

Basic Issue of Child Sacrifice in The Abraham's Trial: An Exegetical Study of Genesis 22:2

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Abstract

Abraham's trial in Genesis 22 provokes inquiry into the matter of child sacrifice. The divine command in Genesis 22:2 consists of three imperatives that significantly contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the command. Conversely, the employment of a chiasmic structure emphasizes that the central focus of God's command resides in second imperative, which pertains to the journey towards the land revealed by God – an aspect intimately linked to the initial encounter between Abraham and God in Genesis 12. Consequently, the command issued in Genesis 22 should not be interpreted within the framework of child sacrifice, but rather as a test of Abraham's faith and a reaffirmation of God's covenant with him and the Israelites.

Keywords: *child sacrifice, Abraham's trial, covenant, promise son, promise land*

INTRODUCTION

The story of Genesis 22 is known as the Akeda (ʿāqedā) which means “the binding [of Isaac] taken from the Hebrew word “bound” (wayyaʿqōd).¹ According to Gerhard von Rad, this story has acknowledged as “the most perfectly formed and polished of all the patriarchal stories.”² The narrative tells the final test of the Abraham which believed as the great test of Abraham.³ This proves Abraham's steadfastness and makes God's promises are fulfill through him. In addition, this story “has inspired so much reflection by Jews and Christians”⁴ through the centuries.

However, the story itself has been argued by scholars for its content which connected to the ancient cult. In the ancient Near East, people believed that “the god that provides fertility is also entitled to demand a portion of what has been produced. This is expressed in the sacrifice of

¹ Kenneth L. Barker and D. Waylon Bailey, *Genesis*, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1998), 283.

² Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis - A Commentary*, Revised edition. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox, 1973), 238.

³ According to Jewish tradition, God put Abraham to the test in ten times. See the discussion in Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac As a Sacrifice: The Akedah 1899-1984* (Jerusalem: Jewish Lights., 1993), 23,49.

⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, Word Biblical Commentary 2 (WBC): Genesis 16-50, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 99.

animals, grain and children.”⁵ This evidence has proved by Phoenician and Punic colonies who describe “the ritual of child sacrifice as a means of ensuring continued fertility.”⁶ Therefore, the questions still arise from another perspective that could Abraham misunderstand the command?

Undoubtedly, the Bible says that Abraham follows the instruction and has a long journey to the land of Moriah. The biblical account tells its reader clearly that by doing this instruction, Abraham gets his righteousness and becomes a father of all who has faith (Heb 11:17-19). However, some scholars argue that God would never ask a human to slaughter his own child.⁷ Another question, therefore, arises that how to understand the story of Abraham who follows the God’s command to sacrifice his own son like other gods of Canaan?

The Bible states clearly the prohibition of child sacrifice (Deut. 12:31; 18:10; Lev 18:21) which is unequal to God’s character in the whole Scripture. The burnt offering of children has become an issue in the ancient near east period. The practice of children sacrifice is believed as the most immoral ritual in the history of humankind.⁸ Accordingly, the problem of this article is the question of does God commands Abraham to sacrifice his own son, Isaac? The purpose of this article is primarily to investigate the problem raised by the commandment of God to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering in Gen 22:2. The burnt offering and Abraham’s righteousness are broad issues in the Bible. Therefore, this article focuses only to analyze the particular passage from Genesis 22:1-2 specifically, the instruction to sacrifice Isaac.

The Interpretation of Scholars

Research on this topic results in a number of books, commentaries and published journal articles. The issue of child-sacrifice has been discussed in a different approach from various scholars. Gordon J. Wenham in *The Akedah: A Paradigm of Sacrifice* says that the story in Genesis 22 aims to say something concerning the theology of sacrifice.⁹ In connection with this, Wenham discusses the picture of Sacrifice in the book of Genesis which focused on two examples such as the offering of Abel and Noah. He argues that there are two important points regarding sacrifice through the tales of Abel and Noah. (1) “The sacrificial victim must be valuable and blemish-free” and (2) “sacrifice by the righteous profoundly alters God’s attitude to the unrighteous and undeserving.”¹⁰ He concludes that both aspects are emphasized and expanded upon within the Akedah, which stands as the most extensive narrative regarding any sacrificial event found within the book of Genesis. Through this narrative, Abraham expresses his wholehearted devotion to obedience and sacrifice to God which is a model for every Israelite.

⁵ John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2000), 221.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Filip Capek in *Philosophical discourse on Genesis 22 – Akedah reflection by Kant, Fichte, and Schelling*, in: *Communio Viatorum* 52 (2010), quoted by Thomas Romer, “Abraham’s Righteousness and Sacrifice: how to understand (and translate) Genesis 15 and 22,” *Communio viatorum* 53 no 1 (2010): 3-15. <http://web.etf.cuni.cz/> (Accessed November 2, 2017).

⁸ Magyarosi, *Holy War and Cosmic Conflict in the Old Testament*, 33-34.

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, "The Akedah: A Paradigm of Sacrifice" in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* eds., Jacob Milgrom et al., (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 95.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Wenham believes the narrative of Genesis 22 has some significant points that become a part of the theological interpretation of Abraham narrative as a whole. The sacrifice of Isaac illustrates the law of firstborn sacrifice. This includes firstborn sons that must be redeemed to God which basically substituted by a sacrificial animal (Exod 13:2, 11-13).

Laurence H. Kant in *Restorative Thoughts on an Agonizing Text: Abraham's Binding of Isaac and the Horror of Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22) Part 1* mentions that the narrative of Gen 22 has played as an important paradigm that inspires the Jews to obey God and live indifferently from other cultures.¹¹ The story of binding Isaac (Akedah) is related to firstborn child, Passover, obedience, differentiate the righteous and wicked in terms of obedience, and demonstrate faith in a situation when God's face is hidden.¹² Therefore, this has been interpreted as a blueprint of the sacrifice of Jesus.¹³ However, the content itself has yielded some debates and disappointed in many others. The Akedah results in many questions concerning morality and God character. This point leads to some Rabbinic commentator to argue that the next story in Gen 23 (Sarah's death and burial) describes the conflict between Abraham and Sarah after the event in Moriah. Kant believes that Genesis 22 has wide parameters and interpretations.

In the second part, Kant discusses the word קח imperative attached with the word קח shows that the instruction does not easily mean "to take," but can be translated also as "please take," "take, I pray," "would you take," "I ask you to take," "I urge you to take." According to rabbinic commentary, the expression קח "does not indicate a command but a 'request.'"¹⁴ The word such as קח also occurs for the first time in this book. Kant argues that it is "describing Abraham's love for his son right before God ostensibly asks Abraham to sacrifice and kill him. Another significant Hebrew word is קח which used twice in this narrative; in noun קח usually refers to a "whole burnt sacrifice". The Hebrew word קח has meaning as "to go up," "to rise," or "to ascend," and in causative form, *hiphil* "bring up," "cause to ascent," or "cause to rise." Therefore, Kant suggest the translation of this verse as "[God] said to him, "please take your son, your only one, Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there for an offering-up on one of the mountaintops that I will say to you."¹⁵ Kant argues that God never ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and says that Abraham has misunderstood the instruction. He writes:

The text does not specify who or what constitutes the offering. God does not identify Isaac as the offering, only that Abraham should bring him up to the summit and make an offering of some kind. God never uses the word, "slaughter," because God never intends to slaughter Isaac. Abraham could have figured that out, if he had listened carefully or asked good questions. *Genesis Rabbah* 56:8 puts it this way. "Did I tell you 'slaughter him'? No, but 'bring him up' Now that you have brought him up, bring him back down." Abraham misinterpreted God's instructions. God simply told Abraham to bring Isaac up the mountain. God may have mentioned a sacrifice, but

¹¹ Laurence H. Kant, "Restorative Thoughts on an Agonizing Text: Abraham Binding of Isaac and the Horror on Mt. Moriah (Genessi 22) Part 1," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 38 no. 2 (September 2003): 77. ALA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, EBSCO host (accessed November, 1 2017).

¹² *Ibid.*, 78.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Laurence H. Kant, "Restorative Thoughts on an Agonizing Text: Abraham Binding of Isaac and the Horror on Mt. Moriah (Genessi 22) Part 2," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 38 no. 3 (September 2003): 162. ALA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, EBSCO host (accessed November, 1 2017).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

God does not name the victim. God never told Abraham to kill Isaac, but simply asked him to make an offering, presumably an animal. Abraham (not God) decided to identify Isaac as that animal.¹⁶

In *Abraham's Sacrifice: Gerhard von Rad's Interpretation of Genesis 22*, Konrad Schmid states Von Rad's two main points in understanding Gen 22. First, the story is told particularly on Isaac and not work with any child and second, in fact, Gen 22 is a story of Abraham, not Isaac. Therefore, one should see the story as "Abraham's Sacrifice," not "Sacrificing Isaac."¹⁷ The story in Gen 22 describes the willingness of Abraham to return the promise which God has given to him in Gen 12, even the son of promise. The story is not about child-sacrifice but it is a story of Abraham himself. However, Van Rad clearly states that the story in Genesis 22 cannot be understood as a part of the promise of God as a whole. Schmid argues that "Although von Rad was wrong in historical terms about Gen 22, he was right in his theological determination of the sense of this text."¹⁸

In *Abraham's Righteousness and Sacrifice: How to Understand (and translate) Genesis 15 And 22*, Thomas Römer discusses the story of Gen 22 as "Elohistic text." The Hebrew word that occurs in Gen 22:1 הָאֱלֹהִים "the god" appears frequently in other text such as the late Persian and early Hellenistic period. The word is "used to denote god that dwells far away from humans and appears to be incomprehensible."¹⁹ This story probably is an "Elohistic text" and do avoiding the name of YHWH. However, the name of YHWH occurs in the final part of Gen 22 as God who does want a human sacrifice.

Historical Background

The history of the patriarchal narrative dates vary between 2000 BC and 1200 BC. According to Eugene H. Merrill, the story of Abraham in Ur is taking place before 2000BC. At the time, Abraham moves from Ur to Haran which is the center of moon gods in the ancient times. Genesis 24:10 mention clearly the homeland of patriarchal so-call "Aram-Naharaim." This refers to "a region in central Mesopotamia, or more specifically, to that district near the Habor and Euphrates rivers."²⁰ These two main cities such as Ur and Haran are mention in the Scripture. Upon relocation to a novel region, Abraham exhibited a proclivity of establishing his residence not within the preexisting urban center, but rather within an unenclosed sanctuary adorned with trees. There are some places in Canaan area that mention regarding the journey of Abraham. Those are Shechem (12:6), Oak of Moreh (12:6), Bethel and Ai (12:8), The Negev (12:9), Hebron (13:18; 23:2), Oaks of Mamre (13:18; 14:13; 18:1; 23:17, 19; 25:9), and finally, Gerar and Beersheba (20:1; 21:31-33; 26:1-6).

¹⁶ Ibid., 174.

¹⁷ Konrad Schmid, "Abraham's Sacrifice: Gerhard von Rad's Interpretation of Genesis 22," *Interpretation* 62, no. 3 (July 2008): 270. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed November 5, 2017).

¹⁸ Ibid., 176.

¹⁹ Thomas Römer, "Abraham's Righteousness and Sacrifice: How to Understand (and Translate) Genesis 15 and 22," *Communio viatorum* 54, no. 1 (2012): 9. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed November 5, 2017).

²⁰ Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 78.

Archaeological evidence shows that Nomads are common in the Middle East at the time. According to an archaeological period of the ancient near east, the narrative of patriarch's period took place in the Middle Bronze period when the Amorites and other group arrived in Mesopotamia. This period was known as the Neo-Sumerian period which is believed as the period when Abraham responded God's call to move from Ur to the promise land.²¹ During that time, the Bible lists clearly the situation of Canaan's iniquity. Cultic practices such as child sacrifice, divination, sorcery witchcraft, necromancy, spiritualism, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality (Deut 18:9-12, Lev 18) are resulting immorality for centuries.²² John Bright confirms that "Canaanite religion was 'no pretty picture'; it embodied an 'extraordinarily debasing form of paganism'"²³ The moral of the Canaanites is entrenched into their culture, religion, and society. Based on Merrill Unger's archaeological observation, he finds that the "brutality, lust and abandon of Canaanite mythology are far worse than elsewhere in the Near East."²⁴ The destruction of the Canaanites is "because of these detestable manifestations of unbelief, now fully blown, that the Lord will drive out these people."²⁵ The destruction of the Canaanites is not unconscionable but it because of their resistance to God.

Child-sacrifice in Ancient Near East Period

There are some arguments among scholars about the practice of child-sacrifice in the ancient near east. For example, Alberto R.W. Green in *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* argues that "no clear testimony of the ritual killing of human beings in this region appears in any written remains from this time."²⁶ Green adds that some practices in Mesopotamian region such the Ur "Royal Burials" also the death of Amorite's King "Ammisaduqa" are not related to human sacrifice.²⁷ Nevertheless, he points out that human sacrifice being sacrificed on alter is clearly demonstrate during the Sumerian period.²⁸ In addition to that, Arnold comments that though practices of child-sacrifice are performed in ancient Canaan, it is unknown in Israel.²⁹ For that reason, such practice is clearly depicted that the norm in ancient Near East was animal sacrifice and not child sacrifice. However, he assumed that Abraham is familiar with such practice during this time.

During the historical era of the ancient Near East, there existed a prevalent belief system wherein it was held that the deity responsible for bestowing fertility upon the land and its inhabitants also demanded a proportionate offering of the bounties provided. Such a belief necessitated the performance of sacrificial rituals involving animals, grains, and even children. Notably, certain manuscripts originating from Phoenician and Punic colonies, exemplified by

²¹ Merrill, Rooker, and Grisanti, *The World and the Word*, 19.

²² Magyarosi, *Holy War and Cosmic Conflict in the Old Testament*, 33-34.

²³ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia, PO: Westminster, 2000), 8-9.

²⁴ Merrill Frederick Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament: A Companion Volume to Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), 175.

²⁵ Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2004), 176.

²⁶ Alberto Ravinell Whitney Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, American Schools of Oriental Research; Dissertation series; no.1 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975), 157.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 192.

²⁹ Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 110.

Carthage in North Africa, elucidate the observance of child sacrifice as a means to ensure the perpetuation of fertility.³⁰ In Light of this evidence, Victor Matthew contends that the narrative of Genesis 22 demonstrates Abraham's familiarity with the custom of child sacrifice.

Interpretation

The book of Genesis consists of two parts where chapters 1-11 known as "primeval history," and the second part, chapters 12-50 has been called as "patriarchal history." The first half centers on the early stages of universal history, while the second centers on the early stages of Israelite history.³¹ The division between two sections are marked by *Tôlédôt* (genealogies). The first section is concluded by Shem's genealogy and Terah's genealogy introduces the second part.³² The second part gives the picture of the patriarchal narratives that show the divine promise to the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although there is no consensus among the biblical scholars concerning this issue. For example, Hamilton still argues that this theme still continues until the story of Joseph.³³ The outline of Genesis 12-50 can be seen in three main points:

- A | The narrative of Abraham: Gods' faithful Servant.
- B | The narrative of Jacob: God's Troubled Servant.
- C | The narrative of Joseph: God's Model Servant

The narrative of Abraham is believed as a special revelation of God to the promise of future descendants. In this context, in fact, the faith of Abraham is closely tied to the promise of the land and the promise of the son.³⁴ As it shown Gen 21 is the fulfillment of the promise son. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend that the manifestation of God's intended purpose was ultimately realized in accordance with divine principles. In fulfillment of the divine covenant, the male offspring, known as the promised Son, underwent the rite of circumcision when he reached the age of eight days.³⁵ However, this precipitates to the separation of Isaac and Ismael delineating Isaac as the legitimate progeny of God's covenant, not Ismael.

Narrowly, preceding the event in Gen 22, the author gives the picture of the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen 21:22-34). This narrative potentially serves as the

³⁰ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), Ge 22:1.

³¹ Victor P. Hamilton, "Genesis: Theology" *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, ed., Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 4: 663.

³² L. A. Turner, "Genesis, Book of," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* ed., T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 350–351.

³³ Victor P. Hamilton, "Genesis: Theology" *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 4:666.

³⁴ Richard S. Hess, (1994, January). Old Testament guides [Review of the book *Genesis 12–50* by R.W.L. Moberly, *Themelios: Volume 19*, 21.

³⁵ Wilbur Glenn Williams, *Genesis: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan, 1999), 167.

background of the Gen 22 wherein Abraham deals with the divine command and covenant. At this point, Abraham must experience profound sense of the fulfilment covenant between him and God. There is no significant issue after the event in Gen 22. The narrative continues with the genealogy of Nahor and afterward gives information on Sarah’s death and burial.

In Hebrew, clauses are divided according to accent mark. Therefore, this passage is divided into three clausal which can be seen below:

Genesis 22:2

וַיֹּאמֶר קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ אֶת-יִחְזָקָה אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְבֶּתָּ אֶת-יִצְחָק
 וְלֶךְ-לְךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ הַמִּרְיָה
 וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶתֶד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים:

First Clause
 Second Clause
 Third Clause

First Clause

וַיֹּאמֶר קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ אֶת-יִחְזָקָה אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְבֶּתָּ אֶת-יִצְחָק

The first clause of the second verse begins with the expression וַיֹּאמֶר “and he said.” This highlights the significance of the divine directive that God would impart to Abraham as indicated by the subsequent term קַח-נָא which appears in imperative. This is the first imperative that appears in the command. The meaning of the verb is “take,” “bring,”³⁶ “to take and go away with,” “to take up,”³⁷ This word occurs only eight times in the Old Testament and two of those in the book of Genesis.³⁸ The object of this imperative refers to the word אֶת-בְּנֶךָ. This word is direct object marker + noun common masculine singular construct + suffix 2nd person masculine singular. The root of this word is בָּן which means “son,”³⁹ Therefore, Abraham possessed a profound understanding and consciousness of the instructions he received. The mandate required him to take his beloved son, Isaac.

אֶת-יִצְחָק	אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְבֶּתָּ	אֶת-יִחְזָקָה	אֶת-בְּנֶךָ	קַח-נָא	וַיֹּאמֶר
Direct object	complement	Direct object	Direct object	predicate	Predicate
Isaac	Whom you love	Your only begotten son	Your son	Take now	And he said
Subordinate Clause				Main Clause	

The main clause of this refers to the instruction for taking Isaac as a burnt offering. The command interestingly shows the expression קַח-נָא taking action directly to the three direct objects, אֶת-בְּנֶךָ “your son,” אֶת-יִחְזָקָה “your only begotten son,” אֶת-יִצְחָק “Isaac.” This expression shows clearly that God wants Abraham to take Isaac, his son, and not to another son, Ismael. The expression אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְבֶּתָּ “whom you love,” appears here which might the cause of Abraham’s trial. This expression appears here for the first time in Bible.

³⁶ Holladay, *HOL*, s.v. לקח.

³⁷ Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *HALOT*, s.v. לקח.

³⁸ Abraham Even-Shoshan, *NCOT*, s.v. קח-נא.

³⁹ Holladay, *HOL*, s.v. בן.

Second Clause

וּלְךָ־לָךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה

This clause begins with the expression וּלְךָ־לָךְ which morphologically appears in imperative form. Its root is לָךְ which means “go,” “walk.”⁴⁰ This inflected form only occurs one time in the Old Testament.⁴¹ This is the second imperative the appear in the command. Interestingly, the direct object of the imperative refers to אֶל־אֶרֶץ. The root is אֶרֶץ which means “earth,” “ground,” “territory,” “land,”⁴² This word occurs 345 times in the Old Testament and 37 of those appear in the book of Genesis. The last word of this clause is הַמֹּרִיָּה which is definite article + proper noun. This word is “place for sacrificing Isaac,” site of temple”⁴³ and occurs only one time in the Old Testament.⁴⁴

הַמֹּרִיָּה	אֶל־אֶרֶץ	וּלְךָ־לָךְ
Complement Of Moriah	Direct object To the land	Predicate And go

Main Clause

The syntactical structure of this clause shows the second imperative form of God’s command which is וּלְךָ־לָךְ “and go to” then mentions in the direct object form אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה “the land of Moriah” as the destination of Abraham journey.

Third Clause

וְהִעֲלֵהוּ שָׂם לְעֹלָה עַל אֹתוֹ הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים:

This clause begins with third imperative form וְהִעֲלֵהוּ. The root of this word is עָלָה which can be translated as “to present a sacrifice at the altar,”⁴⁵ “be offered.”⁴⁶ Etymologically, its root found in all Semitic language, for example in Ugaritic [connected with offering of sacrifices of gods, the mountain of the gods]: “goes up to the mountain,” “offer a sacrifice,” “going up [to the temple or went up to offer sacrifice]”.⁴⁷ In its inflected form, this word only occurs one time in the Old Testament.⁴⁸ In addition to that, in causative form *hiphil*, is used 77 times for the offering of sacrifice, and 61 times appears together with עֹלָה “burnt offering.”⁴⁹ Therefore, the preferred translation of this word is “offer.” The following word, לְעֹלָה is a noun feminine singular. The

⁴⁰ Holladay, *HOL*, s.v. לָךְ.

⁴¹ Abraham Even-Shoshan, *NCOT*, s.v. לָךְ.

⁴² Holladay, *HOL*, s.v. אֶרֶץ.

⁴³ Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *BDB*, s.v. מֹרִיָּה.

⁴⁴ Abraham Even-Shoshan, *NCOT*, s.v. הַמֹּרִיָּה.

⁴⁵ Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *HALOT*, s.v. עָלָה.

⁴⁶ Holladay, *HOL*, s.v. עָלָה.

⁴⁷ H. F. Fush, “*ālā*,” *TDOT*, 11: 76.

⁴⁸ Abraham Even-Shoshan, *NCOT*, s.v. וְהִעֲלֵהוּ.

⁴⁹ H. F. Fush, “*ālā*,” *TDOT*, 11: 90.

root of this word is עֹלָה which means “whole burnt offering,”⁵⁰ “burnt offering,” “animal to be offered.”⁵¹

לעֹלָה על אחד ההרים אשר אמר אליך	שֶׁם	והעֹלָהוּ
Complement of the main clause	Indirect object	Predicate
Subordinate clause		Main Clause

The syntactical structure of this clause shows the third imperative of God’s command which is והעֹלָהוּ “to offer.” This structure does not show the direct object of the clause. The object implies in the suffix of the predicate which refers to Isaac, the one who will be offered “as a burnt offering,” לעֹלָה. However, in this context, the object seems to be שֶׁם which referring to the “one of the mountains in the land of Moriah.

To know better the context of God’s command, it is necessary to see the command as a whole. Overall, there are three commands in this passage, קח־נָא, וּלְךָ־לֶךְ, and והעֹלָהוּ. The Occurrences of imperative form in Gen 22

Term	Translation	Total Occurrence	
		Old Testament	Genesis
קח־נָא	Take	8	2
וּלְךָ־לֶךְ	Go	1	1
והעֹלָהוּ	Offer	1	1

The expression of קח־נָא used when Jacob wants to give a gift when he meets Esau again. This also appears when Naaman wants to give a gift to Elisha after the event of his healing.

The general context of קח־נָא in the Old Testament.

Genesis 33:11

קח־נָא אֶת־בְּרִכְתִּי אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיאת לְךָ

Please accept my blessing that is brought to you

2 Kings 5:15

קח־נָא בְּרִכָּה מֵאֵת עַבְדְּךָ:

So, **accept now** a present from your servant."

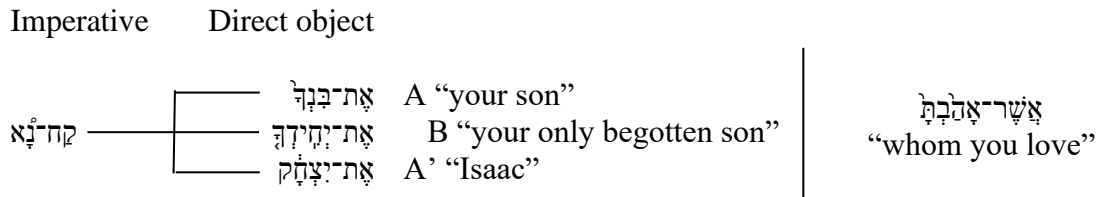
According to Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, “The particle נָא, frequently associated with volitional forms, is generally known as a precative particle and translated into English by ‘please.’”⁵² However, this expression is frequently translated in the Old Testament. Furthermore, the form of imperative also can be translated not as a command but as a request. In this context, therefore, there is no evidence that God wants to Abraham to slaughter his own son like other gods of Canaan. However, the expression קח־נָא is closely related to the request for something to be presented.

⁵⁰ Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *TWOT*, s.v. עֹלָה.

⁵¹ Holladay, *HOL*, s.v. עֹלָה.

⁵² Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 578.

Furthermore, the imperative form of קח־נָא has three direct objects which are אֶת־בְּנֵךְ, אֶת־יְהוָה, and אֶת־יִצְחָק. These words refer to the expression אֲשֶׁר־אַהַבְתָּ “whom you love. According to BDB, this expression is “human love to human object” such as love to son, to parent, to wife, and to the husband.⁵³ Interestingly, this expression appears in the book of Hosea when God enounces Israel’s punishment for being unfaithful to God and love a prostitutes’ wages (Hos 9:1). This expression may show that God wants to prove the Abraham to love Him more than Isaac his son.



The implementation of chiasitic structure as a literary methodology serves to highlight parallel notion while also reaffirming the central theme of the literary work. There, the second imperative plays as the central them of the command. The expression of וָלָךְ־לָךְ “go to the land” [on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you] is closely related to his initial encounter with God as depicted in Genesis 12:1, wherein God summons him to depart from his homeland “...go . . . to the land that I will show you.” Through this [go to the land of Moriah. . . one of the mountains that I will tell you], Abraham recollects the promise once more, prompting his desire to obediently comply with God’s command in anticipation of witnessing the realization of the promised outcome within the land of Moriah, drawing upon his prior encounters with the Lord.

Chiasitic Structure of Imperative

- קח־נָא A “take” [direct object- to your son, to your only begotten son, to Isaac]
- וָלָךְ־לָךְ B “go” [indirect object-to the land . . .]
- וְהִעָלֶהוּ A’ “offer” [the object Isaac implies as suffix in the predicate-the indirect object of this clause is “there” or one of the mountains in the Moriah.]

Therefore, it seems clear that the main issue in this narrative does not focus on the “to take” and “to offer” Isaac, but “to go” to the land. The author seems not to point directly that Isaac is the object of the וְהִעָלֶהוּ in this context. However, the passage shows that all of God’s command is a part of נִסָּה "to test,” as a whole. This narrative is not about child-sacrifice or sacrificing Isaac but about the story of Abraham’s test.

⁵³ Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *BDB*, s.v. אָהַבְתָּ.

Theological Implication

The narrative of Gen 22 carries significant theological implications for the entirety of the biblical text. The main principle of the covenant between God and his people appears in this narrative. The narrative unequivocally portrays the covenant's significance, establishing it as an indispensable element throughout the continuum of biblical history. Of particular focus within the narrative are the themes encompassing the land and the progeny of Abraham, which emerge as predominant motifs within the Old Testament. main issues of the Old Testament theme. This covenant proclaims the universal scope of divine grace on earth through this chosen people. God's covenant is the major issue of his plan of salvation.

The story itself shows the principle of the faithful attitude of Abraham. Due to his steadfastness, he is being a father of all believers (Rom 4:11) and is able to testify God as a faithful God to every human being. By being a faithful person, he can see and understand clearly the covenant of God even in the troubled situation. This attitude shows the spiritual relationship between Abraham and his God as a part of the fulfillment God's promises. Abraham believes that God will never fail in fulfilling his promise to his life. Through this story, God wants to show the principle of the obedience which is the main issue of a human being.

While the central thematic concern of this narrative does not revolve around the practice of child sacrifice, its content insinuates a theological framework that resonates with the conceptualization of the sacrificial nature of Jesus' atonement. As discussed before, the expression of "your only begotten son whom you love" depicts the motif in John 3:16 as the willingness of God to give his only begotten son as a sacrifice to substitute the sinful earth. Apart from highlighting the covenant between God and Abraham, this narrative also highlights the plan of salvation.

SUMMARY

The book of Genesis is written particularly to Israel when Moses prepares them to enter the Promised Land. The issue of child-sacrifice is very common among the Israelites. This serves as validation for the Israelites, affirming the distinction between God the worship and the gods revered by the Canaanite. This is also to remind Israel about the covenant of the chosen people between Abraham and God. The analysis shows that the main issue does not focus on "to take" and "to offer" Isaac, but "to go" to the land. The text seems not to point directly that Isaac is the direct object of the verb *וְהִעֲלֵהוּ*. However, the passage shows that all of God's command is a part of *נִסָּה* "to test," as a whole. This narrative is not focusing on child-sacrifice or sacrificing Isaac but about the story of Abraham's test. The narrative is related to the issue of the covenant, faith, sacrifice, and the chosen people of God. The respond of Abraham to the God's command represents his obedience from the beginning of narrative (Gen 12). By his faith, Abraham put God's promise on God's side, not at his side. Abraham believes that God will never fail in fulfilling his promise in Abraham's life. Moreover, plan of salvation can be seen in the willingness of Abraham and Isaac to God's command of sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

God's command in the Gen 22 has no correlation to the practice of child-sacrifice. The main idea of God's command can be understood as the final fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. To understand this issue, it is necessary to see the God's command as a whole in Gen 22. There are three verbs in the imperative form which refer to God's command in Gen 22:2. The command begins with the expression קָח־אִישׁ ["to take" *Isaac*], followed by וְלֶךְ־לְאֶרֶץ ["to go" *to the land*], and finally וְהִעָלֶהוּ ["to offer" *Isaac*]. The center of God's command does not lie on the expression of קָח־אִישׁ ["to take" *Isaac*] and וְהִעָלֶהוּ ["to offer" *Isaac*] but on the expression of וְלֶךְ־לְאֶרֶץ ["to go" *to the land*]. This expression is closely related to the first calling of Abraham in the Gen 12 "to go" *to the land* which reminds Abraham of the initial promises.

Furthermore, the first expression קָח־אִישׁ ["to take" *Isaac*] has three direct objects which are בְּנִי "your son, $\text{אֶת־יְהוָה־יְחִידְךָ}$ "your only begotten son, and אֶת־יִצְחָק "Isaac." while וְלֶךְ־לְאֶרֶץ and וְהִעָלֶהוּ have an only indirect object. It is assumed that God does not directly point that Isaac is the object of the וְהִעָלֶהוּ in this context. Syntactically, this part implies Isaac as the object of the offering in the suffix third-person singular of וְהִעָלֶהוּ . However, this issue is a part of God's command "to test" Abraham and this narrative does not imply the child-sacrifice or sacrificing Isaac.

The story is obviously written to Israel in the wilderness. Thus, the original readers are familiar with this issue. They understand that God has never commanded the practice of child-sacrifice as they receive also the prohibition of this practice in Deut. 12:31; 18:10; Lev 18:21. Furthermore, this story is believed to establish their understanding of God's covenant during the time in the wilderness.

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