. The writer seems to prolong the tension of both Abraham and the reader in his depiction of the last moments before God interrupted the action and called the test to a halt” (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992], 178).

<sup>33</sup>The double call is rare in the Pentateuch. Three other occasions of urgency employ it: Jacob (Gen 46:2); Moses (Exod 3:4); and Samuel (1 Sam 3:10). Very similar would be King David’s mourning over his son (2 Sam 18:3). All these occasions are marked with high intensity.

<sup>34</sup>Nahum Sarna is eloquent on this point, describing it as the “definition of relationship between man and God . . . [which finds the] fullest expression in the realm of action” (*Understanding Genesis* [New York: Schocken Books, 1966], 163).

—“Your son, your only/unique one.” God repeats this designation of Isaac at this juncture (as in v. 2), repetition assuring the reader that God recognizes full well the nature of His command to Abraham.

*Verse 13:* “Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.”

Again “Abraham lifts up his eyes and sees.” The narrator utilizes the same formula as in v. 4 to mark off another poignant moment for Abraham. The first time he “lifted up his eyes” his heart must have stopped as he saw the mountain God indicated. He knew then for sure that he had not been mistaken about God’s command. And *now*, at *this* moment he sees the substitute for his son.

As alluded to above, the phrase “[he] looked . . . and saw” is the most common way of depicting physical sight in the OT. It is used over 860 times; over 240 times in the Pentateuch; and almost 100 times in Genesis alone. Forms of “to see” also occur seven times within 15 verses of Genesis 22. Thus it becomes tantalizing to notice the few times when the rare phrase “lifting up the eyes” is tagged to the already obvious word for “seeing.” Could this possibly imply something beyond mere physical sight?<sup>35</sup> The narrator could have written that Abraham “saw.” He writes in this manner almost 250 times in the Pentateuch. However, at this dramatic point in Gen

<sup>35</sup>Texts include: (1) Gen 13:10, Lot “lifting eyes” and seeing Sodom (hinting that he was seeing more than just the fertile valley, but was also considering what advantages there would be to living there). Also, he was in a position enabling him to look down into the valley and thus didn’t need to “lift” his eyes in a physical sense; (2) Gen 24:63-64, used *twice* in two verses, as Isaac and Rebekah first encounter each other (possibly denoting deep emotions both might have been experiencing at this “arranged” marriage); (3) 33:1, when Jacob “lifted his eyes” and saw Esau approaching, thereby suggesting the anxiety he was experiencing (remembering his elder brother’s fury at losing the birthright); (4) 43:29, Joseph “lifted” his eyes and saw Benjamin as his brothers *bowed* before him (with complex emotions seeing his brother again plus remembering his past dreams and present fulfillment)—he certainly didn’t need to *raise* his eyes to view prostrate people; (5) Num 24:2, Balaam “lifts his eyes” to view the Israelite camp in the valley *beneath* him.

22 there is added “lifted up the eyes” to the word “seeing.” Is this possibly indicating something beyond natural vision?<sup>36</sup>

In the NT, Jesus Himself declared that “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). Could He have been alluding to this instance of “lifting up the eyes and seeing” of Gen 22:13? Was the Messiah’s future mission of salvation something that Abraham began to “see” there on Moriah’s mountain? The rare formula “lifting up the eyes,” used at two critical junctures in this narrative, could possibly signify something beyond mere natural sight. The narrator seems intentional that the reader “see” as Abraham did when he “went over and took the ram and sacrificed it for a burnt offering *instead of his son.*” Ellen White so contends:

This terrible ordeal was imposed upon Abraham that he might see the day of Christ, and realize the great love of God for the world, so great that to raise it from its degradation, He gave His only-begotten Son to a most shameful death.

Abraham learned of God the greatest lesson ever given to mortal. His prayer that he might see Christ before he should die was answered. He saw Christ; he saw all that mortal can see, and live. By making an entire surrender, he was able to understand the vision of Christ, which had been given him. He was shown that in giving His only-begotten Son to save sinners from eternal ruin, God was making a greater and more wonderful sacrifice than ever man could make. . . .

. . . In the words of Abraham, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” (Gen 22:8), and in God’s provision of a sacrifice instead of Isaac, it was declared that no man could make expiation for himself. The pagan system of sacrifice was

<sup>36</sup>The “lifting up the eyes” seems enigmatic and deserves attention. Gudmundur Olafsson, “The Use of *NS* in the Pentateuch and its Significance for the Biblical Understanding of Forgiveness,” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1988), 148-154, and C. S. Reif, “A Root to Look Up: A Study of the Hebrew *nasa’ ayin*,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 36 (1985): 230-244, both begin to turn in this direction.

wholly unacceptable to God. No father was to offer up his son or his daughter for a sin offering. The Son of God alone can bear the guilt of the world.

Through his own suffering, Abraham was enabled to behold the Saviour's mission of sacrifice.<sup>37</sup>

The drama of this substitution is also emphasized through the phrase "behold a ram," answering Isaac's earlier question: "behold . . . where is the lamb?" in v. 7. This is also the first time the word for this sacrificial animal is used in Genesis.

*Verse 14:* "And Abraham called the name of the place The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'"

Abraham now names the mountain. The "name draws attention to God, not Abraham. It is not Abraham-has-performed, but God-will-provide."<sup>38</sup>

*Verses 15-18:* "Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: 'By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—, blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants [lit. 'seed'] shall possess the gate of their [lit. 'his'] enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'"

After the sacrifice, the "angel of the Lord" called out of heaven the second time to Abraham. *Three* times in just 19 verses God speaks to Abraham, *two* of them at this pivotal climax of the narrative.<sup>39</sup>

(Verse 16) "By myself I have sworn." This is the solitary instance of God swearing this way in all of the patriarchal narratives, crowning these

<sup>37</sup>White, *The Desire of Ages*, 469.

<sup>38</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 109.

<sup>39</sup>And this is the *last* time God speaks to Abraham.

words with extreme importance.<sup>40</sup> God is obviously reaffirming his earlier covenant with Abraham but in a dramatically expanded manner. "And he said," used over and over in these 19 verses, is now punctuated with (literally) "says Yahweh."<sup>41</sup> Even the verbs are reinforced by the absolute infinitive—adding "most abundantly"! Noticeably, the blessing is now extended to Abraham's descendants, and victory over enemies is mentioned for the first time. These blessings are also uniquely presented as the result of Abraham's actions, and not merely as God's gracious initiative, as in previous chapters. God specifically praises Abraham's obedience in this covenant statement. Note also the mention of "nations" for the first time in the covenant expression. A significant "hint" that the messianic gift was to extend beyond the Abrahamic line.

#### Atonement Pointers

The narrative of Genesis 22 is profound.<sup>42</sup> Each of the "particulars" beckons attention and interpretation. It is very apparent that the narrator has displayed, as Robert Alter cogently remarks, "his omniscience with a drastic selectivity."<sup>43</sup> It is the position of this paper that the accumulative effect of the various particulars of Genesis 22 and its surrounding context cannot be brushed aside as merely coincidental.

1. Isaac's birth, in just the previous chapter (21), is announced in a very singular manner.<sup>44</sup> Up to this birth, the author of Genesis has described the

<sup>40</sup>This type of oath is extremely rare in all of Scripture. Three other examples: Isa 45:23; Jer 22:5; 49:13 (Heb 6:13, 14, the NT reference to this important oath).

The Pentateuch subsequently has repeated references to this oath (24:7; 26:3; 50:24; Exod 8:5; 33:1).

<sup>41</sup>"Says Yahweh" is used constantly by the prophets, but is rare in the historical books (Num 14:28; 1 Sam 2:30; 2 Kgs 9:26; 19:33).

<sup>42</sup>Sailhamer is one of many who singles out Genesis 22: "Few narratives in Genesis can equal this story in dramatic tension" (178).

<sup>43</sup>Alter, 126.

<sup>44</sup>And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him" (Gen 21:1-2).

conception of a child as the result of the husband “knowing” his wife.<sup>45</sup> However, in this instance we are told that “the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken” (21:1).

Sarah conceived, without the previously-used Genesis formula of her husband “knowing” her. This in no way suggests that Abraham was not involved! This is not a virgin birth. Sarah has, however, been pointedly depicted as well-beyond childbearing years (chap. 18). Thus this birth of Isaac is miraculous in that fact alone, pointing the perceptive reader to the later miracle involved in the Messiah’s unusual birth.

2. The text declares that Isaac’s miraculous birth also came “at the *set time* of which God had spoken to him,” alluding to a later fulfillment of God’s word when at “the fullness of the time” the Messiah would be born (Gal 4:4).

3. The birth announcement involves both names for God that are found in Genesis 22, the shift in names occurring there at the decisive interruption on Moriah.

4. God explicitly informs Abraham what he is to call his son: “Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac’” (Gen 17:19), bringing to mind the later words of the angel to Joseph, “you shall call His name Jesus” (Matt 1:21). Matthew quotes the exact LXX phrase of Gen 17:19.

5. The word “love” is used for the first time in Genesis in this narrative, specifying a father’s love for his son. Surely fathers loved their sons before Abraham. However, this particular relationship is singled out.

6. Specific mention of Moriah: later readers would be reminded of when God halted the plague against Israel (2 Sam 24:15-25), where the Temple would stand (2 Chr 3:1), and thus, “in NT times, the vicinity of Calvary—where sin’s great Plague would be halted.”<sup>46</sup>

7. Abraham’s journey to Moriah is specifically pointed out as being a “three day” journey. “Three days” proves to be a significant marker in the

Pentateuch, sensitizing the reader to the three days of Christ’s death and resurrection (see footnote 49).

8. The reader is given a double reminder linking father and son—“the two of them went together.”

9. The detail of Isaac carrying the wood to the place of sacrifice is explicitly noted.

10. The dramatic slowdown in the narrative in vv. 9-10, sensitizing readers to the only time “in history by which it is surpassed: that where the Great Father gave His Isaac to a death from which there was no deliverance.”<sup>47</sup>

11. Curiously, Isaac is silent. He never speaks, except once—on Moriah’s mountain. Isaiah later writes of the Messiah: “Yet he opened not his mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter” (53:7).

12. The word for the “sacrificial ram” occurs first in this narrative. Furthermore, the ram is offered “instead of” Isaac, implying a substitutionary sacrifice. The LXX translation of this word (*anti*) is the same as used in Mark 10:45 to describe Jesus’ substitutionary atonement: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for [*anti*] many.”

It can be argued that the narrator develops a whole constellation of salvation images in Genesis 22. A father giving his son; a son yielding to the father’s will; a sacrifice, wood, altar, ram, faith and obedience. Taken in entirety, the poignant details of this narrative seem to point to the Great Sacrifice of Christ.

### Theological Implications

Much current Narrative analysis assumes the nonhistorical, mythical nature of OT events and personages with interest focused rather on probing the psychological nuances of the characters.<sup>48</sup> More importantly, the various

<sup>47</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis 12:1-36:43*, vol. 2, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 218.

<sup>48</sup>See Alter, and David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewel, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), for two examples.

<sup>45</sup>Gen 4:1, 25—Adam and Eve; 4:17—Cain.

<sup>46</sup>Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 143.

details included by biblical narrators have not generally been allowed to carry theological import. However, a “close reading of the text” suggests a deliberate hermeneutic pervading the Abrahamic narratives.<sup>49</sup>

New Testament materials also give evidence of linkage with Genesis 22. It could be argued that it was some of the very particulars in Genesis 22 that the NT writers pondered as they wrote of Christ and His death. The Apostle Paul seems to have lingered long over Genesis 22 when he writes “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all*, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:31, 32, emphasis supplied). Had John the Baptist been moved when studying Gen 22:7-8 and pondering “My father . . . where is the lamb?” coupled with Isaiah 53, when he announced by the Jordan River, “Behold! The *Lamb of God*, who takes away the sin of the *world!*” (John 1:29, 36, emphasis supplied)?

Is the word “love” describing a father’s heart initially used in Genesis 22 so that when later God Himself calls from heaven twice, “This is *My beloved*

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<sup>49</sup>Within the surrounding chapters, we note that Isaac’s name is given by a divine being before birth (Gen 17:19: as will happen with Christ, Matt 1:21); the miraculous conception (of both Isaac and Christ); the victim (both Isaac and Jesus) silent and yielding before death (Isa 53:7); both Isaac and Christ bearing the wood to the place of sacrifice (Gen 22:6; John 19:17); resurrection on the “third day” (Isaac never dies; but he “miraculously” rises from the altar on the “third day.” Even Jewish Midrash ties the “third day” to resurrection with Hos 6:2. *Genesis Rabbah*, vol. 1, 491. Also: “There are many three days mentioned in the Holy Scripture, of which one is the Resurrection of the Messiah” (*Bereshith Rabba*); and “The Holy One doesn’t leave His just men in sorrow more than three days, as it is said, ‘After two days will He revive us; on the third day He will raise us up that we may live in His presence (Hos 6:2)’” (Parasha 56.1). Thus Josipovici rightly suggests: “[in the Bible] a section comes to a definite closure and is followed by another with a clear beginning, often years later and in another place. Yet gradually, as the new section unfolds, elements of the earlier section start to be picked up and we are made to sense a continuity between the two which is deeper than that of mere chronology, alerting us to the fact that at all times and in all cases chronology is but a weak joiner of two moments in time. There is . . . in the Bible, a sense of the infinite depths of individual moments, and the awareness of the possibility of the perpetual enrichment of the material from within rather than by mere extension” (Josipovici, 86).

Son, in whom I am well pleased.”<sup>50</sup> Later readers would better grasp what love was involved in *His* heart for *His* Son? The mention *three times* to Abraham by God in Genesis 22 of Isaac as “your son, your only son” also finds echo in Christ’s words to Nicodemus when he tells him that “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*” (John 3:16).

The Apostle Paul also does careful exegesis of Genesis. He notes (Gal 3:8), “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’*” Of his several statements of the Abrahamic covenant, Paul was distinctly referring to the blessing in Genesis 22 and the *final* covenantal declaration to *Abraham*. Two previous times God’s covenantal statement states that through Abraham all the earth would be blessed: in chap. 12, all the “families” of the earth; but in chap. 22, all the “nations” of the earth (which Paul renders “Gentiles”). For in v. 18, God dramatically changes the destination of the blessing from “families” in Gen 12:3 to “nations” in Gen 22:18.

This important passage in Galatians also seems to validate the earlier suggestion above that the “lifting up of the eyes” includes more than just physical sight. For Paul states that the “gospel” was “preached to Abraham,” and pinpoints this exact time with a direct quote from Gen 22:18. There is no direct mention of God “preaching” the “gospel” to Abraham in Genesis chaps. 12-25. When does God “preach” the “gospel” to Abraham? If the enigmatic obscure formula “lifting up the eyes” can suggest something more than just natural eyesight, it could be hinting at Abraham’s perception opening when he “lifted his eyes” and “sees” the substitute lamb on Mt. Moriah.

Paul’s argument in later verses (Gal 3:15-16) must not go unnoticed in this context. He seems to continue his exegesis of Genesis 22 when he points to the deliberate change to the singular “Seed” in the Great Blessing of Genesis 22. Paul is not careless. He has traced the “seed” through its several promises within the Abrahamic narratives and thus demonstrates a

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<sup>50</sup>Matt 3:17—Christ’s baptism; 17:5—Christ’s transfiguration.

“close reading” of Gen 22:17, elaborating on a detail which many modern English versions do not translate precisely.

Paul apparently noticed that elsewhere in Genesis when the collective “seed” is used it appears with the plural pronoun “they” (e.g., Gen 15:13). In Gen 3:15—the first covenant promise—one finds the first mention of the “seed” but used with the third person *singular*. In Gen 16:10 (in God’s blessing to Hagar), “seed” is used with no pronoun. In 17:7, 9, a collective “seed” is used with *plural* pronouns. Yet in 22:17 and 24:60, the text includes a deliberate use of the *singular* pronoun. This pronominal precision continues in the discussion of the “seed” beyond the Pentateuch. For example, 2 Sam 7:12—“I will raise up your seed after you, . . . I will establish *his* kingdom.” Also 2 Kgs 17:20—“The Lord rejected all the people [“seed”] of Israel”—afflicted *them*, delivered *them*, etc. When a collective idea is implied, the pronominal suffix is plural. Further testimony can be found “indirectly” from the LXX. Of the 103 times where the Hebrew masculine pronoun is used in Genesis, *never* does the LXX violate the agreement of the pronoun and antecedent except in Genesis 3:15—evidence, perhaps, of a Messianic expectation.<sup>51</sup>

In Gen 22:17, the KJV appropriately translated the pronoun “his”—the Hebrew utilizes the third person *singular* pronominal suffix following “seed.” “and thy seed shall possess the gate of *his* enemies.” Thus there is a move in Gen 22:17-18 from a collective “seed” in v. 17a, to a singular “Seed” in vv. 17b-18. This is an important textual nuance Paul noticed (and built his exegesis upon) but which is excluded by most modern English translations.

This is not an isolated incident. Pronominal suffixes in the covenant blessings are not carelessly written. Subsequently in 24:60, as Rebekah leaves her home to go and marry Isaac, she is blessed: “May you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your seed possess the gate of those who hate *him*” (*again*, the third person singular pronominal

<sup>51</sup>See Johan Lust, “Messianism and Septuagint,” in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, 36 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 174-195. In Gen 22:17 the LXX has “the cities of the enemies,” omitting the pronoun altogether.

suffix!).<sup>52</sup> This deliberate focusing on a single “him” seems again to imply a Messianic understanding of these promises by the author of the Pentateuch—a significant detail upon which Paul builds his own argument.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, many have seen Isaac as a type of Christ in this narrative. We also tentatively argue that in the carefully crafted Genesis 22 narrative, the writer also seeks to rivet the attention of the reader upon the *father*. There is almost exclusive focus on Abraham. He is the subject of almost all the verbs. Perhaps it was here in Genesis that the NT writers learned of the Heavenly Father’s love for His Son, and how closely He was identified with Jesus in the Great Sacrifice.<sup>54</sup>

OT sacrifices for sin were God-ordained. They were a prominent part of Hebrew worship. However, in Genesis 22 one is instructed that God does not need the bloody sacrifice to bring His heart to love and forgive. It is because of the love already in His heart that He makes provision for the Atonement (Rom 5:8). And before any of the elaboration of the sacrificial ritual later in the Pentateuch, God first revealed to Abraham, the father of the

<sup>52</sup>Max Wilcox, “‘Upon the Tree’—Deut 21:22-23 in the New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96/1 (1977), especially 94-99, notes this important point.

<sup>53</sup>Jewish practice indirectly validates this interpretation. They blow the shofar horn, recalling the ram caught in the Moriah thicket, in anticipation of Yom Kippur, thus pointing forward to another divine event through Genesis 22. Indeed, in addition to Genesis 22, Christ’s atonement is prefigured all through the OT sacrificial system and the many types in the Israelite economy, and rightly so. The composition of the OT demonstrates that one cannot focus too much on what Christ’s salvation act involves.

<sup>54</sup>The NT writers would have also noted (as we have) the constant repetition of “father” and “son” and the poignant repetition of “the two of them together”; and the first use of the word “love”—thus the pointed accent on a *father’s* love. They also saw beneath the surface formula “he lifted up his eyes and saw”—realizing that on Mt. Moriah Abraham was “seeing” something more than just a mountain and a lamb. He was discerning not only the future Messiah but also now the *Father’s* part in giving his Son. Thus Abraham named Moriah’s mountain “The Lord sees . . . on the mountain of Yahweh, he will be seen” (with the insistent occurrences of variants of “to see” [vv. 2, 4, 12, 13], it makes sense to translate the verbs of v. 14 this way—enhancing what the writer is trying to portray in both a primary and secondary sense). The threefold repetition by God of (literally) “your son, your only/unique one” was also not lost on the NT writers (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, etc.).

true seed, what would be in *His* heart as he offered *His* only Son in sacrifice for sin.

The NT writers have not “advanced” theologically beyond the OT when insisting that “God is Love.” They are not introducing some new, exalted concept. Rather, it is the position of this paper that NT writers had lingered long over Genesis 22 and had seen, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who also inspired the Abrahamic narratives (2 Pet 1:20-21), that “*the Father Himself loves you*” (John 16:27). The collective details in Genesis 22 are not randomly included, but instead serve as intriguing pointers toward the Messiah’s sacrifice issuing from His Father’s heart.”

We moderns tend to pride ourselves on our access to the sophisticated tools of comparative linguistics, religion, psychology and archaeology in dealing with the biblical text. Yet we are humbled to recognize that the ancients saw all the angles, voiced all the questions and paradoxes, and emerged from the maze still one step ahead of us.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Milgrom, 62. Martin Buber says it equally well: “Scripture does not state its doctrine as doctrine but by telling a story and without exceeding the limits set by the nature of a story. It uses the method of story-telling to a degree, however, which world literature has not yet learned to use; and its cross-references and inter-connections, while noticeable, are so unobtrusive that a perfect attention is needed to grasp its intent—an attentiveness so perfect that it has not yet been fully achieved. Hence, it remains for us latecomers to point out the significance of what has hitherto been overlooked, neglected, insufficiently valued” (“Abraham the Seer,” *Judaism* 5 [1956]: 296).

# Creation, Life, and Hope

Essays in Honor  
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