

19. Question: Why was Abraham so unwaveringly committed to carrying out this mission without question, without delay, and without sorrow?
20. Below, in blue, are excerpts from an esteemed theologian who paints a verbal picture of what he characterizes as, “Abraham’s struggle.” I intersperse within it, bracketed commentary in black:

Several features of the narrative serve to keep the reader’s attention focused directly on the inward struggle of Abraham as he carried out the Lord’s request—all, we might add, without any mention of the actual thoughts of Abraham’s mind.

[There is nothing in the narrative that mentions anything about Abraham experiencing an “inward struggle.” It is true there is no mention of Abraham’s actual thoughts, but those thoughts were formed over the course of 45 years during which the working object of his faith was the Abrahamic Covenant.]

First, there is the abruptness of the Lord’s request within the narrative.

[Abruptness is usually the issue when a believer is being tested. More often than not, there is no head’s-up and for a reason. It is designed to determine whether or not the doctrine learned is on the launching pad of the stream of consciousness.]

Apart from the remark in verse 1 that the narrative represented a test of Abraham, the reader is given no advanced warning of the nature of the request nor of its severity. Nothing in the preceding narratives would have hinted at this sort of request.

[This is the third time the writer refers to the phrase in verse 2, “offer him as a burnt offering,” as a “request.” There was no request given. The word “offer” is the Hiph’il imperative of $\text{הִלָּח} \text{ (‘alah)}$: “the motion associated with lifting up an offering onto an altar.” This was a command!]

The reader is as surprised and shocked by the Lord’s request [#4] as Abraham himself would have been.

[There is not one single jot or tittle indicating Abraham ever responded with “surprise” or “shock.”]

The whole of the request [#5] is made up of three simple imperatives (v. 2); “Take,” “go,” and “sacrifice him.” Like many biblical narratives, the reader often knows information that the characters in the narrative do not. In this case the reader knows that this was a test. But apart from this, we know no more about God’s plans and ways than the characters within the narrative itself.

At the same time, in the absence of any explanation from the narrator, we are forced to read our own thoughts and feelings into those of Abraham.



What is particularly noticeable is how the writer of this story prolongs the narrative with excessive and deliberate details of Abraham's preparation for the journey and the journey itself. By allowing or, indeed, forcing the reader to follow one incidental and perfunctory act after the other (e.g., "[he] saddled his donkey" [v. 3a], "he took with him two of his servants" [v.3b], "he had cut enough wood" [v3c]—none of these acts prove relevant to the narrative in the end), the writer forces the reader to look beyond these narratively meaningless external events to ponder the thoughts of Abraham himself as he so matter-of-factly carried them out.

[Several times the author of the article refers to the "narrator" or the "writer" in critical terms such as "excessive and deliberate details," "incidental and perfunctory act after the other," and "meaningless external events." What was in Abraham's mind was not the commanded sacrifice, but his faith in the Abrahamic Covenant, paragraph 5: "I will establish my covenant with Isaac and his descendants after him (Genesis 17:19b)."

The "narrator" or "writer" is God the Holy Spirit, Who, through enduement, revealed to Moses the "narrative," who then through inspiration wrote it down verbatim into the twenty-second chapter of Genesis.]

Few narratives in Genesis can equal this story in dramatic tension. The writer seems deliberately to prolong the tension of both Abraham and the reader in his depiction of the last moments before God interrupted the action and called the test to a halt. Abraham's every action is described in exaggerated detail. At the last dramatic moment—"[Abraham] reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son" (v. 10)—the Lord intervened and, as Abraham had already anticipated, provided a fit substitute for the burnt offering. Abraham therefore named the altar he had built, "The Lord will provide" (v. 14).⁴

21. This analysis is offered to emphasize the point that when evaluating a narrative passage in Scripture, its content reflects a true and accurate description of the event. The theologian must treat every component of it as essential to a full understanding.
22. In this case, full understanding must reflect back on all the events in Abraham's life from Genesis 12:1 to Genesis 22:1, a 50-year period during which Abraham developed and facilitated a doctrinal inventory into the working object of his faith in Genesis 22.

(End JAS2-40. See JAS2-41 for continuation of study at p. 401.)

⁴ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House 1990), 2:168–69.



23. The text of James 2:21 does not refer back to Genesis 15:6 which certifies that Abraham was a believer before he left Ur, but to the sequence of events that followed.
24. As a believer, Abraham was in a learning curve during which he built up a doctrinal inventory including the five paragraphs of the Abrahamic Covenant.
25. This body of knowledge functioned as the working object of his faith so that he could ultimately use his “Law of Liberty” to leave Beersheba and head out toward Mount Moriah.
26. At salvation, Abraham’s faith was placed in the working object of Jesus Christ resulting in salvation. This is justification by faith. When he woke up in Beersheba in Genesis 22, the working object of his faith was the Abrahamic Covenant. The sequence of events that followed resulted in justification by works.
27. Therefore, justification is a biblical term that has two applications which we have noted recently. They each need to be quickly reviewed before we continue with the passage in Genesis 22.

Doctrine of Justification

I. Justification Related to Salvation

1. Justification means vindication. We need to be vindicated because we are born condemned and spiritually dead.
2. Therefore, justification is an official judicial act of vindication when anyone uses his Law of Freedom to place his personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.
3. This decision results in forgiveness, the imputation of eternal life, and the imputation of divine righteousness to the believer.
4. This sequence results in justification by faith which means the believer is vindicated before the Supreme Court of Heaven.
5. This is called forensic justification because it is a judicial act of God Who recognizes His divine righteousness in the believer.
6. Therefore justification is the legal act of God that vindicates the new believer:

To declare free from the penalty of sin on the ground of Christ's
righteousness; to make inherently righteous by grace.¹

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary (1971), s.v. “righteous.”



7. Therefore, justification is an official judicial act which occurs every time anyone believes in Christ. The justice of God acts on our behalf pronouncing us justified, which means, having a relationship with God forever.
8. Justification is not forgiveness. Forgiveness is subtraction; justification is addition by grace. Forgiveness subtracts sin; justification adds the perfect righteousness of God.
9. Justification is related to salvation adjustment to the justice of God in Genesis 15:6; Romans 3:28, 5:1; and Galatians 3:24.
10. Justification, then, is the completion of the believer's salvation adjustment to the justice of God. It is the consummation of the salvation work of God logistically.
11. At the point of faith in Christ, justification is the judicial act of God whereby the imputation of divine righteousness is recognized as valid for vindication.

II. Justification Related Works

1. Spiritual growth by a believer results an ever-increasing accumulation of truth in the *kardía* of the soul from which he makes good decisions from a position of strength.
2. As this inventory advances, his Law of Freedom may consult this ever-enlarging inventory for the execution of divine good.
3. Divine good is therefore accomplished by having divine viewpoint from which good decisions are made that result in the production of divine good.
4. Abraham is famous for making a series of good decisions because he used his Law of Freedom to place his faith in the working objects of the Abrahamic Covenant.
5. James 2:21–26 is one of several New Testament passages that document Abraham's sequence of decisions in Genesis 22 that resulted in his being "justification by works."
6. The word "works" refers to overt acts that result in the production of divine good. Divine good is a term that describes the process by which a believer references resident doctrine in his soul to carry out an overt act.
7. The unstated resource for the production of divine good is the inventory of doctrine that was consulted in order to commit the act.