

Analysis of Genesis 22:1–18

1. James, in James 2:21, references Abraham as an example of a person who was a “hearer of the Word” for a long time before he got around to being a “doer of the Word.”
2. The question James uses to amplify Abraham’s “doing” is, “Was he not justified by works when he offered Isaac?”
3. We have gone through the forty-five-year sequence of events during which Abraham, as a believer in Messiah, received five paragraphs from God which are summarized under the phrase, “The Abrahamic Covenant.”
4. “Justified by works” is the summation of that process culminating with the event on Mount Moriah in Genesis 22. In 18 verses we are able to see the “doing” of Abraham following a long period of “hearing.”
5. Abraham “heard” the Lord’s repeated revelations of a divine covenant to him personally. They became the working object of his faith when he executed the “doing” of his previous occasions of “hearing.”
6. The spiritual-growth advancements of Abraham and Isaac had grown to the point where both were now being tested. When Genesis 22 takes place, Abraham was 120 years old and Isaac was 20.

Genesis 22:1 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

1. The word “tested” is the Piel intensive perfect, active verb, נָסָה (*nasah*), designed to determine if Abraham can make the advance from being a “hearer” of the Word to being a “doer” of the Word.
2. The intensive perfect places the emphasis on being tested for the purpose of approval. Abraham has received consistent information from God that the patriarch will be the father of a great nation including several additional paragraphs.
3. The issues Abraham must resolve are these: “Do you believe God? Do you believe the veracity of His Word? Do you believe He has the integrity to keep His Word? Do you believe He has the omnipotence to back up His Word? Do you believe God will do what He says regardless of my personal circumstances?”
4. These are the questions that every believer must answer in the affirmative if he is going to become a “doer of the Word” rather than a “hearer only.”
5. To begin the process, the Lord exclaims, “Abraham!” Abraham simply responds, “Here I am.”



Genesis 22:2 He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”

1. The opening comment is, “Take now your son”; the verb is the Qal active imperative of **לָקַח** (*laqach*): “to grasp or seize” is one way to translate it, but in this command to Abraham, he is to use his parental authority, to “take your son.”
2. The time for growing in grace has advanced to the point where Abraham must respond immediately to the commandment, “take your son!” This is the first of four ways God chooses to identify Isaac. The second comes next, “your only son,” **יָחִיד** (*yachiyth*).
3. The third term identifying his son is, “whom you love,” the verb, **אָהַב** (*'ahav*) and refers to love for another person, here paternal love for his son. The fourth identifies who that other person is, the proper noun, **יִצְחָק** (*Yischaq*): “Isaac.” This culls out Ishmael.
4. These four identifying terms insure that Abraham cannot possibly conclude that the Lord is talking about Ishmael. It is crystal that the one being spoken of is Isaac who is to be taken to the “land of Moriah.”
5. Abraham is to take Isaac on a journey, indicated by the Qal imperative of the verb **הָלַךְ** (*halach*): “to go.” This is a command to leave Beersheba promptly once necessary preparations are made.
6. The destination is the Hebrew noun, **מֹרְיָה** (*Moriyyah*). It is a compound of the verb, **רָאָה** (*ra'ah*): “to see,” and the noun, **יְהוָה** (*Yehowah*), translated, Jehovah, *YHWH*, or *'Athonai*. Together they form the proper noun, *Moriyyah*: “Jehovah sees,” or better, “Jehovah provides.”
7. What Abraham is to do when he gets there comes next with the phrase, “and offer him there.” The word “offer” is the Hiph'il imperative of **עָלָה** (*'alah*): “the motion associated with lifting up an offering onto an altar.” Here it is the causative active voice.
8. Abraham is caused to lift up a sacrifice onto an altar on Mount Moriah. The identity of the offering is the pronoun “him” which reflects back on the proper noun, “Isaac.”
9. Not leaving well-enough alone, the Lord continues by instructing Abraham to then complete the process by setting him on fire, consequently, Isaac is to be sacrificed as a “burnt offering.”



10. This passage has nothing to do with the Levitical offerings among which some animals were to be burned. This event on Mount Moriah occurred long before the Levitical Priesthood and the sacrificial calendar were established in Leviticus.
11. This is not only independent of them, but unique to this occasion. Here is a brief synopsis of the sacrifice that was commanded to Abraham:

Abraham lived at a time when sacrifices and religion were virtually identical. On his arrival at Shechem he erected an altar (Genesis 12:7). At Bethel also (v. 8), and on his return from Egypt he worshipped there (Genesis 13:4). Such sacrifices expressed adoration and prayer. They constituted worship. At Hebron he built an altar (v. 8), officiating always as his own priest. In Genesis 15:4ff he offers a “covenant” sacrifice, when the animals were slain, divided, the parts set opposite each other, and prepared for the other party to the covenant. In chapter 22 Abraham attempts to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering, as was probably the custom of his neighbors. That he attempted it shows that the practice was not shocking to his ethical nature. It tested the strength of his devotion to God, shows the right spirit in sacrifices, and teaches for all time that God does not desire human sacrifice—a beast will do. What God does want is the obedient heart.¹

12. Where this burnt offering is to take place will be revealed later.

Genesis 22:2 With your son, your only legitimately born son, whom you have always loved, namely, Isaac, and promptly go to the land of Moriah where Jehovah will provide, and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will indicate to you. (EXT)

Genesis 22:3 So Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place God had told him. (NASB)

1. Abraham did not dillydally around. He “rose early”: the Hiph‘il causative, imperfect of the verb שָׁכַם (*shakam*): “To be caused to rise up early to pack and go on a journey.”

¹ J. J. Reeve, “Sacrifice: In the Old Testament,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 4:2641–42.



2. Why was Abraham so motivated to respond to the commandment to move out as soon as possible? Because he knew that Jehovah would provide!
3. This verb indicates that Abraham is no longer in the status of “hearing” the Word of God taught for intellectual retention. He has now shifted over to the status of “doing” the Word of God. The working objects of his faith for application were the five paragraphs of the Abrahamic Covenant.
4. **Point of Doctrine:** The New Testament contains passages that use the saga of Abraham to drive home the point that hearing is step one in *learning* the Christian way of life. Applying what you know to life and circumstances is step two in the *execution* of the Christian way of life.
NOTE: Romans 4:1–5; Hebrews 11:17–19; Galatians 3:14–18; and James 1:22–25; 2:21–26 discuss the Abrahamic Covenant.
5. After getting up, Abraham’s first chore was to “saddle his donkey.” The verb “to saddle” is the Qal imperfect of **חָבַשׁ (*chavash*)**: its primary definition is, “to wind or wrap one object with another. It is frequently used of saddling a donkey.”
6. Abraham then “took two of his young men with him.” The verb “took” is the Qal imperfect of the verb, **לָקַח (*laqach*)**: “the act of taking things standing at one’s disposal.”² Abraham took two servants along with him.
7. This is not a superfluous detail. First, there are common sense reasons to take these men along. The more people in the party the better prepared they would be to deal with robbers along the 40-mile trip.
8. But there is an important doctrinal reason for doing so as well. Just before leaving these two witnesses behind at Mount Moriah, Abraham made this statement to them, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you” (Genesis 22:5).
9. Next Abraham “took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together” (v. 6).
10. It is evident that Abraham is prepared to offer a sacrifice but without the requisite animal for doing so. The only individual available for an offering is Isaac.
11. When Abraham and Isaac returned to the “young men,” Isaac was unharmed which the two men, as witnesses, were able to confirm. This fulfills a legal requirement of the yet to be implemented Mosaic Law in:

² H. Seabass, “לָקַח,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 8:18.



Deuteronomy 19:15b “... on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.”

12. The Mosaic Law had not yet been instituted, but the policy Moses states in Deuteronomy is a legal standard contained in both Testaments and adopted into British and American jurisprudence:

Amendment VI: In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.³

13. Jurisprudence in the fallen environment of the devil’s world is divinely structured so that the one charged for a crime must be considered innocent until proved guilty. His guilt or innocence must be based on evidence of two or more witnesses. These “two young men” fulfilled the divine requirement to certify the events on Mount Moriah.
14. Accompanying these two men was Isaac, Abraham’s son, the only member of the troop that could possibly be the object of the sacrifice.
15. To prepare for a burnt offering, Abraham is said to have split wood to carry on the journey and use it for a burnt offering on Moriah. The word “split” is the verb **בָּקַע (baqa‘)**: “To split with force.” Striking wood against the grain is chopping; doing so with the grain is splitting. The latter produces smaller pieces that are easier to ignite and are more flammable.
16. Abraham has been instructed to use the wood to sacrifice his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering on an altar.
17. Splitting done, Abraham “arose,” the Qal imperfect of **קָם (qum)**. This verb is different from *shakam* which means to get out of bed. *Qum* means to “stand up,” but in this case it means Abraham mounted up and headed out toward the land of Moriah.
18. Notice the efficiency of Abraham’s preparation. He is not morose. He does not pray to the Lord to change His mind about sacrificing Isaac. He does not sleep in late hoping the Lord was not really serious about this. He got up out of bed, saddled up his donkey, split up the wood, and “went up the road to the place God had told him.

³ *Forty Proclamations: The Theology of Grace Doctrine Church* (St. Charles, Mo.: Joe Griffin Media Ministries, 2011), 78.

