For Abraham So Loved God That He Gave His Only Son
The Akedah: Images of Fatherhood, Faith, and Future Hope

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College
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Abstract

Abraham’s obedient response to the divine command of Genesis 22 has implications for his role as a father, patriarch, and covenant partner with Yahweh. The significance of Abraham’s choice in light of his various roles will be examined in the context of works such as Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, and Moses Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* as well as other historical Jewish literature. A critique of Abraham’s faith and the ethical concerns of his choice will also be given. The offering of Isaac will be discussed in relation to Christ’s death and resurrection.
Dedicated to my three beloved sons.
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Introduction

The Abrahamic covenant is shaped by commands and promises. One of the first fulfilled promises is the birth of Abraham’s long awaited son Isaac. Yet this fulfilled promise soon comes with a new command: “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 that I shall show you.”¹ Faced with an unthinkable choice as a father and the patriarch of a promised nation, Abraham acts in faith and obeys. He saddles his donkey and journeys to Moriah trusting that God will fulfill his promises. Calvin speaks of the faith that Abraham demonstrates as he acts boldly to obey:

…here we see the right conflict of Abraham’s faith, which is death is set before his eyes which was enough to confound him; but he extolled the power of God far beyond all this and said yet will God overcome and be a mighty conqueror herein.²

Abraham continues to trust that God will keep his covenant and thus Abraham offers his love and his hope. The faith that Abraham displays is definitely steadfast but is it necessarily praiseworthy? Obeying a voice that commands the murder of an innocent child seems absurd if not horrific. Many critiques of the Akedah have labeled Abraham’s offering of Isaac as nothing more than child abuse. Is it actually faith that is seen when Abraham raises the knife to kill his beloved son or is it mere foolishness?

The Akedah is unique in that it can elicit both horror and praise. Soren Kierkegaard’s 
_Fear and Trembling_³ is one of the most well-known portrayals of the Akedah that offers 
a praiseworthy account of Abraham. This Christian approach to the binding of Isaac lauds 
Abraham as a “knight of faith”⁴ in his choice to obey the divine command given to him. 
While a Jewish approach to the Akedah has different emphases than a Christian approach 
they are both united in their praise of Abraham, father of a beloved son, and patriarch of 
the nation of Israel. One significant Jewish work is Moses Maimonides’ _Guide of the 
Perplexed_⁵ which outlines Abraham’s exemplary faith in his role as prophet. My thesis 
will examine the portrayal of Abraham’s faith in Genesis 22, _Fear and Trembling, Guide 
of the Perplexed_, and other Jewish works as well as the biblical portrayal offered in 
Hebrews 11. In examining the references to Abraham’s faith in Hebrews 11 I will 
examine the Akedah within the context of the entire book of Hebrews and Christ as the 
perfect sacrifice. I will offer a Christological account of the Akedah as I place Abraham’s 
faith within the greater story of the Hebrew people and redemptive history as a whole. 
Through my thesis I will argue that the faith of Abraham, epitomized in the Akedah as 
portrayed in Kierkegaard’s _Fear and Trembling_ and Maimonides’ _The Guide of the 
Perplexed_, is not merely praiseworthy but even exemplary of faith despite the ethical 
concerns raised in various historical and modern critiques of Abraham’s choice. The 
exemplary nature of Abraham’s faith will be explored in the context of the book of 
Hebrews’ insistence that Jesus Christ is the sacrificial offering.

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³ Soren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong. _Fear and Trembling: Repetition_ (Princeton, 
⁴ Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 71-81.
⁵ Moses Maimonides, _The Guide of the Perplexed_. trans. Shlomo Pines, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of 
Abraham as Father

In the Exordium of Fear and Trembling Abraham’s loving and caring nature as a father is described. Narrating the moments leading up to the Mount of Moriah Silentio states: “Abraham’s face epitomized fatherliness.”6 Despite his agonizing choice as a father in addition to his concerns about promised future blessings and descendants, Abraham willingly offers his son and is commended repeatedly for doing so.7 His willingness to sacrifice his one promised cherished son is counted to him as an act of great faith.8 His heartache is that of a father and also a patriarch whose seeds of hope have not yet come to full fruition. Not only did Abraham have to wait one hundred years for Isaac but he also had to “draw the knife”9 to receive him back. When people consider the trial of Abraham surely they are “paralyzed” and “blinded.”10 Silentio speaks of the devastation that the potential death of Isaac would bring:

Now everything would be lost! All the glorious remembrance of his posterity, the promise in Abraham’s seed—it was nothing but a whim, a fleeting thought that the Lord had had that Abraham was now supposed to obliterate.11

The potential cost of the command is great as Isaac is a beloved son and the hope of future blessings. Abraham does not waver however in his obedient response to the command of his covenant partner Yahweh. While the command seems to request the unthinkable Abraham trusts that the promises given to him will be fulfilled according to God’s perfect provision and faithfulness.

6 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 10.
8 Hebrews 11:17
9 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 23.
10 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 22.
11 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 19.
Teleological Suspension of the Ethical

While obviously aware of the passions of a father as well as the ethical duties – to protect his beloved children, Abraham seems to put aside these concerns for something greater to which he is called. Within *Fear and Trembling* suspending the ethical to obey a higher calling is described as a “teleological suspension of the ethical.”\(^{12}\) Silentio places a discussion of this suspension within the framework of various dichotomies such as the individual and the universal.\(^{13}\) Silentio notes the different expressions of the dramatic act of the Akedah:

The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he meant to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he meant to sacrifice Isaac—but precisely in this contradiction is the anxiety that can make a person sleepless, and yet without this anxiety Abraham is not who he is.\(^{14}\)

It is the inherent tension in this contradiction that deepens the agony of the choice Abraham faces. There is anguish because of the loss but also because of the apparent contradictory nature of the command. Merold Westphal speaks of this contrast in terms of how it is represented in Kierkegaard’s works as a whole.\(^{15}\) In his analysis Kierkegaard subdivides the religious stage into three parts, namely; Religiousness A that is characterized by “human cleverness realizes that the Platonic notion of recollection could be quite useful,”\(^{16}\) Religiousness B that goes further to be seen as the “repudiation of [this] religious ideology,”\(^{17}\) and thirdly Religiousness C that “is the teleological suspension of Religiousness B and thereby the completion of the teleological suspension

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12 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 56.
13 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 55-56.
14 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 31.
16 Westphal, 115.
17 Westphal, 115.
of the ethical.”\textsuperscript{18} Westphal’s characterization of Religiousness C also expresses some of
same challenges represented in the teleological suspension of ethical including how to
rejoice in the midst of the suffering that can come when one stands in relation to the
absolute.\textsuperscript{19} It is this relation to the absolute that anchors Abraham within the horror that
he faces.

\textsuperscript{18} Westphal, 115.
\textsuperscript{19} Westphal, 117.
**Infinite Resignation vs. Faith**

Before discussing the suspension of the ethical Silentio speaks of the tensions and movements between the different stages of faith in terms of the differences between the “knight of infinite resignation”\(^{20}\) and the “knight of faith.”\(^{21}\) Each of these knights responds to the struggles of finitude in the shadow of infinity. The calls of joy, sorrow, hope, and despair and their final place in relation to the divine characterizes each knight as each pursues the loves of life. To illustrate the different movements of each knight Silentio describes a scenario where both knights are consumed by love, a love that cannot be fully realized or experienced in this world. Each knight must choose between enduring a love that cannot be realized or relinquishing the one whom he dearly loves.\(^{22}\) Faced with potential loss and pain the choice is a difficult one: either resign oneself to sorrow and give up hoping for future love in the finite world, or hope beyond the sorrow to believe that love will be known again in this world. The knight of infinite resignation does not restrain his love because it seems unattainable.\(^{23}\) On the contrary he:

> is not afraid to let it steal into his most secret, his most remote thoughts, to let it twist and entwine itself intricately around every ligament of his consciousness…He feels a blissful delight in letting love palpitate in every nerve…\(^{24}\)

Despite his resolve to maintain his love he is not ignorant of the truth that it cannot be realized. What is left for the knight to do? What is the knight’s relation to the eternal?

The knight of infinite resignation “makes this impossibility possible by expressing it

\(^{20}\) Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 38-53.  
\(^{21}\) Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 38-53.  
\(^{22}\) Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 41-51.  
\(^{23}\) Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 42.  
\(^{24}\) Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 42.
spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by renouncing it.”

He does not guard himself against the love but rather allows himself to feel the full extent of his passion. However, he then resigns himself to the knowledge that his love cannot be known. While the knight cannot be faulted for not being afraid to love he still does not hope beyond the realities of this world. Silentio characterizes this movement of infinite resignation as one that brings “peace and rest.” However the depth of this peace and rest must be understood in comparison to the hope found by the knight of faith.

What differentiates the knight of infinite resignation from the knight of faith? They both love, they both hope to know the love that they desire, and they both resign themselves to the realities of unrealized love. However, the knight of faith moves beyond this resignation to believe that his love will eventually be known to him. Silentio expresses the movements between the disappointments of the finite world, the hope of the eternal, and even greater, the hope of realized joy in this world despite seeming impossibilities: “…whereas faith makes the opposite movements: after having made the movements of the infinity, it makes the movements of finitude.” Faith does not resign itself to the disappointments of the finite world and simply yearn for the joys of the eternal. On the contrary, the knight of faith believes that there is hope that he will receive his love in the finite world. Hoping for the glories of the eternal does not require faith. Yet it does take faith to hope for more in this world and also trust that it will be given. Silentio speaks of the wonder of this movement of faith:

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25 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 44.
26 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 45.
27 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 46.
28 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 38.
29 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 46.
But then the marvel happens; he makes one more movement even more wonderful than all the others, for he says: Nevertheless I have faith that I will get her—that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible.  

In contrast to the first knight who renounces his love as he accepts that it will not be realized the knight of faith does not need to renounce anything but rather he “receive[s] everything exactly in the sense in which it is said that one who has faith like a mustard seed can move mountains.” Faith both hopes and believes.

Edward F. Mooney speaks of how a knight of faith does not just give up his love but instead he continues to prepare to receive his love back. Abraham demonstrates remarkable strength in not just offering up Isaac but also in trusting that he will be restored to him. The distinction between resignation and faith is not merely a choice between hope and despair but it is also a difference in how one views the value of that which is loved. Resignation does recognize that “nothing in the world has value simply because one values it.” As he draws on some of the work of Alastair Hannay, Mooney notes that resignation cannot go further to recognize from where value does come. Faith on the other hand knows that the value of things ultimately rests in God. This humble recognition of the true source of worth is further explained:

One relinquishes a worldly control of mundane value; but in faith one affirms its value nonetheless. [Silentio] believes that worldly things have value not on his account, but, in Hannay’s phrase, ‘on their own account and from God.’ The ‘second element’ in the ‘compound attitude’ of faith readies us to accept things back, ‘on a new basis’, their ‘status clarified.”

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30 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 46.
31 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 48-49.
33 Mooney, 92.
34 Mooney, 93.
35 Mooney, 93.
In faith one’s own loves are relinquished not because they are worthless or hopeless but because ultimately they have their source of value in the giver of good gifts – God. Abraham as the knight of faith recognizes that the gift of his son is just that; a gift. The giver of the gift is the originator of the joy who will also restore the joy once more.

Edward F. Mooney speaks of the knight of faith’s ability to receive his love back in terms of an ability to “care” which he defines as “a capacity for joyful welcome of what may be given: a capacity to acknowledge the blessings of existence, appearing wondrously without warning or rationale.” The ability to care involves recognizing the value of that which could be lost. While the knight of faith renounces having any “claim” to his love he still maintains a “care” of his princess. In continuing to care for his love the knight of faith leaves himself open and receptive to the possibility that his lost love will be given back to him. In contrast resignation can destroy one’s ability to love and thus affect one’s readiness to receive that which is lost:

Denying the possibility of joy (through bitterness, resignation, or ‘common sense’) can deplete and poison care. The capacity to remain open to joy—to care—would be authenticated insofar as the swain, moving beyond resignation, could believe he might get the princess back.

The knight of resignation on the other hand relinquishes both “care and claim…leaving him in no position to receive the princess, were she to be given.” In addition to the

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37 Mooney, 110.
38 Mooney, 108.
39 Mooney, 108.
40 Mooney, 110.
41 Mooney, 110.
42 Mooney, 108.
knight of faith losing his love he has also lost the ability to love her if she indeed was returned to him.

How does one move from infinite resignation to faith? Silentio describes this movement as one of absurdity that is “the paradox of existence.” The knight of finitude resigns himself “by [his] own strength and find[s] peace and rest in the pain.” In resignation the knight achieves his “eternal consciousness.” A paradox is created as faith is not needed for infinite resignation. However one must go through the movement of infinite resignation to achieve faith and have faith to move beyond it. It is necessary to move through infinite resignation first so the knight can fully acknowledge impossibilities that he faces. The pain of disappointment, difficulty, challenge, and apparent hopelessness is not ignored but is confidently dealt with. Yet the knight of faith has a remarkable ability to see beyond the hopelessness and not only hope for more but trust that more will be given.

43 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 47.
44 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 49.
45 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 48.
46 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 47-48.
47 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 47.
Abraham as a Knight of Faith

The portrayals given of the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation set the framework for Silentio’s praise of Abraham and his exemplary demonstration of faithful obedience. The command of the Akedah presents Abraham with the possibility of immense loss. Losing Isaac would be mean the death of a son and a promised kingdom. Yet Abraham does not simply resign himself to this command and obey despairingly in sheer hopelessness. On the contrary Abraham faithfully maintains hope that God’s promises to him will be fulfilled. How is it known that Abraham believed the promises would be fulfilled? As Abraham takes the final steps up to the place of worship he instructs his servants: “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.”\(^{48}\) Abraham had faith that he and his beloved son would return together though he did not how this would take place. Is there even more significance to Abraham’s choice to leave his servant behind? Luther posits that: “When we wish to ascend to God, we should come with Isaac alone, that is, with Christ through faith; the servants and the ass, this is our works, we should leave below.”\(^{49}\) Other commentaries argue that perhaps the donkey is nothing more than just a donkey.\(^{50}\) Regardless of the significance of the servant and donkey one image remains consistent; Abraham journeying to the mount with his beloved son and the unthinkable task to which he has been commanded.

\(^{48}\) Genesis 22:5
\(^{50}\) Walsh, 47.
Some interpreters of the Akedah have criticized Abraham’s words as being deceptive.\textsuperscript{51} Does Abraham really know that he and Isaac will return or does he anticipate returning alone? Origen expresses that Abraham’s confidence in his return with Isaac is ultimately a confidence in the resurrection.\textsuperscript{52} Luther comments that the reason why Abraham and Isaac must journey together in solitude is because “only they know the truth of resurrection.”\textsuperscript{53} Augustine asserts that there is no deception in the actions of Abraham since his faith draws upon the historical covenant relationship with God. Augustine describes Abraham’s confident faith and belief that Isaac would return with him:

\begin{quote}
On the contrary, in his heart there was always the same unshaken and absolutely unfailing faith. Abraham reckoned, you see, that the God who has granted that one who did not exist should be born to aged parents would also be the able to restore him from death.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Abraham’s faith in the restoration of Isaac is also seen in his response to Isaac. When his son asks the means of their offering Abraham responds without hesitation that God will provide.\textsuperscript{55} The exemplary nature of Abraham’s faithfulness as the knight of faith in \textit{Fear and Trembling} is best understood as his hopeful trust in the promises of Yahweh. Abraham’s ability to have faith in the finite world and beyond it is rooted in hope and trust. Despite seeming obstacles and challenges he trusts that the promises that God has given him will be fulfilled. He believes that his joy will be restored in the present life.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Walsh, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Walsh, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Walsh, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Walsh, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Genesis 22:8
\end{itemize}
Abraham’s journey as a knight of faith is extreme as the potential loss is great. Silentio admires the knight of faith yet fails to understand how he could make such a movement. Making the move of resignation requires human strength but making the move of faith via the absurd “is a marvel.” While surprising that Abraham acts so boldly in the face of the command to kill his son it can also be very troubling. How can one be praised for violating an ethical norm? What about Abraham’s duties as a parent? Silentio speaks of this paradox as “…the prodigious paradox of faith, a paradox that makes a murder into a holy and God-pleasing act, a paradox that gives Isaac back to Abraham again, which no thought can grasp…” He addresses these concerns in Problema I where he speaks of the theological suspension of the ethical that is present in the Akedah.

The answer Silentio provides draws the distinction between the ethical and faith, as well as the particular and the universal. The ethical is described as:

the universal…It rests immanent in itself, has nothing outside of itself that is its telos but is itself the telos for everything outside itself, and when the ethical has absorbed this into itself, it goes not further.

Abraham violated the universal ethic that parents should protect and care for their children. Silentio describes the ethical duties of a father towards his son as being “the highest and holiest.” Abraham also transgresses the universal understanding that murder is wrong. The horror of the command heightens the emotional impact of what Abraham is asked to do. Not only is Abraham asked to offer something of incredible worth he must also completely overstep ethical norms to do so. Universal norms are suspended for a

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56 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 47-48.
57 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 48.
58 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 53.
59 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 54.
60 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 28.
higher, greater, and more worthy *telos*. By aligning himself with this higher good Abraham acts as an individual yet surrenders himself to a higher command. Faith is described as a paradox where the “single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal, is justified before it, not as inferior to it but as superior…. “61 Silentio goes further to speak of the single individual being in relation to the absolute.62 The paradox is expressed in another way in that “interiority is higher than exteriority, or, to call to mind something said earlier, the uneven number is higher than the even.”63 The higher *telos* of the individual expression of faith justifies the suspension of the ethical. It seems strange that acting in a way that contradicts ethical norms could ever be praised however that is the paradox of the Akedah. The mystery of the seeming contradiction is rooted in divine wisdom.

Drawing on John Davenport’s “eschatological”64 reading of faith in *Fear and Trembling* Andrew Tebbutt argues that ethics are actually not suspended in faith but rather fulfilled in a way “unfathomable by human understanding.”65 Within this framework God is portrayed as the “divine fulfiler of ethical norms”66 and not just the originator of ethical standards or, worse yet, the giver of unethical commands. He notes that the “eternal validity”67 present in infinite resignation is not the kind of relation to the eternal that

61 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 55-56.
62 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 56.
63 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 69.
65 Tebbutt, 132.
66 Tebbutt, 132.
67 Tebbutt, 132.
Kierkegaard had intended for faith. Based on Kierkegaard’s notion of “the expectancy of faith” from his 1843 discourse Tebbutt divides the hope found in God as taking on two forms that stem from one’s understanding of God.

Tebbutt identifies the first form of hope as the initial hope that is established before a trial of faith is encountered as, for example, Abraham’s trust placed in God prior to the command given in Genesis 22. Referred to as “Alpha hope-provider” God is understood as the provider of meaning and hope. The second understanding of God, which infinite resignation fails to attain, sees God as the “Omega hope-fulfiler” the one who will ultimately fulfil one’s ethical hopes even if it is in ways not fully known or understood at the time of the trial. Tebbutt argues that individuals can only come to trust God “eschatologically as the fulfiler of ethical hopes insofar as they have first overcome the obstinacy of resignation and have humbly related to God as the original (Alpha) provider of meaning and religious hope.” For Tebbutt the command of the Akedah does not present a suspension of the ethical. Instead it allows Abraham to move from resignation to a recognition of God as the provider of meaning and hope. Through this knowledge of God as the originator of hope Abraham trusts in expectation of an “ethically sound resolution or vindication.” The creator of hope will indeed prove to be the source of hope and resolve any contradictions that occur between a divine command and an ethical norm.

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68 Tebbutt, 132.
69 Tebbutt, 132.
70 Tebbutt, 132.
71 Tebbutt, 132.
72 Tebbutt, 132.
73 Tebbutt, 132.
74 Tebbutt, 132.
Tebbutt’s approach is helpful in providing an understanding of the teleological suspension of the ethical that does not involve God transgressing any ethical norms, nor asking Abraham to do so either. Divine commands are given a richer, more meaningful definition where the *telos* of the ethical rests within God’s wisdom and goodness. However, this approach fails to recognize one of the key elements of faith. Abraham’s struggle with the command is real as is the contradiction between the command and his parental and patriarchal duties. In presenting the ethical as having its ultimate fulfilment in God the core mystery of the suspension is disregarded. It is not that the ethical finds its meaning in God and thus no real tension is present. On the contrary faith trusts God absolutely above any ethical concerns. This trust is rooted in an understanding of God’s character established through the covenant and past fulfilled promises.
The Telos of the Divine Command

Imperative to understanding the suspension of the ethical present in Kierkegaard’s portrayal of the Akedah is understanding the telos of the command given to Abraham. What exactly was higher than the ethical concerns that Abraham faced? How was this telos higher than the ethical? Of equal importance to understanding the command given is an understanding of the giver of the command. Why did God ask this of Abraham? Why did Abraham choose to obey? Lastly it is necessary to reflect on how Abraham suspended the ethical, namely by way of the absurd.

To begin we will examine what exactly was higher than the ethical norms that Abraham transgresses when he raises the knife to his son. Silentio writes that “the father shall love the son more than himself.” What is the extent of Abraham’s love and duty as a father? What should be done when his duties conflict with those required in his covenant partnership with Yahweh? In Fear and Trembling Abraham’s act of faith is contrasted with another example of ethical excellence. Silentio speaks of the tragic hero and gives a number of examples including a striking comparison between Abraham and a leader who is willing to sacrifice his own child to appease the gods and bring good to his nation.

While his agony as a father is similar to what Abraham experienced his obedience is that of a tragic hero. Both of the considerations of the tragic hero are ethical in nature. One is simply higher than the other as Silentio expresses: “[the tragic hero] allows an expression of the ethical to have its telos in a higher expression of the ethical.”

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75 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 57.
76 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 59.
are given up for the good of the nation. Silentio characterizes the greatness of the tragic hero in terms of “moral virtue.” However in Abraham’s case there is no greater universal cause that motivated him. In contrast he obeys the individual call of Yahweh. Within the ethical it is the universal that is followed. Yet the greater call and telos which is illustrated in the Akedah involves a relation with the absolute.

The tragic hero and Abraham are also contrasted in another way. Since the tragic hero acts in accordance with a universal ethic, his actions are understood and admired. However in Abraham’s case he enters into a relationship with the divine by following God’s unique and particular command. This is a relation that is marked by solitude as Abraham disregards the morals of the masses to unite himself with a singular higher calling. While the ethical is described as being divine the tragic hero does not have a relation to it. He simply acts in accordance with it. In responding to his duty to God Abraham experiences a much lonelier journey, one that is not understood by anyone else. Silentio describes the aloneness that is felt when one endures a spiritual trial and gives up the universal for the sake of something higher:

He suffers all the agony of the tragic hero, he shatters his joy in the world, he renounces everything, and perhaps at the same time he barricades himself from the sublime joy that was so precious to him that he would buy it at any price. The observer cannot understand him at all; neither can his eye rest upon him with confidence.

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77 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 59.
78 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 59.
79 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 58-59.
80 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 60.
81 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 60.
82 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 60.
83 Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, 60-61.
The choice of faith can be accompanied by loneliness as what seems absurd is often misunderstood. Being alone in his journey of grief is just one of the many ways that Abraham suffered in his choice of obedience. C. Stephen Evans speaks of the solitude that Abraham experiences as the recipient of a divine command that surpasses the ethical:

> At a specific moment in time the deity approached Abraham as an individual and gave him a specific, private message. The message, according to Johannes, is private to merely in the sense that only Abraham happened to receive it but in the further sense that only Abraham could understand it.\(^84\)

While the knight of faith is strengthened by his hope in restored joy his walk of faith is certainly not without much sorrow and suffering.

Aside from being portrayed as a knight of faith Abraham demonstrates exemplary faith for a variety of reasons. Abraham’s faith is praiseworthy because of the extremity of the loss he faced as a father and covenant father. The depth of the emotion felt by Abraham is accentuated by the prolonged structure of the command given to him: “Take now that son…that only one of thine…whom thou lovest…that Isaac.”\(^85\) The command comes at a time when Isaac had been given and the blessing of a son had enjoyed for some time.\(^86\) Fuller depicts the anguish that Isaac’s death would bring to Abraham after he had waited so long for the birth of his beloved son. The death of Isaac would be especially painful:

> …after hope had been frequently repeated; after hope had been raised to the highest pitch; yea, after it had been actually turned into enjoyment; and when the child had lived long enough to discover an amiable and godly disposition.\(^87\)

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\(^85\) Andrew Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Book of Genesis* (London: 1806), 259.

\(^86\) Fuller, 259.

\(^87\) Fuller, 259.
Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice someone so precious and so significant him to as a patriarch is one aspect of his faith that is exemplary in its strength.

In his further writings regarding *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard reflects how the death of a child would be a significant loss to any father in Israel as children represented future hope. However any such father would typically accept the fate and conclude, as Job did that: “The Lord gave, the Lord took away.” However the grief of Abraham is unique. Kierkegaard observes: “Not so with Abraham—he was commanded to do it with his own hand. The fate of Isaac was laid in Abraham’s hand together with the knife.” Abraham was not only the one giving the sacrifice, he also acts as priest. His role in the offering calls for a greater strength than just the endurance of loss. His confidence in the faithfulness of God is exemplar due to the extremity of pain and anguish he suffered during the trial as well as the extremity of the potential loss that the trial presented. The sacrifice that Abraham offers is just as significant as the fact that he is willing to offer it.

The actions of Abraham not only embody faith but they also show an obedience that is unwavering. Abraham does not simply deny his feelings and despairingly obey God. In contrast he, with a heart full of fatherly love, willingly climbs to Moriah. It is his obedience united with hope that mark him as a knight of faith. He resolves to not just submit but to also expect restoration in some fashion. Fuller speaks of this submission in

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89 Kierkegaard, 240.
90 Kierkegaard, 240.
91 Fuller, 259.
terms of “rendering every power, passion, and thought of the mind subordinate to the will of God.” This submissive obedience is in contrast to an “extinction of the passions” which Fuller notes in not what is seen in Abraham’s journey. The different choice of heart between resignation and hopeful faith is expressed in the words of Fuller:

This [extinction of the passions] were to be deprived of feeling; but the other is to have the mind assimilated to the mind of Christ, who though he felt most sensibly, yet said, ‘If this cup may not pass from me, expect I drink it, thy will be done!’

Gunther Plaut also discusses the unity of faith and obedience as seen in the Akedah. He remarks that both faith and faithful obedience are tested. He writes: “together they may be said to represent the quality of emunah ‘adherence without faltering, obedience with complete trust.’” Fuller describes this steadfast obedience as one that shows no opposition “from the struggles of natural affection, or those of unbelief: all bow in absolute submission to the will of God.” While it is Abraham that is praised for this obedience Fuller also does not fully attribute Abraham’s obedience to himself. Abraham is not just an example of human faithfulness he is also ultimately a testimony to the work of God’s grace and faithfulness.

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92 Fuller, 261.
93 Fuller, 261.
94 Fuller, 261.
96 Plaut, 210.
97 Fuller, 261.
Critiques of Abraham’s Choice

The literature regarding Abraham’s choices is plentiful and the critiques vary from grand words of praise to harsh words of criticism. As a parent Abraham chooses obedience to the divine over his responsibilities to keep his child safe. Is this actually obedience or pure ethical recklessness? How could a loving father be willing to sacrifice his son? Perhaps it is not reasonable to think of Abraham as a loving father at all. It is not that Abraham loved his son and gave him up but rather that he “dehumanized” him in being willing to sacrifice him.  

R.W.L. Moberly states that the:

“...text does indeed make ‘patriarchal’ assumptions in its portrayal of Abraham as paterfamilias, with the power of life and death over his child, in a way that is characteristic of its ancient place and time.”

In this historical patriarchal focus the children have their value only by means of what they bring to their father. Isaac would not have been loved as a son but only valued as an heir. Moberly’s claim of dehumanization assumes that Abraham thinks of Isaac as more of an expendable asset than a cherished son. Yet the charge of dehumanization disregards all of the references to Isaac being described as Abraham’s beloved son: “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.” To say that Abraham’s sacrifice was easy because Isaac was not loved or significant to Abraham, apart from instrumental reasons, denies what the narrative clearly states.

99 Moberly, 193.
100 Moberly, 193.
101 Genesis 22:2
In his book *Abraham’s Curse* Bruce Chilton claims that the language of the Akedah narrative is void of emotions. He writes: “Actions transpire without deliberation or choice, objection, or delay, as if the sacrifice of the child Isaac were a foregone conclusion.”102 In criticism similar to Chilton’s Terence E. Fretheim questions why Abraham did not plead for his son’s life as he did for the lives of the righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah.103 Criticism of Abraham’s lack of objection or deliberation does not recognize that although deliberation is not specifically referenced Abraham does journey to Moriah for three days. The reader does not know the thoughts of Abraham while he traveled to the place of sacrifice but that certainly does not mean that Abraham did not contemplate the horror before him. Even if the narrative lacks explicit emotive language it nonetheless evokes a “silent horror”104 in its readers.

The two main aspects of the Akedah that are unnerving are the command that God gives and the fact that Abraham obeys it. How could God command such a horrific act? Perhaps the voice that commands Abraham is actually the voice of Satan? Samuel Hugo Bergmann expresses this approach as he writes:

> The danger is that man will substitute the voice of Satan for the voice of God, for who can assure Abraham that God himself is demanding the sacrifice of his son?... Satan was attempting to mislead Abraham into thinking that it was not God’s word he had heard but Satan’s.105

Martin Buber shares in this critique of the command given to Abraham. Buber questions the higher command for which Abraham suspends his ethics:

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103 Terence E. Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 2007), 120.
104 Chilton, 21.
Where, therefore, the ‘suspension’ of the ethical is concerned, the question of questions which takes precedence over every other is: Are you really addressed by the Absolute or by one of his apes?\(^{106}\)

Philosophical presentations of Abraham’s erroneous interpretation of the command are generally twofold: epistemic and ethical.\(^{107}\) The epistemic confusion takes places because people’s experience of hearing God’s voice is subjective and therefore prone to error and uncertainty.\(^{108}\) Ethically speaking there is a contradiction between the command given and other ethical considerations which could imply that the command is not from God.\(^{109}\) Immanuel Kant combines these two concerns in his similar critique of Abraham’s actions. He reflects:

> Even though something is represented as commanded by God, through a direct manifestation of Him, yet, if it flatly contradicts morality, it cannot, despite all appearances, be of God (for example, were a father ordered to kill his son who is, so far as he knows, perfectly innocent).\(^{110}\)

Since revelation is “transmitted” through humans there is always the possibility for error especially when it seems to blatantly contradict ethical standards.\(^{111}\) Abraham’s obedience is definitely a demonstration of his deep religious devotion however according to the above critique this type of devotion is not praiseworthy.\(^{112}\)

The type of devotion seen in the Akedah could be perceived as a religious blindness, which is further confused by the uncertainty that comes with hearing God’s voice. Buber speaks of this blind obedience in terms of a “temptation of faith.”\(^ {113}\) In one sense

\(^{106}\) Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 48.
\(^{107}\) Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 49.
\(^{108}\) Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 49.
\(^{109}\) Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 49.
\(^{110}\) Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 49.
\(^{111}\) Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 51.
\(^{112}\) Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 49.
\(^{113}\) Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 53.
Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac “expressed the perfection of religious stance; he succumbed to it in the sense that it was only God’s intervention that prevented this act.”\textsuperscript{114} Buber’s approach to the Akedah portrays the event as one of extreme foolishness not exemplary faith.

R. Leiner speaks of the ambiguity that comes with a divine command as revelation “through an unilluminated mirror.”\textsuperscript{115} However Leiner’s appraisal of Abraham’s faith portrays his religious devotion in a more positive light as it is Abraham’s faith that anchors Abraham in the face of potential loss.\textsuperscript{116} According to R. Leiner the faith of Abraham is:

one ‘the human mind fails to grasp,’ since the religious disposition is a readiness to act in situations that contradict human perceptions and interests. Faith is not revealed in situations of certainty but precisely in situations of uncertainty, danger, and loss.\textsuperscript{117}

His words note how uncertainty in understanding does not necessarily mean weakness or error. The depth of the trust one places in the command giver actually deserves praise not criticism.

Assuming that it is God’s voice that Abraham hears questions can still be raised as to why Abraham was tested at all. What exactly is the nature of the trial that Abraham endured? Gerhard von Rad defines the temptation as “a pedagogical test which God

\textsuperscript{114} Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 53.
\textsuperscript{115} Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 50.
\textsuperscript{116} Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 51.
\textsuperscript{117} Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 51.
permits men to endure in order to probe their faith and faithfulness." Bill T. Arnold
suggests:

The idea is not to torture Abraham, but to demonstrate a truth that can be
observed, in contrast to a truth that is only asserted...But having passed this test,
Abraham has demonstrated tangibly his fear of God, and God accepts the truth of
that assertion experientially (‘now I know,’ Gen. 22:12). Arnold notes how the opening heading of Genesis 1a informs the reader that the narrative
is about a test and therefore the outcome is not about whether Isaac is sacrificed but about
whether or not Abraham will pass the test. Arnold suggests “Abraham’s enactment has
dramatized the reality of obedience experientially and qualitatively for God.” Rad
speaks of how the Akedah is an exit from the cult:

On the other hand, the application of the idea of temptation or testing to the
paradoxes of God’s historical reading is to be understood as a suppression of the
ritual and an exit from the cultic realm, i.e., with respect to the history of faith, as
a sign of positive maturity. The Akedah serves as a pivotal moment for Abraham and the people of Israel. The
purposes of the trial are multifaceted as is the significance of Abraham’s obedience.

Was the trial that Abraham faced different than any other time God asks his people to
offer their best? Sacrifice is not just about offering a child upon the altar. It involves
surrendering to God in acknowledgment of his lordship over everything. In the face of
suffering there is always the possible response of a hopeless rejection of God or a

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120 Arnold, 202.
121 Arnold, 207.
122 Von Rad, 234-235. 656
steadfast faith that cries: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him…” The faithful response is not one of mere obedience, but joyful, trusting hope. The manner in which the sacrifice is offered is just as important as the fact that it is indeed offered. In The Book of Genesis: A Jewish Interpretation Julian Morgenstern speaks of this faithful response and trustful surrender:

God tries everyone in some way. Nor must we imagine that, as with Abraham, as the last moment our sacrifice will not be required. Generally, our sacrifice is accepted. And the real test is the way we offer our sacrifice, the willingness with which we give up what is dear, the perfect faith in God which we still preserve, and which keeps us from doubting His wisdom and goodness.

For Abraham the death of Isaac was ultimately not needed however the offering was still required. Morgenstern reflects that for most people the sacrifice often is required. That which is cherished must be given back to the giver of the gift. In cases of relinquished love it is the spirit with which the offering is given that differentiates the acts of faith from those of resignation. Does one give up in hopelessness or instead offer up their love in faithful trust?

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125 Morgenstern, 160.
The Purpose of the Trial

Perhaps the question of why Abraham is tested is not so much a question of why God would test him but why God specifically chose Abraham to be tested. Abraham was praised for his faithfulness but it is also an expression of praise to Abraham that he was indeed tested at all. Morgenstern shares an illustration of how being chosen for testing is itself a meaningful praise for the one being tested. He writes:

Yet the rabbis ask themselves, ‘Why did God try Abraham again and again?’ And they gave a very wise answer. ‘When the potter bakes his vessels in the kiln, which does he test to see if they are well made, the best or the worst? Surely the best, from which he expects the most. So, too, God tried Abraham severely, just because He expected so much from him and from his descendants, the children of Israel.’

The severity of the test stands in direct relation to depth of God’s trust in Abraham. Maimonides explained that Abraham was chosen because God knew that he would pass the test and his “faith would shine like a beacon and be a sign to the nations.”

According to this approach to spiritual testing Abraham should be praised for just having been chosen for the test, let alone passing the test.

The strength of the hope demonstrated by Abraham is rooted in the covenant that God had established with him. Though all the intricate workings of the covenant are not known to Abraham he knew the source of the covenant. The covenant between God and Abraham is fundamental to the true telos of the Akedah. Established through a series of commands and signs the covenant provides Abraham the hope of a promised land,

126 Morgenstern, 159.
127 Morgenstern, 158-159.
descendants, and blessings.\textsuperscript{129} While much of God’s promises to Abraham remained unfulfilled there had been ways that God had already demonstrated his faithfulness to Abraham. C. Stephen Evans reflects on the nature of divine commands and moral obligations in his work \textit{Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love}.\textsuperscript{130} He argues that Abraham has good reasons for trusting God because He had proven to be faithful and loving.\textsuperscript{131} Evans describes how faith is rooted in the goodness of God:

\begin{quote}
Humans have good reasons to obey God’s commands, on this account, because God has created them, graciously showering them with many goods, including the capacity for love that mirrors God’s own love.\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

Jerry H. Gill identifies the basis of the life of faith is trust which Abraham exhibits.\textsuperscript{133} Faith cannot be separated from the character of the recipient of the trust offered.

Another anchor in God’s character that provides strength for Abraham is the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God as greater than human understanding is expressed in words of the prophet Isaiah:

\begin{quote}
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.\textsuperscript{134}
\end{quote}

Related to this wisdom are the higher purposes of a higher being. Ultimately Abraham understands that his own understanding of joy, pain, provision, and suffering must be seen within the context of greater plans and purposes. It is possible that the purposes

\textsuperscript{129} Genesis 12:1-3
\textsuperscript{131} Evans, \textit{Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations}, 299.
\textsuperscript{132} Evans, 299.
\textsuperscript{134} Isaiah 55:8-9 New Revised Standard Version
of his own sorrows are the seeds for future joys. Morgenstern expresses the ultimate overarching goodness in the telos of God’s ways: “Yet the Master’s purpose is sure, is wise and good, and laden with blessing for all mankind, greater far than all our suffering.”135 As a knight of faith Abraham believes that his joy can be restored and hopeless resignation is not the end. The restoration of Abraham’s joy can be found in a way that only God knows. Purposes of goodness cannot be fully understood by human standards of joy. The richest found peace comes from trust in the depth of a goodness greater than human understanding. Abraham does not resign to the potential loss because he knows that regardless of the outcome Yahweh knows best and this assurance provides the greatest hopeful peace.

Hope and trust characterize Abraham’s faith. While both of these have been criticized ultimately they should be praised. It demonstrates remarkable strength of character to hope in what is not seen and to trust that which is not understood or known. To resign oneself to the often sorrowful realities of this world is not difficult. In contrast believing beyond what seems hopeless and choosing to hope requires strength and resolve.

Abraham demonstrates such strength. Hope also requires humility as it bows to the higher ways and grander thoughts of Yahweh.136 Trusting in the wisdom of God is an act of obedience on the part of Abraham, not foolishness. He recognizes the past faithfulness of God and he trusts that which he does not yet understand. Humble trust and faithful obedience mark Abraham’s exemplar demonstration of faith in the Akedah. His obedience is exercised with a joyful strength as the author of the telos of suffering is perfect in wisdom and love.

135 Morgenstern, 162.
136 Isaiah 55:8-9
A Jewish Approach

For the purposes of this thesis a Jewish perspective will include Midrash, Genesis Rabbah, Moses Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* and other commentary regarding Abraham’s role as prophet, patriarch, and father. Ignaz Maybaum describes Abraham’s knowledge of God as “prophetic knowledge, the knowledge [that is] is acquired directly, without mediator.” Abraham is unique in his role as a prophet because the revelation given to him was not a command to share but rather an individual message. A prophet is characterized by the message that is given, and the confidence with which the message is received and responded to. The assured confidence and trust that is displayed at each of these moments can be understood as the strength of faith. Abraham demonstrates exemplary faith regarding each of these significant steps in a prophet’s journey.

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Events Prior to Akedah

Some of the differing views regarding the Akedah stem from accounts of what took place prior to Genesis 22 in terms of Abraham’s obedience and covenant with God. There are two main events in Genesis 21 that can be considered as what is referenced in the opening statement of Genesis 22 “And it happened after these things.”¹³⁸ Hagar and Ishmael are sent away which could be seen as the ‘binding’ of Ishmael (through expulsion) set alongside the binding of Isaac.¹³⁹ The second main event preceding Genesis 22 is Abraham’s making a treaty with Abimelech and planting a tamarisk tree in Beer Sheba.¹⁴⁰ A perspective offered in Zohar Vayera suggests that the phrase “And after these things” continues the pattern of God who “tried Abraham each time in order to know his heart, whether he would be able to preserve and keep all the commandments of the Torah or not.”¹⁴¹ Some Jewish sages see the events of the Akedah as God’s response to Satan’s accusation that Abraham did not properly offer God a burnt offering on the occasion of Isaac’s birth.¹⁴² The exchange between Satan and God is found in the Midrash spoken by R. Johanan on the authority of R. Jose b. Zimra:

‘And the child grew, and was weaned and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned’ (Genesis 21:8). Thereupon Satan said to the Almighty: ‘Lord of the universe! To this old man You did graciously vouchsafe the fruit of the womb at the age of a hundred, yet of all that banquet which he prepared, he did not have one turtle-dove or pigeon to sacrifice before You. If he did so, then it was in honour of his son.’ Replied God: ‘Yet were I to say to him,

¹³⁹ Caspi and Cohen, 3.
¹⁴⁰ Genesis 21:22-33
¹⁴¹ Caspi and Cohen, 4.
¹⁴² Caspi and Cohen, 4.
“Sacrifice your son before Me,” he would do so without hesitation.’ Straightaway, God did tempt Abraham and said: ‘Please take your son.’

This understanding does not seem to be a cohere premise for the Akedah as it is stated four times in Genesis that Abraham does build an altar for God. It is not likely that the command given to Abraham was in response to a lack of a burnt offering.

Regarding the correlation between the events of Genesis 21 and 22 there are differing views of the meaning of the term ‘after’ in opening of Genesis 22. These opposing interpretations are found in Genesis Rabbah:

After (Ahar) these things, R. Judah and R. Huna both said in the name of R. Jose K.R. Judan: Whenever ahare occurs it denotes ‘in immediate connection with’ whereas ahar denotes that there is no connection. R. Huna said: Whenever ahar is stated it denotes ‘in immediate connection with,’ whereas ahare implies there is no connection.

If one takes the view that Genesis 22 is in response to the events of Genesis 21 and indeed represent God’s response to Abraham’s disobedience another possibility can be explored. Perhaps God was displeased with Abraham’s treaty with Abimelech? One potential disobedience of Abraham concerns his choice to plant a tamarisk tree since the tree is one symbol of pagan worship. There are various interpretations of the meaning of the tree including an orchard meant to supply fruit to guests. In contrast one interpretation suggests that the tree was actually an inn with varying fruits. The varying interpretations of Abraham’s purposes in Beer Sheba and the planting of the tree are so

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144 Genesis 12:7,8; 13:3-4,18, Capsi and Cohen, 4.
145 Capsi and Cohen, 5.
146 Capsi and Cohen, 5.
147 Capsi and Cohen, 5.
148 Capsi and Cohen, 5.
disputed that Jewish sages suggest an unwillingness to see the tree as a symbol of pagan worship.\textsuperscript{149} However it was not just the planting of the tree that is of concern regarding Abraham’s potential disobedience. He also called upon God at Beer Sheba making it a holy ground yet evidence in Midrash alludes to Abraham knowing that Moriah was a holy ground.\textsuperscript{150} The juxtaposing of these two holy places “can be construed, textually speaking, as both political and religious; the pull between two factions for supremacy in control of Abraham’s legacy.”\textsuperscript{151} While controversy surrounds the meaning of Abraham’s actions in Beer Sheba it seems unlikely that the Akedah is a test in response to these events. The phrase “after these things” is more likely a time marker than a note of correlation or consequence.

\textsuperscript{149} Caspi and Cohen, 5.
\textsuperscript{150} Caspi and Cohen, 6.
\textsuperscript{151} Caspi and Cohen, 7.
A Focus on Isaac

A Jewish approach to the Akedah actually takes on a different focus as the account is known as “the binding of Isaac” rather than the trial of Abraham.\textsuperscript{152} What was Isaac’s role in the Akedah? Is he to be praised as Abraham is or perhaps even more than Abraham as he is the one being sacrificed? Jewish sages express the mutual joy that Isaac and Abraham share as they had been chosen to obey their God:

\[ \text{…Isaac was not distressed by what his father had said to him. Even as the one rejoiced to make the offering, the other rejoiced to be made an offering. Abraham rejoiced to bind his son as the sacrifice, and Isaac rejoiced to be bound as the sacrifice. Abraham rejoiced to bind his son as the sacrifice, and Isaac rejoiced to be bound as the sacrifice. Abraham rejoiced to cut the throat and Isaac rejoiced to have his throat cut.}\textsuperscript{153} \]

A conversation is portrayed between Isaac and his father as they journey to Moriah. Isaac comforts his distressed father: “Do not be sorrowful my father, do to me what ever your father in heaven wish, let be the quarter of my blood a redemption of all people of Israel.”\textsuperscript{154} While Abraham is praised for his faith for offering his son Jewish tradition equally lauds Isaac for his willing participation and obedience as well.

\textsuperscript{152} Bekkum, 86.
\textsuperscript{153} Caspi and Cohen, 30.
\textsuperscript{154} Caspi and Cohen, 30.
Journey to Moriah

A Jewish approach to Genesis 22 emphasizes different aspects of the Akedah including Abraham’s journey to Moriah. The events leading up to the journey as well the significance of Moriah are all means of comparative thought. Within Midrash Moriah is referred to as a place that commemorates the spirit of the nation and the seeds of Abraham the patriarch:

Isaac shed one fourth of his blood on Mount Moriah: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: I keep faith to pay the reward of Isaac son of Abraham, who gave one fourth of his blood on the altar.155

Within Midrash Moriah is where an exchange is given between Abraham and God relating to Abraham’s role as priest in the proposed sacrifice.156 Abraham exclaims:

‘Master of the Universe, am I fit to offer Isaac up? Am I a priest? Shem is High Priest. Let him come and take Isaac from me for the offering.’ God replied: ‘When you reach the place, I will consecrate you to make you a priest.’157

The commentary goes further to state that Moriah was a term suggesting that Abraham was to be a replacement for Shem.158 Acting as priest in the offering of Isaac is significant in Abraham’s exemplar work as prophet.

After the Akedah takes place Moriah is known as a place of legacy in terms of divine communication. It is described as a place where religious instruction “went forth to the world.”159 Another commentator portrays it as a place of “religious awe.”160 A passage in Genesis Rabbah suggests a connection between Moriah and myrrh as referenced in Song

155 Caspi and Cohen, 7.
156 Caspi and Cohen, 12.
157 Caspi and Cohen, 12.
158 Caspi and Cohen, 12.
159 Caspi and Cohen, 12.
160 Caspi and Cohen, 12.
of Songs 4:6.\textsuperscript{161} One Rabbi describes: “to the place where incense would be offered, as you read: ‘I will get me to the mountain of myrrh Mor.’”\textsuperscript{162} In conclusion the words of R. Simeon be Yohai poignantly portray the significance of Moriah: “It is the land which, if it were an arrow, would shoot up through the heavens directly to the heavenly altar. Here the word is derived from the stem shot through.”\textsuperscript{163} The imagery of incense and piercing significance illustrate the lasting legacy of both Abraham’s obedience as well as that of Isaac.

\textsuperscript{161} Caspi and Cohen, 12.  
\textsuperscript{162} Caspi and Cohen, 12.  
\textsuperscript{163} Caspi and Cohen, 13.
Akedah as Prophecy

One of the essential elements of prophecy is the transmitted message. The meaning of the message is comprised of two components, namely the message itself, and the giver of the message. The command given to Abraham must be set within the context of the previous commands and promises of his covenantal relationship with Yahweh. At the beginning of the Abrahamic narrative God calls him to “Go, go”164 from his home country and journey to the land that God will show him.165 Similarly when the command is given to Abraham to walk to Moriah the same phrase is used “Go, go.”166 One of the results of the Akedah being tied to previous journeys that Abraham had taken in faith is that Abraham can draw strength from the assurance he has in Yahweh. Anchoring the startling command of the Akedah in the covenantal history allows Abraham to act in faith as a father, a patriarch, and a prophet of Yahweh.

Maybaum notes the calmness with which Abraham and Isaac journey together.167 The peace that he speaks of echoes Kierkegaard’s knight of faith’s hopeful trust in the face of loss and sorrow. Maybaum portrays the stillness of Abraham and Isaac’s steps together:

This calmness is the atmosphere which trust creates around itself. Calmness is not tranquility. Calmness engendered by trust comes to its blissful own in danger, affliction and pain. Abraham and Isaac walk in this calmness.168

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165 Genesis 12:1
166 Neusner, 34
167 Maybaum, 4-5.
168 Maybaum, 4-5.
The Akedah is an illustration of Abraham’s faith, obedience, and trust in Yahweh. As Maybaum describes “the akeda is the great document of a trust in God.” Maybaum describes the transformation of the knowledge of God that Abraham experiences through the ordeal of the Akedah:

…[Abraham’s] knowledge of God before he goes to the mountain of Moriah is different from the knowledge of God which he acquires when he departs from this mountain. This self-acquired knowledge of God does not see any cruelty in God. God’s kindness becomes revealed and this God remains the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It is Abraham’s trust in God that provides him the courage to climb the mountain and it is this trust that becomes even stronger as he descends the mountain with his beloved son restored to him.

In contrast to praising Abraham’s role as prophet and his obedient reception of the message given to him is another Jewish perspective found in the Midrash which suggests that Abraham was confused and actually heard the voice of Satan commanding him.

The Midrash that expresses this view as follows:

When they were on their way, Satan appeared to Abraham disguised as an old man and said to him: “Was I not there when Satan told you, ‘Take your only son whom you love and sacrifice him’”…Said Abraham, “It was not Satan but the Lord himself who told me.”

This view that Satan was the one that instructed Abraham is similar to other critiques previously given about the accuracy of the divine command and its source. While perhaps

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169 Maybaum, 4.
170 Maybaum, 3.
171 Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 46.
172 Sagi, Schwartz, and Englander, 46.
used as a strategy for reconciling the contradictory nature of the divine command this approach undermines the significance of Abraham’s faithful choice.

Even when assumed that it is God who commands Abraham questions still remain as to why this command is given and what is the nature of the command. Was Abraham called to merely offer his son? Or was he called to indeed sacrifice him? Was this act to serve as a trial he must endure personally or a test he must pass as a patriarch of a promised chosen nation? In his work *The Fear, the Trembling, and the Fire: Kierkegaard and Hasidic Masters on the Binding of Isaac* Jerome I. Gellman outlines various historical Jewish approaches to interpreting the command of the Akedah and the choice made by Abraham.\(^\text{173}\) Saadia ben Joseph responds to the argument that the Akedah is an example of God nullifying his commands. He articulates why the Akedah does not demonstrate any inconsistency within God’s command for Abraham of offer Isaac:

> Four answers to this question have been given, including that ‘olah’ does not mean sacrifice, but merely a raising up. And if it be asked in response, does a man who has been told to take his son up a mountain, take him fire and wood…and take hold of a knife to slaughter him? The answer given is that since the word ‘olah’ has two meanings, a raising up and a sacrifice, Abraham had to prepare himself for the most difficult of the possibilities...And since the intention was only for a raising up, it was said to him, ‘Don’t send forth your hand against the lad.’ [Genesis 22:12]\(^\text{174}\)

This approach puts the horror of the Akedah within the context of the outcome of the command. It is just as significant that God commands Abraham not to take Isaac’s life as it is that he commands him to do so.

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\(^{174}\) Gellam, 30.
Regarding the merits of the Akedah and Abraham’s role as prophet Maimonides states that the trial can be seen to have two core educational purposes: the degree of self-sacrifice that one can strive to attain, as well as the spiritual powers of the patriarch.\textsuperscript{175}

The Akedah is fundamental in the establishment of prophecy between Yahweh and the covenant followers. In \textit{Guide of the Perplexed} Maimonides describes Abraham as the original prophet who illustrates the complex responsibilities that come with the role.\textsuperscript{176}

Through his obedient response to the given command Abraham demonstrates the great depth of love one should have for Yahweh.\textsuperscript{177} Maimonides describes the extent of the exemplary love expressed by Abraham:

\begin{quote}
One of these notions consists in our being informed of the limit of love for God, may He be exalted, and fear of Him—that is up to what limit they must reach. For in this story he was ordered to do something that bears no comparison either with sacrifice of property or with sacrifice of life. In truth it is the most extraordinary thing that could happen in the world, such a thing that one would not imagine that human nature was capable of it.\textsuperscript{178}
\end{quote}

In addition to the depth of the love for God that Abraham’s actions as prophet express he also illustrates that the revelations prophets receive are believed to be true.\textsuperscript{179} If Abraham did not have confidence in his received revelation then he would not have hastened to do that which is repugnant to nature, and [Abraham’s] soul would not have consented to accomplish an act of so great an importance if there had been \textit{a doubt} about it.\textsuperscript{180}

Another way to describe the foundational faith of Abraham is to speak of him as being the first believer. Caspi and Cohen describe Abraham as:

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Caspi and Cohen, 22.}
\footnote{Maimonides, III, 24, pp. 500-502.}
\footnote{Maimonides, III, 24, pp. 500.}
\footnote{Maimonides, III, 24, pp. 500.}
\footnote{Maimonides, III, 25, pp. 501-502.}
\footnote{Maimonides, III, 25, pp. 502.}
\end{footnotes}
the first believer, as the person through whom worship of the sacred changed from a matter of Blood-relation to a function of belief-relation, [it] is really an image of two men: Abraham the Prophet and Abraham the man.\textsuperscript{181}

Through his choices in the Akedah Abraham demonstrates incredible devotion to his God, while also demonstrating the power of divine revelation that is received and responded to in obedience.

Concerning the nature of the command given to Abraham an analysis of the language of the command can be helpful in understanding the prophetic message. R. Simeon b. Abba notes that the word ‘please’ used by God implies an entreaty that:

may be compared to a king of flesh and blood who was confronted by many wars, which he won by the aid of a great warrior. Subsequently he was faced with a severe battle. Thereupon he said to him: ‘Please assist me in battle that people may not say, there was no reality in the earlier ones.’ So also did the Holy One, blessed be He, say unto Abraham: ‘I have tested you with many trials and you did withstand all. Now, be firm for My sake in this trial, that men may not say, there was no reality in the earlier ones’\textsuperscript{182}

The test of the Akedah is seen as a culmination of previous commands and tests of faith that Abraham had undergone during his covenantal journey with Yahweh. Through the binding of Isaac Abraham acts not only as a covenant partner but also as a faithful prophet of Yahweh.

Commentary continues in \textit{Genesis Rabbah} as to the specific way in which the command is spoken to Abraham. A dialogue is given between God and Abraham as he discerns exactly what God is asking of him. In response to the command to take his son Abraham

\textsuperscript{181} Caspi and Cohen, 26.
\textsuperscript{182} Bekkum, 87-88.
replies, “But I have two sons!” The exchange continues as Abraham relays that each son is loved by his mother, and indeed each son is also loved by Abraham. Finally Abraham exclaims: “I love them both: are there limits to one’s emotions?” The long augmented command is concluded as God confirms: “Even Isaac.” The question can be asked why does God wait so long to reveal the details of the command to Abraham? The depiction given in Genesis Rabbah speaks of the delay in terms of being purposeful to reveal how greatly Abraham was loved. It was written:

This was in order to make him even more beloved in God’s eyes and reward him for every word spoken, for the Holy One, blessed be He, first places the righteous in doubt and suspense, and then He reveals to them the meaning of the matter.

The long, augmented nature of the command parallels the ultimate purpose of the trial itself – to be a testimony to Abraham’s faithfulness. Because of his great faith he was chosen to be tested and it will be that same faith that will allow him to withstand the trial and be a witness all the more.

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183 Bikkum, 88.
184 Bikkum, 88.
185 Bikkum, 88.
186 Bikkum, 88.
187 (Genesis Rabbah 39:9) Bikkum, 88.
188 Bikkum, 88.
189 Morgenstern, 158.
Akedah as Redemptive

Obedience in and of itself can be praiseworthy but are there also redemptive elements to the sacrifice that Abraham offers? The sacrifice of Isaac is seen to be redemptive in midrash as it refers to Abraham requesting that Yahweh remember the Binding of Isaac and forgive his descendants their transgressions in times of hardship.\textsuperscript{190} Similarly R. Jose of Galilee speaks of the importance of the Akedah in Israel’s future journey to promised blessings. He comments:

> When Israel entered the sea (fleeing Pharaoh and the Egyptians) Mount Moriah was moved from its place, with the altar of Isaac built upon it, the pile of wood upon it, and Isaac as it were bound and put upon the altar, and Abraham as it were stretching out his hand and holding the knife to slaughter his son.\textsuperscript{191}

Moriah is portrayed as an everlasting symbol of faithful obedience and the favor and blessing that comes in response to that obedience. In 1 Chronicles 21:15 God sends an angel to destroy Jerusalem but at the last moment God chooses not to destroy the city. Why is the city saved from destruction? One thought is that it is because God “saw the blood of the Binding of Isaac.”\textsuperscript{192} In \textit{Exodus Rabbah} as Moses prays for deliverance for his people after they have sinned with the golden calf at Sinai he references the binding: “...If they are guilty to be slain, remember Isaac their father who stretched out his neck on the altar to be slain for Your Name’s sake.”\textsuperscript{193} While the sacrifice of Isaac was not ultimately required the obedience of Abraham and his willing offering was still a means of blessings for future generations. Midrash regarding the knife used in the Akedah even references the redemptive effects of Abraham’s obedience for Israel. The knife was

\textsuperscript{190} Caspi and Cohen, 7.
\textsuperscript{191} Caspi and Cohen, 8.
\textsuperscript{192} Caspi and Cohen, 8.
\textsuperscript{193} Caspi and Cohen, 8.
called a “ma’akhelet” because it makes food. Why is the knife called this? The rabbis answer: “because Israel eats in this world only in the merit of the ma’akhetet.” Israel is blessed because Abraham obeyed.

194 Caspi and Cohen, 21.
195 Caspi and Cohen, 21.
Critique of Abraham’s Obedient Faith

Thus far it has been discussed how Abraham’s journey to Moriah gave him sufficient time to reflect on what he was commanded to do. His resolve and persistent obedience has been praised. But should a response of complete obedience without question really be the most praiseworthy response for a prophet? At no point through the ordeal does Abraham question the command or plea for his son’s life. It was Abraham who had previously pleaded with God to save the city of Sodom and yet he makes no effort to “question the merciless demand of his God to slaughter his seed.” A prophet must discern the divine voice. Is there also a call to discern the command as well?

In contrast to praising Abraham the opposite perspective is offered by Bruce Chilton in his work Abraham’s Curse. Chilton speaks of the Akedah’s legacy of, what he describes as, blind religious obedience. In the foreword of his work Chilton describes the murder of an innocent university student who was killed with a hunting knife by a man later declared to be insane. The killer claimed to have obeyed a voice that commanded the act. Chilton draws a comparison to the image of Abraham drawing his knife. Is the great patriarch of faith anything more than a mad man? This ability to kill in obedience is referred to as a “primordial compulsion.” Looking at the tragedies of modern times that were done in the name of “religious obedience” Chilton asserts that there is nothing different between the motivation behind Abraham’s binding of Isaac and

196 Caspi and Cohen, 4.
197 Chilton, 8.
198 Chilton, 8.
199 Chilton, 3.
200 Chilton, 3.
201 Chilton, 3.
the extremity seen in modern acts of terrorism and individual missions of ideological fervor such as Timothy McVeigh’s bombing in Oklahoma City, and the terrorist attacks of September 11. According to Chilton Abraham’s legacy of faith is not a life-giving gift. It is a curse that continues to bring death for centuries after Abraham raised the knife to kill his beloved son.

Chilton’s critique of Abraham’s obedience speaks of a “sacrificial violence” as if the desire to sacrifice is the primary goal of the Akedah. Within this approach to sacrifice the motivation is not obedience but rather an “impulse to kill.” To illustrate the relentless brutality of this call to kill Chilton references Wilfred Owen’s poem “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young” which was written during World War I. In the work Owen portrays the drive to kill that is seen in war as a force that even divine intervention cannot stop. He writes:

    Behold! Caught in a thicket by its horns,
    A Ram. Offer the Ram of Pride instead.
    But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
    And half of the seed of Europe, one by one.

Within this perspective the desire to obey seems to be overtaken by a thirst to kill.

Chilton however does not seem fair in his evaluation of Abraham’s willingness to offer Isaac. Referencing Kierkegaard’s work Chilton presents Abraham’s choice in a purely negative light: “Looking into Abraham’s mind, into the heart of sacrifice and its consequences, provokes dread, even ‘fear and trembling,’ the title of Soren Kierkegaard’s

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202 Chilton, 3-5.
203 Chilton, 8.
204 Chilton, 10.
205 Chilton, 11.
206 Chilton, 11.
The fear and trembling is spoken of as the horror of the sacrifice and not really the extremity of the obedience that is called for.

In her work *After These Things* Jenny Diski portrays the experiences of Abraham’s children and the trauma they endure as a result of their father’s choices. Richard Holloway, a bishop, reviewed Diski’s book and summarizes her intent in demonstrating how Isaac is instrumentalized in the Akedah:

> But what happened to Isaac? That’s what Diski wants to find out. She worms her way into his terror and discovers that he did indeed die inside that day, because he discovered that any son might be sacrificed to the demands of an inaudible voice.

According to this harsh critique Abraham’s obedience should not be revered but rather it should be scrutinized in horror. Diski describes the giver of divine command which seems to drive Abraham to horrific actions as a father:

> The voice could be more powerful even than the reason for hearing it in the first place — the terrible fact and fear of extinction...the Voice is still at work, calling its servants to kill their children in obedience to an allegiance that is more powerful than any ties of the heart or mind. We see it there 3,000 years ago in the pages of the Bible; and we see it here in the pages of our newspapers today. The Voice still speaks and Abraham still obeys its command.

Diski’s criticism of Abraham’s obedience is similar to that of Chilton. According to these critiques the only way that Abraham’s faith is exemplary is by being an example of insane religious devotion that leads to needless bloodshed.

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207 Chilton, 12.
208 Moberly, 183.
209 Moberly, 183.
Omri Boehm observes that in our modern liberal-democratic society Abraham’s choice is often considered an act of disturbing “unethical religious submissiveness”\textsuperscript{210} that can be likened to insanity and or abusive violence.\textsuperscript{211} However he concludes that these modern responses of condemnation and horror do not properly see the choice that was given to Abraham. Omri writes:

Given the divine command to sacrifice Isaac…disobedience cannot be regarded a ‘better’ alternative to obedience…killing one’s son and disobeying a direct divine command are both unthinkable.\textsuperscript{212}

Boehm’s approach rightly recognizes the complexity of the ethical and moral decision Abraham faced.

The critique of blind religious obedience is both an important one and a difficult one. How can obedience to the call of murder be respected? Perhaps the answer can be found by examining the intent of the act. Is the intent of the obedience destruction and harm? What is the purpose of the command? Chilton compares the divine command given in the Akedah to other acts of divine destruction within the history of humanity. He writes:

“The logic of the Fall or the Flood or the Exodus is ruthless, but it remains logic aimed at righteousness; there is a measure of justice and integrity in the divine-human interaction.”\textsuperscript{213} The Akedah however is different in its quality of horror because it is a test that was then stopped.\textsuperscript{214} Chilton believes that the justification for the command seems to be less because the command was ultimately nullified when Isaac’s life is spared.

\textsuperscript{211} Boehm, 3.
\textsuperscript{212} Boehm, 3.
\textsuperscript{213} Chilton, 8.
\textsuperscript{214} Chilton, 8.
Judging the nature of a divine command by the ends that it seemingly aims to accomplish may not be a prudent means of evaluation. In the case of the Akedah Chilton assumes that the original purpose of the command was indeed to kill Isaac and thus when Abraham was further commanded to “…not lay [his] hand on the boy”\(^{215}\) it seems the original goal was not achieved. However, this limited view of the *telos* of the command does not take into account the purposes such as a test of faith or a strengthening of the covenant partnership that Abraham has with God. It is ultimately a trust in higher purposes that reconciles the mysteries of the command and promise.

Victor Shepherd discusses how hope reconciles God’s command and promise within the Akedah. He writes:

> Obedience ‘does not exist where this is no divine promise.’ Clearly there is a subtle mutuality between promise and command. While from a human perspective promise and command may appear to contradict each other, ultimately the promise is the meaning of the command.\(^{216}\)

Abraham does not fully understand the intended outcome or purpose of the command yet he trusts that God will fulfil his promises to him in ways greater than the horror temporarily set before him.

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\(^{215}\) Genesis 22:12

\(^{216}\) Victor Shepherd, “Hope as the Reconciliation of Command and Promise” (presented at the Annual Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, Cleveland, November 4, 2000), 6-7.
Hebrews – Christ’s Perfect Sacrifice

Thus far we have discussed Abraham as a knight of faith who demonstrates great strength trusting God’s covenantal promises. His obedience sets the foundation for future blessings and descendants. The covenant promises state: “I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore...”\(^{217}\) Abraham is also noted as a hero of the faith in the book of Hebrews. Abraham’s faithful obedience allows for God’s faithfulness to be seen both to Abraham’s descendants and ultimately through the work of Christ. Within the context of the book of Hebrews the Akedah will be discussed as related to the sacrificial, restorative, and the redemptive elements of the event.

Hebrews 11: 17 speaks of Abraham’s faith and willingness to sacrifice his son of promised future blessings:

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, ‘It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.’\(^{218}\)

Regarding the sacrifice that Abraham offers it is worth noting that the word used for ‘offered’ is translated in the perfect tense which denotes the finality of the sacrifice as it expresses that “the demands in the sacrifice were fully met, and that, from an ideal standpoint and as far as Abraham was concerned, the offering was a completed action.”\(^{219}\) The perfect tense is contrasted with the imperfect tense used in ‘was ready to

\(^{217}\) Genesis 22:17
\(^{218}\) Hebrews 11:17-18
offer up’ in Hebrews 11:17. The use of the imperfect tense here communicates an incomplete action. Abraham had begun the act of sacrificing his son and then God stopped the process from being completed. The use of both of these tenses portrays an image of the Akedah as complete in terms of both Abraham’s faithful obedience as well as God’s faithful provision.

The allusions to Christ within the events of the Akedah relate to the sacrifice of Isaac and the restoration of Isaac as well. Hebrews 11:19 states: “[Abraham] considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” The hope of Isaac’s resurrection and restoration can be interpreted in various ways. In his commentary on Hebrews Donald Wagner notes that since “Isaac was as good as dead at the point of being sacrificed, it is ‘as though’ he had been raised from the dead.” Raymond Brown speaks of this pivotal moment in the history of God’s people: “Isaac was received back from the verge of death, a sign of God’s unfailing provision in the moment of man’s desperate need.” Brown asserts that Abraham had faith in “the creative power of God (Hebrews 11:30) and his word (4:12).” Abraham trusts the promises of God in addition to the proven character of God and ability to fulfil promises. The binding of Isaac and the subsequent provision of the ram can be seen as a foreshadowing of the sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection of Christ. Victor Shepherd speaks of how the risen Christ unites the command and promise of the Akedah:

220 Lightfoot, 212.
221 Lightfoot, 213.
222 Hebrews 11:19 New Revised Standard Version
225 Brown, 212.
The resurrection is that act of God whereby promise and command are reconciled; hope is the human counterpart that finds promise and command reconciled in the believer. Accordingly, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is ultimately the truth and reality that gave Isaac back; hope, that which gave him back to Abraham, the resurrection being the guarantee of all the promises of God to all believers.\textsuperscript{226}

The hope that Abraham has rests on the character of his covenant partner—Yahweh whom ultimately proves faithful through the provision of his beloved son as the\textit{sacrificial lamb}.

Throughout Hebrews the supremacy of Christ is described in various ways included his role as priest: “Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself.”\textsuperscript{227} The work of Christ is also spoken of as establishing a new covenant with God’s people: “But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.”\textsuperscript{228} Finally the nature of Christ’s sacrifice and its redemptive power is also superior to other sacrifices previously offered. It is written:

And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, ‘he sat down at the right hand of God, and since then has been waiting ‘until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.’ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.\textsuperscript{229}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{226} Shepherd, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{227} Hebrews 7:27
\item \textsuperscript{228} Hebrews 8:6
\item \textsuperscript{229} Hebrews 10:11-14
\end{itemize}
The perfect nature of Christ’s sacrifice is frequently referenced as being “once for all (hapax)”\textsuperscript{230} in contrast to the Old Testament sacrificial system where priests would have to continually offer sacrifices. The nature of the sacrificial transaction that takes place at the cross is an offering like none before it. In their commentary on Hebrews Edgar V. McKnight and Christopher Church speak of both the earthly and heavenly significance of Christ’s sacrificial death.\textsuperscript{231} It was an offering given not just on earth but also in a heavenly sanctuary as well:

> The reality of that sacrifice consists in part in its physical quality, but in part it consists in the willingness with which it is made. The interior nature of the act makes it the heavenly event it is. \textsuperscript{232}

Christ as a superior priest and a superior sacrifice ushered in a superior covenant through his death on earth which was ultimately an offering given on a heavenly altar.

Through the faith of Abraham and his willing sacrifice the covenant with Yahweh was strengthened. The death and resurrection of Christ truly is the fulfilment of the obedience that is seen in the sacrificial offering of Isaac. Ellen Davis expresses how these two events together provide an image of God’s complete faithfulness:

> In Jesus Christ we see a son of Abraham sparing nothing, totally faithful in covenant in covenant relationship with God. At the same time, we see in Jesus God’s total faithfulness…even to death on a cross.\textsuperscript{233}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[230] Brown, 171.
\item[231] Edgar V. McKnight and Christopher Church, Hebrews-James (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2004), 220.
\item[232] McKnight and Church, 220.
\end{footnotes}
Abraham is exemplar in his faith as he offered his best; his beloved son. Isaac’s life is ultimately spared by Yahweh’s faithful provision of the sacrificial ram. Similarly, it is the covenantal faithfulness and fulfilment that is seen in the provision of Christ as the perfect sacrificial offering.

The approaches to the Akedah that have been discussed have presented Abraham as exemplary in his faith and obedience. His response to the command given by Yahweh demonstrates both a deep-rooted trust in the covenantal promises and the character of Yahweh. The faithfulness of God is what ties each of the above approaches together. Whether the focus is on Abraham’s obedience, his suspension of the universe ethic to unite with an individual command, his trust in the restoration of his son, his steadfast hope in God’s promises, or Isaac’s willing obedience, one common theme remains; the faithful provision of the God who commands. What is the message of the Akedah? God asks us to accept the sorrows of this world with hopeful eyes that look toward heaven and know that infinite joy is ours now as we rest within the promises of a faithful God.
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