CHAPTER 4

The AQEDAH *and* CHRISTICONIC INTERPRETATION

. . . συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.
(. . . summorphous tēs eikonos tou huiou autou)
. . . conformed to the image of his Son.
ROMANS 8:29

After establishing, in chapters 1 and 2, that the biblical canon projects a *world in front of the text*—what authors *do* with what they *say* (the pragmatics of the text)—it was shown that this segment of the canonical world was the theology of the pericope, bearing a divine demand: how God would have his people live, i.e., by the precepts, priorities, and practices of the projected world. Chapter 3 examined the genre of biblical law and showed that even pericopes in this genre carry divine demands applicable for the Christian today. Each pericope projects a segment of the canonical *world in front of the text*, i.e., the theology of that pericope, that portrays an aspect of God and his relationship with his creation. Thus, each text bears a divine demand intended to be obeyed, not as a condition for salvation, but as a call to sanctification. Grounded in a prior relationship with God, the believer has a filial responsibility to obey. A theological hermeneutic for the interpretation of OT law was proposed, that is guided by the rationale of the law implicit in the theology of the pericope.

Preview: The *Aqedah* and Christiconic Interpretation

The potential applicability of every pericope of Scripture, even those in the genre of OT law, raises an important question: Where is Christ in these texts? How does the interpreter do justice to the Rule of Centrality that calls for focusing all interpretation upon Christ (see chapter 1), particularly when handling an OT pericope? This chapter will address these questions. It begins with the study of a text that, over the last two millennia, has been extensively mined for christological elements—the narrative of Gen 22. The christocentric readings will be critiqued; arguments for and against such an interpretation will be analyzed. Subsequently an examination of this narrative text will be conducted to yield the theology of the pericope according to the hermeneutic propounded in this work. This chapter will close with the proposal for a new model for the christological reading of Scripture—*christiconic* interpretation, one which "sees" Christ in every pericope of Scripture, OT and NT, a hermeneutic that *does* abide by the Rule of Centrality. In brief, the plenary text of Scripture projects an image (εικών) of Christ, with each pericope portraying a facet of this image: what it means to be Christlike.

THE *AQEDAH* (GENESIS 22)

For millennia, Bible scholars, both Jewish and Christian, have exerted themselves at the task of interpreting Gen 22, the *Aqedah*.[1] The first part of this chapter will revisit these interpretations and discover the theology of the pericope by means of a focused exegesis that privileges the text.[2]

Traditional Views

The perplexities of this narrative are many. Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor and Nobel prize-winning author, called this story "terrifying in content."[3] How could God test/tempt someone in so gruesome a fashion, seemingly contradicting his own promises? How could Abraham agree to this gory transaction? What did Sarah—or for that matter, Isaac—think about the whole deal? And, of course, the question of how Christ fits into the scheme has kept Christian interpreters busy.

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1. *Aqedah* comes from עקד, *'qd,* "bind" (Gen 22:9)—a *hapax legomenon*.

2. Portions of this section were presented at the 63rd Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Francisco, Calif., November 16–18, 2011, and published in Abraham Kuruvilla, "The *Aqedah:* What Is the Author *Doing* with What He Is *Saying*?," *JETS* 55 (2012): 489–508.

3. Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God* (New York: Random House, 1976), 69.

God's Joke?

The account is so unimaginable as it stands, that some have thought God must have been joking! Woody Allen thinks it happened this way:

> And Abraham awoke in the middle of the night and said to his only son, Isaac, "I have had a dream where the voice of the Lord sayeth that I must sacrifice my only son, so put your pants on."
>
> And Isaac trembled and said, "So what did you say? I mean when He brought this whole thing up?"
>
> "What am I going to say?" Abraham said. "I'm standing there at two a.m. in my underwear with the Creator of the Universe. Should I argue?". . .
>
> And Sarah, who heard Abraham's plan, grew vexed and said, "How doth thou know it was the Lord and not, say, thy friend who loveth practical jokes . . .?"
>
> And Abraham answered, "Because . . . [i]t was a deep, resonant voice, well-modulated, and nobody in the desert can get a rumble in it like that.". . .
>
> And so he took Isaac to a certain place and prepared to sacrifice him, but at the last minute the Lord stayed Abraham's hand and said, "How could thou doest such a thing?"
>
> And Abraham said, "But thou said—"
>
> "Never mind what I said," the Lord spake. "Doth thou listen to every crazy idea that comes thy way?"
>
> And Abraham grew ashamed. "Er—not really . . . no."
>
> "I jokingly suggest thou sacrifice Isaac and thou immediately runs out to do it."
>
> And Abraham fell to his knees. "See, I never know when you're kidding."
>
> And the Lord thundered, "No sense of humor. I can't believe it."
>
> "But doth this not prove I love thee, that I was willing to donate mine only son on thy whim?"
>
> And the Lord said, "It proves that some men will follow any order no matter how asinine as long as it comes from a resonant, well-modulated voice."
>
> And with that, the Lord bid Abraham get some rest and check with him tomorrow.[4]

4. Woody Allen, "The Scrolls," in *The Insanity Defense: The Complete Prose* (New York: Random House, 2007), 137–38.

Was God just kidding? Unlikely. The particle נָא (*na'*; an interjection of entreaty usually translated as "pray," "now," or "then") that is linked to God's command to Abraham to "take" (Gen 22:2; קַח־נָא, *qah na'*, "take now") is found over sixty times in Gen. However, it is employed in divine speech only five times: Gen 13:14; 15:5; 22:2; Ex 11:2; Isa 7:3, and in each of these instances, God demands something incredulous of the individual, "something that defies rational explanation or understanding."[5] No, there could be no question but that God *was* aware of the magnitude of what he was asking Abraham to do in Gen 22. He was not joking; that he did mean "sacrifice" is clear from the reference to "burnt offering" in 22:2.

In a similar vein, but rather than make the Almighty a prankster, the rabbis concluded Abraham had simply heard God wrong.

> Said R. Aha:
>
> [Abraham said to God] "Are there jokes even before You? Yesterday You said to me, 'For in Isaac shall seed be called to you.' And then You went back on Your word and said, 'Take your son.' And now: 'Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him.' [What's next?] . . ."
>
> [God to Abraham] "True, I command you, 'Take now your son.' I will not alter what has gone out of My lips. Did I ever tell you to kill him? No, I told you, 'Bring him up.' Well and good! You did indeed bring him up. Now take him down." (*Gen. Rab.* 56:8)[6]

So, God is off the hook. It was all Abraham's fault. He had misunderstood God.

Kant deprecated this whole idea of God conversing with Abraham. According to him, one could be sure that the voice that commanded sacrifice was *not* God's and, Kant advised, Abraham ought to have repudiated this supposedly divine command: "'That I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God—of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even

5. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 101.

6. The verb in Gen 22:2 translated "offer," derived from עלה (*'lh*, "to go up," "to rise," or "to ascend"), could conceivably mean "bring up" (as a noun, עֹלָה, *'olah,* means "whole, burnt sacrifice"). See Laurence H. Kant, "Restorative Thoughts on an Agonizing Text: Abraham's Binding of Isaac and the Horror on Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22): Part 2," *LTQ* 38 (2003): 173–74. A burnt offering expressed the giving of the offerer completely to God, the animal taking the place of the person. Biblical law considered every firstborn son to be so dedicated to God, but that "offering" was to be substituted in the actual sacrifice by an animal (Ex 22:29; 34:20). Later, Levites took on that role of being substitutes consecrated entirely to God, in lieu of Israel's firstborn male children (Num 4:45–49). See Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 105.

if this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven.'"[7] In other words, Abraham should not have been taken in by the "resonant, well-modulated voice." This argument will not be countered here; I accept the veracity of the biblical account as a starting premise, construing it as part of Scripture: it *was* God speaking. The goal here is to unravel the speech-action of the author, and for that purpose, this account will be dealt with as it stands, without undermining it.[8]

Satanic Influence in the Test?

There is a whole array of rabbinic exposition that dwells on the role of evil angels in the *Aqedah*. They are said to have instigated the test of the patriarch after the manner of Job's trial. *Jubilees* 17:16 and 4Q225 (pseudo-Jubilees) propounds a satanic character, Mastema, inciting God to test Abraham; *m. Sanh.* 89b assumes it was Satan himself behind all of this.[9] Another account thinks jealous demons had something to do with this frightful test—jealous because Abraham had a son (Pseudo-Philo, *L.A.B.* 32:1–4).[10] None of these ideas has any biblical basis.

Isaac—Ignorant Victim or Willing Partner?

Given that this was actually a test—rather than a joke or a misunderstood command or a demonically instigated enterprise—how does one explain Abraham's willingness to go through with the sacrifice? The rabbis tried hard to blunt the force of the horrific narrative by speculating that Isaac was a willing participant

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7. Immanuel Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties," in Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology* (trans. Mary J. Gregor and Robert Anchor; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 283 (7:63), and the unnumbered footnote on the same page.

8. While not considering this episode a joke, Elie Wiesel's accounting of the event is unique: Abraham actually twisted God's arm and forced the test back upon God, as if to say: "I defy You, Lord. I shall submit to Your will, but let us see whether You shall go to the end, whether You shall remain passive and remain silent when the life of my son—who is also Your son—is at stake!" And of course, God blinked! Abraham won. Wiesel thinks *that* was why, at the conclusion of this tussle of wills, God sent an angel to rescind the order and to congratulate him: because God was too embarrassed to do so personally, having lost this battle of bluffs (*Messengers of God*, 91).

9. Mastema is a cryptic and esoteric evil being frequently found in the Qumran literature: 1QS, 1QM, CD, 4Q286, 4Q387, and 4Q390, in addition to 4Q225. The word מַשְׂטֵמָה (*mstmh*) is a feminine abstract noun meaning "opposition," an etymology similar to that of שָׂטָן (*satan*). See Moshe J. Bernstein, "Angels at the Aqedah: A Study in the Development of a Midrashic Motif," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7 (2000): 263–91.

10. There are other florid stories of angels as well: watching and weeping angels (*Gen. Rab.* 56:7 speculates that the tears of angels dissolved Abraham's knife; elsewhere, in *Gen. Rab.* 65:10, it is said that their tears, falling into Isaac's eyes, blinded him), and singing angels (they sang, apparently when Isaac was finally spared, *t. Soṭ.* 6:5).

in the affair, colluding with his father. The seemingly passive Isaac of Gen was reinterpreted by later Jewish scholars to depict a "mature, active, and virtuous volunteer, the perfect offering."[11] In *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Gen 22:10, the son exhorts his father, "Bind me well that I may not struggle in the agony of my soul and be pitched into the pit of destruction and a blemish be found in your offering" (so also *Tg. Neof.* and *Gen. Rab.* 56:8). Josephus even has Isaac being so "pleased" with the news of his fate that he "went immediately to the altar to be sacrificed" (*Ant.* 1.13.4). Later in the history of interpretation, Isaac is also supposed to have bound himself (*Sipre* Deut 32).

We do best to remain as restrained as the biblical account is about Isaac's willingness. There is no record of any conversation between father and son, beyond the cryptic remarks of each in Gen 22:7–8. Luther, however, thought there was more chatting between father and son, and he gave in to his speculative tendencies:

> The father said: "You, my dearly beloved son, whom God has given me, have been destined for the burnt offering." Then the son was undoubtedly struck with amazement and in turn reminded his father of the promise: "Consider, father, that I am the offspring to whom descendants, kings, peoples, etc., have been promised. God gave me to my mother Sarah through a great miracle. How, then, will it be possible for the promises to be fulfilled if I have been killed? Nevertheless, let us first confer about this matter and talk it over." All this should have been recorded here. I do not know why Moses omitted it.[12]

But despite all these heroic efforts, the text remains inscrutable. There is hardly any concern for the details of the event that Luther and others are grasping for. Rather, as I will demonstrate, authorial interest is theological; the writer has an agenda and therefore is selective about what is detailed in the text. It is those details that the interpreter must attend to—it is the text that must be privileged, not the events *behind* the text.

Typology of the Passover?

Over the millennia, one of the more common avenues of exploration of the *Aqedah* has been the identification of the typology within the narrative. The purported willingness of Isaac to go to the altar rendered him a virtuous sacrifice

11. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC 1B; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 301.

12. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 21–25: Luther's Works*, vol. 4 (trans. George V. Schick; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 112–13.

that was seen by Jewish interpreters as efficacious for future generations of Israelites. For instance, *Mek. R. Ishmael* (*Pisha* 7 on Ex 12:13) interprets God's "When I see the blood I will pass over you" as, in fact, concerning the blood of the sacrifice of Isaac, anachronistic as it may be. In similar fashion, the account of the *Aqedah* in *Jubilees* makes it coincident with the (pre)anniversary of the Passover. As *Jub.* 18:3 has it, God's command to Abraham regarding Isaac was issued on the twelfth day of Nisan; the sacrifice party then travels for three days, making the sacrifice on "Mt. Zion" occur on the fifteenth of Nisan, the exact date of the Passover ritual. Subsequently, returning to Beersheba, a seven-day fast is observed by Abraham (*Jub.* 18:18–19), corresponding to the only seven-day feast in the Bible—that of Passover (Lev 23:6 and Num 28:17). The *Aqedah* thus becomes the "etiology of Passover."[13] One is hard-pressed to see how this line of typological thinking is substantiated in the canonical Scriptures.

Typology of the Atonement?

It is quite understandable why the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has been oft linked to the *Aqedah.* The concepts of "sacrifice" and "son" and "substitute" in Gen 22 have obvious parallels in the theology of the atonement; the resulting enterprise of finding typological elements in Gen 22 has been unparalleled in the history of biblical interpretation. The identification of Abraham with God the Father and Isaac with God the Son was articulated by numerous patristic and medieval interpreters.[14] Barnabas (second century) was perhaps the earliest to advance on this path: "He himself [Jesus Christ] was going to offer the vessel of the spirit as a sacrifice for our sins, in order that the type [ὁ τύπος, *ho tupos*] established in Isaac, who was offered upon the altar, might be fulfilled [τελεσθῇ, *telesthē*]" (*Barn.* 7.3). Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) also explicitly labeled Isaac as a "type" of the Christ—both were sons, both were victims, both bore wood (*Christ the Educator* 1.5.23).[15] Tertullian (ca. 160–220) contributed to

13. Leroy Andrew Huizenga, "Obedience unto Death: The Matthean Gethsemane and Arrest Sequence and the Aqedah," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 510–11. Other parallels in *Jubilees*: both the *Aqedah* and the Passover celebrations involved rejoicing (18:18–19 and 49:2, 22); Mastema (the mysterious evil heavenly being) showed up in both accounts (17:16; 18:9, 12; and 48:2, 9); and he was ultimately shamed (18:9–12; and 48:13; 49:12).

14. See Jon Balserak, "Luther, Calvin and Musculus on Abraham's Trial: Exegetical History and the Transformation of Genesis 22," *RRR* 6 (2004): 364–65, for an extensive list and bibliography.

15. Cited in Thomas C. Oden and Mark Sheridan, eds., *Genesis 12–50* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, vol. 2; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 105.

this line of thought, too: "Isaac, on the one hand, with his 'wood,' was saved, the ram being offered which was caught by the horns in the bramble. Christ, on the other hand, in His times, carried His 'wood' on His own shoulders, adhering to the horns of the cross, with a thorny crown encircling His head" (*Adv. Jud.* 13). Origen (ca. 185–254) came to the same conclusion: "We said . . . that Isaac represented Christ. But this ram no less also seems to represent Christ" (*Homilies on Genesis* 8.9).[16] Irenaeus (second century) declared: "For Abraham, according to his faith, followed the command of the Word of God, and with a ready mind delivered up, as a sacrifice to God, his only-begotten and beloved son, in order that God also might be pleased to offer up for all his seed His own beloved and only-begotten Son, as a sacrifice for our redemption" (*Haer* 4.5.4). Caesarius of Arles (ca. 470–542) observed that "[w]hen Abraham offered his son Isaac, he was a type of God the Father, while Isaac prefigured our Lord and Savior" (*Sermon* 84.2). He went further: the two servants of Abraham, left below the mountain, represented the Jewish people, who could not ascend or reach the place of sacrifice because of unbelief in Christ; the donkey, inexplicably, indicated the synagogue.[17] Thus Abraham represents the believer and his faith, Isaac represents the believer's self-denial, *and* Isaac also represents Jesus Christ, creating no small confusion, not to mention the typology of wood and thorns, ram and donkey.

Typical of modern-day interpreters who focus on OT typology is Clowney[18]:

> When God provided the ram, he not only spared Isaac (and Abraham!) but showed Abraham that the price of redemption was greater than he could pay. The Lord himself must provide the offering that brings salvation. . . . The One descended from Abraham must come, in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. "The Lord Will Provide" promises the coming of Christ. . . . Not Isaac but the Lamb of God was the Sacrifice that the Father would provide.

16. Cited in Oden and Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, 109. Chrysostom (ca. 349–407) asserted: "All this, however, happened as a type of the cross. . . . an only-begotten son in that case, an only-begotten son in this; dearly loved in that case, dearly loved in this" (*Homilies on Genesis* 47.14; cited in Oden and Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, 110). Jerome (ca. 347–420) described "Isaac who in his readiness to die bore the cross of the Gospel before the Gospel came" (*Ep. ad Pammachium*, 7).

17. Cited in Oden and Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, 102. So also Melito of Sardis (see Fragments 1 and 3, translated in Robert L. Wilken, "Melito, the Jewish Community at Sardis, and the Sacrifice of Isaac," *TS* 37 [1976]: 64, 66, 67), and Theodoret (*Dialogues* [III: "The Impassable"]). Later commentators followed suit, blending the types of Isaac and the ram into the antitype of Christ, among them Augustine (see *City of God* 16.32, and *De Trinitate* 6.11).

18. Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 76–77.

There is no mention at all about the "fear of God" for which Abraham was commended (see below). According to Sidney Greidanus, another proponent of the redemptive-historical (RH) approach to OT interpretation, "[c]learly, the theme of God providing a lamb leads directly to Jesus Christ and the sacrifice he makes so that his people may live."[19] His resulting sermon on this text has the goal "[t]o assure God's people that their faithful covenant LORD can be trusted to provide their redemption."[20]

Despite these christocentric assertions, ancient and modern, Moberly makes it clear that שֶׂה (*seh*), translated "lamb" in Gen 22:7, is "a generic term for an animal from a flock." Indeed even the LXX of Gen 22:7 has πρόβατον (*probaton,* and not the christological "lamb [ἀμνὸς, *amnos*]" of John 1:29 that one might expect); the precise Hebrew word for lamb is כֶּבֶשׂ (*kebes,* as in the "lamb" of the "continuous" offering, Ex 29:38), and not שֶׂה. Thus there appears to be little basis for drawing out any ovine typology from Gen 22.[21] Calvin is honest about these conjectures: "I am not ignorant that more subtle allegories may be elicited; but I do not see on what foundation they rest" (*Commentary on Genesis,* on 22:13). All of these typological explorations render the narrative a tangled skein of anachronistic references, especially for preachers. Rather than immediately fling out a lifeline from the NT to accomplish a christocentric rescue of the *Aqedah*, I suggest that the interpreter privilege the text and its immediate context to figure out what the A/author was *doing* with what he was saying (the theology of this pericope). For there is the "strong danger of ultimate superficiality" when the ancient text is not allowed to speak for itself and express its primary message. "If the Old Testament no longer says something to the Christian in its own right, to which the Christian still needs to attend and on which Christian faith necessarily builds, its actual role within Christian faith will tend to become marginal and optional, no matter what rhetoric is used to urge its importance."[22] A sound warning, indeed.

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19. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 311. He does admit that "there is no agreement" as to which character of the story is a type of Christ—Abraham, Isaac, or the ram (Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 202, 203).

20. Ibid., 205 (italics removed). For a review of Greidanus's work on Genesis, see Abraham Kuruvilla, "Book Review: *Preaching Christ through Genesis,* Sidney Greidanus," *JEHS* 8 (2008): 137–40.

21. R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107n52.

22. Ibid., 140.

It is certainly not universally accepted that Isaac and the ram represent God the Son, and Abraham, God the Father. Even in the late first-century interpretation of Gen 22 by Clement of Rome (*1 Clem.* 10:7), there is no indication of typology: "By obedience he [Abraham] offered him a sacrifice unto God on one of the mountains which he showed him."[23] Clement instead pronounces on Abraham's righteousness and faith as aspects of the narrative that ought to be exemplary for the Christian. In fact, the NT does not specifically refer to the *Aqedah* at all.[24] Kessler remarks on the unusual lack of references to the *Aqedah* in the NT, suggesting that "the biblical story was either not of special importance and/or lacked significance to Jesus and his first followers." This is especially telling, in light of the fact that OT quotations are, as a rule, frequently employed in the NT to substantiate atonement themes. Yet there appears to be no evidence that the earliest Christians viewed Gen 22 as christologically significant. Even though Paul uses a phrase in Rom 8:32 (τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο, *tou idiou huiou ouk epheisato*) that is perhaps an allusion to Genesis 22:12 and 16 (οὐκ ἐφεισω τοῦ υἱοῦ σου ἀγαπητοῦ, *ouk epheisō tou huiou sou agapētou*), "he makes little theological capital of it," neither is there any obvious portrayal of Isaac as a type of Christ elsewhere in Paul.[25] In Rom 8:32, "the typology is purely implicit, a by-product of the imaginative application to God of a clause that pertains to Abraham in the Greek Bible tradition."[26] This is a critical observation, often missed by those examining quotes of the OT in the NT. Not every NT citation or allusion or oblique reference to the OT is an *exposition* of the older text that adheres to literary, historical, and grammatical constraints. Rather, they are often imaginative

23. Where the patriarch was commanded to make his burnt offering apparently was the same location where the children of Abraham were called to do so—at the Temple mount (see the use of "Moriah" in Gen 22:2 and 2 Chron 3:1; also note the use of הַר [*har yhwh,* "mountain of Yahweh"] in Gen 22:14 and in Ps 24:3; Isa 2:3; etc.). This does not necessitate a connection with the atonement; rather the nexus is with faith. The faith of Abraham (or "fear of God"; see below) in the *Aqedah* was the attitude God's people were to have as they approached him, in the Temple or elsewhere. Any approach to God, any relationship with God, is to be undergirded with faith; hence the subtle link between the Temple (the place where God was encountered) and the *Aqedah* (the paradigmatic biblical demonstration of faith).

24. P. R. Davies and B. D. Chilton, "The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 532.

25. If he were referring to Gen 22, Paul would surely have employed the LXX's ἀγαπητοῦ. Hebrews11:17 also refuses to use this potent adjective, preferring μονογενής (*monogenēs*, "only") instead. Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 60–61, 121. The "typology" in Heb 11:19 refers to the reception of Isaac symbolically/figuratively back from the dead (thus, παραβολή, *parabolē*, "symbol/figure"). Rather than being a definitive statement of the meaning of the *Aqedah*, this NT verse simply underscores Abraham's incredible faith in a trustworthy God, as a result of which, "*in a sense/so to speak* [ἐν παραβολή] he received him [Isaac] back from the dead."

26. Davies and Chilton, "The Aqedah," 533.

applications and creative re-employments of a pithy phrase—a hijacking, if you will, of a recognizable commonplace, slogan, or bromide: an intertextual pun.[27]

Genesis 22 and the Author's *Doings*

What, then, was the author *doing* with what he was saying? And, with particular regard to Christology, where does Christ fit in this account?

A Necessary Test of Faith

The account begins with a time-stamp: "Now it came about *after these things*, that God tested Abraham" (Gen 22:1, emphasis added). What exactly were "these things"? A review of the Abrahamic saga is helpful for arriving at the speech-act of the narrator.

Bergen observes that "[t]his most prominent theme—that of Abraham's search for a proper heir—ties the diverse stories of the Abraham cycle together more securely than any other."[28] Indeed! In Gen 12 we have God commanding Abraham to leave his relatives and father's house in order to secure a blessing that would, in great part, come through an heir (12:1–3).[29] And, yes, Abraham showed faith in stepping out as commanded, but one notices that he took Lot his nephew with him, even though the divine word called for a separation from relatives and father's house. Was Abraham thinking of Lot as the likely heir,

27. Recently, criticizing the trend in administration circles to weigh, measure, and count everything that is weighable, measurable, and countable, I recommended to a fellow committee member at my institution that our committee motto ought to be *mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.* Yes, I wanted the biblical reference recognized. Yes, I wanted the literal meaning of the arcane terms understood. But I also wanted it known that I was trying to be creative and clever, while at the same time poking fun at (and condemning) our inclination towards the idolatry of numbers that makes us devotees of metrology. In other words, I was making an *intertextual pun!* My intention was hardly congruent with that of the venerable prophet: the "hijacking" of Daniel's Aramaic report of what was inscribed on Belshazzar's wall was not intended to be an exposition of Dan 5:25–28. While there were connections between my utterance and Daniel's—connections actually meant to be recognized—there was no intention to pass off my wisecrack as a literary-historical-grammatical gem of interpretation. One must bear in mind that OT-in-the-NT is not a monolithic transaction. There is clearly a vast diversity of purposes in the use of OT texts in the NT: illustrations and analogies and intertextual puns, in addition to prophetic, typological, and allegorical usages. Rather than seeking the *hermeneutical* bases of these NT uses of OT texts, I suggest that one must seek the *rhetorical* bases of their uses. What was the NT author trying to do in/with the writing of *his* text—OT quotes and all? At least for preaching purposes, the interpreter must privilege the text itself, not the hermeneutical method the author employed to bring the text into being (see below for further discussion on this point).

28. Robert D. Bergen, "The role of Genesis 22:1–19 in the Abraham Cycle: A Computer-Assisted Textual Interpretation," *CTR* 4 (1990): 323.

29. "Abraham" is, of course, "Abram" in Gen 12, but for ease of expression his final name (and that of his wife, "Sarah," not "Sarai") will be used throughout, despite the anachronism.

seeing that he himself was already seventy-five years old, and his wife sixty-five (12:4)? That certainly was not an attitude of faith in God's promise. Later, perhaps still holding on to the hope that his nephew Lot would be the chosen heir, Abraham gives him the choicest portion of the land; Lot goes east and Abraham west (13:10–11). God appears to Abraham soon thereafter, renewing the promise to his descendants (13:16) as if to assert that he, Abraham, had been mistaken in his reckoning of Lot as his heir. The patriarch *was* wrong, for the descendants of Lot would become sworn enemies of the descendants of Abraham (19:38).

Soon after he left his father's household and homeland, as Abraham stepped into the Negev, his caravan was hit by a famine (12:9–10). He promptly decamped to Egypt "to sojourn there," despite the fact that Yahweh had just appeared to him and promised, "To your descendants I will give this land," upon which Abraham had immediately built an altar (12:7). There appears to have been a hint of faithlessness in his fleeing to Egypt during the famine. Surely he knew God would keep his promise? Of course, one knows what happened in that land of refuge—Abraham was willing to pass off his wife, Sarah, as his sister, lest he got killed by Pharaoh for that "very beautiful" woman (12:12–14). Would not God keep his promise about the seed? Why then did he have to worry about his own life, and even put his wife's well-being in jeopardy?

In Gen 15, Yahweh's promise to Abraham was renewed (15:1). But Abraham was still childless, and so the heir, he figured, had to be Eliezer, his steward (15:2–3). God completely negated that suggestion: Abraham's heir would be "one who comes forth from your own body" (15:4), a promise set forth in covenant form (15:5–21). Yet Sarah continued to remain barren (16:1). Abraham then resorted to a compromise: perhaps the chosen heir, "from your own body," was to come through the maternal agency of a concubine (16:2). Acting on this misconception, Abraham fathers Ishmael through Hagar, the Egyptian. God reappeared to Abraham in Gen 17 and once again spelled out his promise to the patriarch. The divine word was crystal clear: *Sarah* would be the mother of the heir (this was iterated thrice this time: 17:16, 19, 21), not the maid, Hagar. And just as in the case of Lot, Ishmael's descendants (25:12–18) would turn out to be enemies of the descendants of Abraham. Again, faithlessness characterized Abraham's response to God.

Then, to make matters worse, in Gen 20, Abraham palmed his wife off as his sister . . . again! This time to Abimelech (20:2), but for the same reason that

he had conducted his subterfuge in Gen 12—out of fear for his own life (20:11), and that despite the extended account of Yahweh's appearance and re-promise to Abraham and his wife that an heir would be born to them (Gen 19). As in Gen 12, God had to intervene to set things straight (20:6–7).

Thus, all along, Abraham is seen rather clumsily stumbling along in his faith. All of his attempts to help God out with the production of an heir had come to naught. None of his schemes had worked; in fact, they had only created more trouble for himself and, in the future, for his descendants. Genesis 12–20, then, is not the account of a pristine faith on the part of the patriarch.

Finally, in Gen 21, the heir is born, and the account makes it very clear that God had done what he had promised to do all along. Three times in two verses, Yahweh's faithfulness is established: "Yahweh visited Sarah *as he had said*" (21:1a); "Yahweh did for Sarah *as he had promised*" (21:1b); "Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son . . . at the appointed time *of which God had spoken to him*" (21:2, emphasis added to all). This threefold iteration was almost a rebuke to Abraham's faithlessness thus far. God had been faithful; and he had done as he had promised. Abraham could surely trust him! The thorny issue of "seed," a problem that Abraham had been trying to solve on his own (or at least "help" God in solving it), had now been settled, as God had promised.

And then, in the very next chapter, Gen 22, Abraham is tested.[30] It was almost as if this test was a necessary one. Had Abraham learned his lessons? Would he come around to realizing, finally, that God was faithful? Would he now acknowledge that even against all odds and despite all unfavorable circumstances God's promises *would* come to pass? A test was necessary—not for God's benefit, of course, but for Abraham's, and for the benefit of all succeeding generations of readers of the text, to demonstrate what it meant to trust God fully, to take him at his word.[31]

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30. "Testing" (נסה, *nsh*) as an act of God for the good of his people is found in Deut 8:2, 16; Ex 15:25; 16:4; Jdg 2:22; 2 Chron 32:31; Ps 26:2. Both "fear of God" and "test" show up in Ex 20:20, where Moses reassures his people: "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, so that you might not sin."

31. Both in structure and concept, this test in Gen 22 was strikingly similar to the "test" in Gen 12:1–7. The latter was the first time God spoke to the patriarch; the former, the last. Both speeches contained the same initial command, found nowhere else in the Bible (לֶךְ־לְךָ, *lek-lka,* "go forth/go out," Gen 12:1; 22:2). The first called for a break with Abraham's past; the second, with Abraham's future. Both stressed a journey, an altar, and promised blessings. Thus Gen 12 and 22 form an appropriate commencement and conclusion, respectively, of the Abrahamic saga.

Kass speculates on the test: "Will you, Abraham, walk reverently and wholeheartedly before God even if it means sacrificing all benefits promised for such conduct? Do you, Abraham, fear-and-revere God more than you love your son—and through him, your great nation, great name, and great prosperity—and more even than you desire the covenant with God?"[32] As will be seen, Abraham passed his test in Gen 22 with flying colors. How he did, and what the A/author was *doing* in the recounting of that successful examination, will be addressed next.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS[33]

Faith in God's promises and his word is required from the child of God, a faith liable to be tested.

Abraham's Fear of God

Notice the key phrase in the acclamation of the angel of Yahweh in Gen 22:12: "Now I know that you *fear God*" (emphasis added). Abraham's fear of God had, through this test, been proven. This "fearing of God" is a critical element in the account. The last time fear of God was mentioned in the Abrahamic saga was in 20:11 (in fact these are the first two occurrences of "fear of God" in the Bible: יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים [*yir'at elohim*] in 20:11; and יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים [*yre' elohim*] in 22:12). When Abimelech confronted Abraham with his wife/sister deception, Abraham's excuse was: "Surely there is no fear of God in this place; and they will kill me because of my wife" (20:11). "No fear of God in this place"—the reader immediately catches the irony. Abimelech was terror-stricken at the possibility of having run up against God; the text explicitly tells us so: "And the men were greatly frightened [וַיִּירְאוּ . . . מְאֹד, *wayyir'u . . . m'od*]" (20:8). On the other hand, it was *Abraham* who did not fear God enough to trust him to take care of him when God had promised him descendants. Surely his life would not be in danger before he produced progeny.

But here, in Gen 22, Abraham appeared to have learned his lesson in trusting God as indicated in his response to Isaac: "Yahweh will provide" (22:8). In-

32. Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 337.

33. At the end of each section, the "Theological Focus" will summarize the theological thrust developed in that section; the exploration of the pericope will conclude with an integrated statement of the theology of the pericope ("Comprehensive Theological Focus").

deed, the entire account of Gen 22 is carefully framed around this momentous declaration:[34]

A	Divine call to Abraham (22:1a)
B	Abraham's response: "Here I am" (הִנֵּנִי, *hinneni*, 22:1b))
C	Divine command (22:2)
D	Abraham's response (22:3–4); raising eyes/seeing (וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא, *wayyissa' Abraham 'et-'enayw wayyar'*, 22:4)
E	Worship (22:5)
	Preparation for sacrifice (22:6)
	Abraham's response to Isaac (22:7): "Yahweh will provide" (22:8)
	Preparation for sacrifice (22:9–10)
A′	Divine call to Abraham (22:11a)
B′	Abraham's response: "Here I am" (הִנֵּנִי, 22:11b)
C′	Divine command (22:12)
D′	Abraham's response (22:13–14); raising eyes/seeing (וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא, 22:13)
E′	Worship implied (22:14)

From the way the story is discoursed, it seems clear that Gen 21, with the birth of Isaac and Yahweh's triple assertion of his faithfulness (21:1–2), had something to do with that change of heart. Apparently, after many blunders and fumbles, Abraham had finally come around to trusting God. And in Gen 22, the divine declaration "Now I know that you fear God" (22:12) gave proof to the fact that Abraham now feared God, trusting him enough to obey without question. Surely a God who could give him an heir from a dead womb could bring back that one from a charred altar. No wonder God could affirm Abraham's fear of God after this momentous test. "Now I know," the assertion that prefaces God's announcement in 22:12, was often used in the OT to describe solemn declarations (Ex 18:11; Jdg 17:13; 1 Sam 24:20; 1 Kgs 17:24; Ps 20:6). Targumic interpretation put it this way in the mouth of God: "I credit the merit

34. From Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 341–42n48; and Stanley D. Walters, "Wood, Sand and Stars: Structure and Theology in Gn 22:1–19," *TJT* 3 (1987): 314. After "and he said," and "and he said," and "and he said," and "and he said" (וַיֹּאמֶר, *wayyo'mer*)—the dialogue between father and son in 22:7—we suddenly have the pointed "and *Abraham* said" in 22:8 (וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם, *wayyo'mer Abraham*), signifying that what he was going to say was of great importance: the assertion of his faith, the manifestation of his fear of God.

to you for this action as though I had said to you, 'Offer me yourself,' and you did not hold back" (*Gen. Rab.* 56:7).[35] Indeed, this was a sacrifice not of Isaac, but of Abraham himself—all he hoped for, his future, his life, his seed.[36] A cascade of six imperfect verbs marked Abraham's obedience at the outset of the narrative: he rose, he saddled, he took, he split, he arose, he went (Gen 22:3). Approaching the place of sacrifice, another six imperfect verbs again point to his obedience: he built, he arranged, he bound, he placed, he stretched, he took (22:9–10). Earlier he had countered God's proposals, attempting to substitute Lot (Gen 12–13), Eliezer (15:2), and Ishmael (17:18), in place of Isaac. Here he is totally silent, a silence that is deafening: "his only words are absolute compliance and a confidence in the Lord's final provision."[37]

Ironically, when Abraham understood that "*God* sees/provides" (אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה, *elohim yir'eh,* Gen 22:8), God in turn acknowledged that *Abraham* "fears God" (יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים, *yre' elohim,* 22:12); the paronomasia is obvious.[38] One might say that "fear of God" is equivalent to the intense degree of faith that Abraham exhibited. Here, in Gen 22:12, the verb יָרֵא is used substantively to denote Abraham as a "fearer" of God—a (now-proven) characteristic of this patriarch. "Fear of God" is the fundamental OT term for depicting the appropriate human

35. So also *Jub.* 18.16 (and 4Q225), quoting God: "'I [God] have made known to all that you [Abraham] are faithful to me in everything which I say to you.'"

36. So also Ross: "[T]he real point of the act was Abraham's sacrifice of himself, that is, of his will and his wisdom with regard to his son Isaac" (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997], 393). Appropriately enough, Gerhard von Rad's booklet on Gen 22 is titled *Das Opfer des Abraham* ("The Sacrifice of Abraham")—not that of Isaac (Kaiser Traktate 6; Munich: Kaiser, 1971).

37. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 291.

38. The verb רָאָה (*ra'ah*, "to see/provide") echoes through the account: Gen 22:8, 13, 14 (×2). In fact, "Moriah" (מֹרִיָּה, *moriyah,* 22:2) also may quite likely be related to this root: thus, the "place of seeing." Moreover, one could also read בַּהַר יְהוָה יֵרָאֶה (*bhar yhwh yera'eh,* 22:14b) as "in the mount, the LORD will be seen" (or "in the mount of the LORD, he will be seen"), thus providing an etiology for what might have been the site of the Temple. The various uses of ראה in the story form a chiastic structure, centered on Abraham's faith in God's provision for a substitute for his son, and his discovery of that provision.

A	God announces the name of the mountain (הר, *har*): land of "the place of seeing" (מֹרִיָּה, *moriyah*, "Moriah", 22:2)
B	Abraham sees (ראה) the place (מָקוֹם, *maqom*) of sacrifice (22:4)
C	Abraham asserts God will see/provide (ראה, 22:8)
C′	Abraham sees (ראה) God's provision (22:13)
B′	Abraham names the place (מָקוֹם): "God sees/provides" (ראה, 22:14a)
A′	Narrator announces maxim about the mountain (הר): where "God will be seen" (ראה, 22:14b)

Rather than an Atonement analogy, this play of words and structure strongly emphasizes Abraham's faith in a faithful God: he sees (with the eyes of faith)—and God sees (to it).

response to God—the Hebrew equivalent to the Christian "faith" (see Deut 10:12; Eccl 12:13, in addition to Pss 103:11, 13, 17; 112:1; 128:1; Prov 31:30; Luke 1:50). Moberly asserts that "Genesis 22 may appropriately be read as a, arguably the, primary canonical exposition of the meaning of 'one who fears God,'" entailing "obedience of the most demanding kind" grounded in a deep trust in God.[39] In other words, the *Aqedah* defines the meaning of יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים—"obedience which does not hold back even what is most precious, when God demands it, and commits to God even that future which he himself has promised."[40] Abraham's sacrifice thus becomes "a paradigm for his successors," in his "wholehearted devotion to God" expressed in his obedience.[41] Maimonides would have agreed with this assessment; according to Rambam, one of the great principles of the Jewish faith that is taught in the *Aqedah* is

> the extent and limit of the fear of God. . . . The angel, therefore, says to [Abraham], "For now I know," etc. [Gen 22:12], that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a God-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of God. This idea is confirmed in Scripture; it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of God, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples. . . . (*Guide for the Perplexed* 24)

And faith is an integral part of that "fear." Abraham's faith in God is underscored in Gen 22:5, where in a series of first person plural verbs, the result that Abraham expected as the final outcome of the incident is implied: "I and the lad—we shall go . . . , and we shall worship, and we shall return." It is this faith of the patriarch in God, despite insurmountable odds, that is emphasized in Heb 11:17–19. James 2:21 points to the "justification" (or "proving") of Abraham by the specific "work" of his offering up Isaac, thus consummating his faith. James

39. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith*, 79, 96. Also see R. W. L. Moberly, "What is Theological Interpretation of Scripture?" *JTI* 3 (2009): 176.

40. Hans Walter Wolff, "The Elohistic Fragments in the Pentateuch" (trans. Keith R. Crim), *Int* 26 (1972):163–64. As Chisholm put it, "[f]earing God is a metonymy for reverence that results in obedience" (Robert B. Chisholm, "Anatomy of an Anthropomorphism: Does God Discover Facts?" *BSac* 164 [2007]: 13).

41. Gordon J. Wenham, "The Aqedah: 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. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 102. Notice also in Exod 20:20 where the Israelites are said to be tested (נסה, *nsh,* as in Gen 22:1) by God so that they may "fear" him (יראה, *yr'h*, as in Gen 22:12).

asserts that this was why Abraham was called "the friend of God."[42] The *Aqedah*, thus, is an account that teaches God's people what fearing God is all about—the willing sacrifice of *everything*![43]

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The fear of God is an attribute to be demonstrated by God's children, involving self-sacrificial trust in God's promises and wholehearted obedience to his word.

Abraham's Love for Isaac

The extent of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice "everything" and the depth of his wholehearted obedience is indicated in Gen 22 by the emphasis on the father-son relationship: "father" and/or "son" is mentioned fifteen times in Gen 22:1–20 (in 22:2 [×2], 3, 6, 7 [×3], 8, 9, 10, 12 [×2], 13, 16 [×2]). The readers are never to forget the relationship. In the only conversation recorded in the Bible between Abraham and Isaac, the latter's words begin with "my father" and the former's words end with "my son" (22:7–8)—this is also Abraham's last word before he prepares to slay Isaac (בְּנִי, *bni,* "my son," is a single word in the Hebrew). The narrator is explicitly creating an emotional tension in the story; no matter what the typological lens with which this account is viewed, one thing is clear: a father is called to slay the son he loves.

Gregory of Nyssa exclaimed: "See the goads of these words, how they prick the innards of the father; how they kindle the flame of nature; how they awaken the love by calling the son 'beloved' and 'the only one.' Through these names the affection towards him [Isaac] is brought to the boil."[44] In a sense, Mastema's sentiments were right on the money: "And the prince Mastema came and said before God, 'Behold, Abraham loves Isaac his son, and he delights in him above all things else; bid him offer him as a burnt-offering on the altar, and Thou wilt

42. Second Chronicles 20:7 and Isa 41:8 call the patriarch "beloved" of God (participle of אהב, *'hb*; the LXX of Isa 51:2 adds ἀγαπάω, *agapaō,* to point to God's love for Abraham (also see Jas 2:23). The "faith" of Abraham (אמן and, in the LXX, πιστός, *pistos*) is specifically noted in Neh 9:7–8.

43. On the other hand, the reversion to typology and a focus on parallels between the *Aqedah* and Christology diminishes the value of the story in its exhortation of the kind of "fear of God" that God desires from his people.

44. *Deit.*, translation from Kessler, *Bound by the Bible*, 49.

see if he will do this command, and Thou wilt know if he is faithful in everything wherein Thou dost try him'" (*Jub.* 17:16). It is therefore highly significant that the first time the word "love" (אהב, *'hb*) occurs in the Bible is in Gen 22:2. With the entry of this new word into Scripture came an implicit question: Was Abraham's love for Isaac so strong that his allegiance to God had diminished? It appears, then, that this love of Abraham for Isaac was a crucial element in the test—it was this love that was being tested. Would Abraham be loyal to God, or would love for the human overpower trust in the divine?

Without even perusing the details of Abraham's test, one can find the answer to that question of Abraham's loyalties when one compares the unique descriptors of Isaac. There are three heavenly announcements to Abraham (22:1–2, 11–12, 14–16) with three corresponding descriptors of the (proposed/putative) sacrifice, Isaac. These three descriptors contain three of the ten instances of בֵּן (*ben,* "son") in the account; but these three alone are inflected with the second person singular possessive pronoun (בִּנְךָ, *binka,* "your son") and fitted into a patterned construction. However, there is a significant alteration, before and after the test, in how God/angel of Yahweh described Isaac.

Pre-test:

22:2 "your son, your only son, *the one you love*"

Post-test:

22:12 "your son, your only son"

22:16 "your son, your only son"

The narrative omissions in 22:12 and 16 help clarify the reason for the test. The trifold description of Isaac in Gen 22:2 was to emphasize that this son, this particular one, was the one Abraham *loved,* with a love that potentially stood in the way of his allegiance to, and faith in, God. The subsequent, post-test deletion of the phrase, "the one you love," was clear indication that Abraham had passed the examination. The three-part description of Isaac *before* the test ("son/only son/one you love") becomes, *after* the test, two-part ("son/only son"). The *Aqedah* was, in reality, a demonstration of love for God over and against anything that advanced a rival claim to that love. "[T]he story has to do with idolatry—the idolatry of the son. Once God had given the gift of Isaac to Abraham, does Abraham focus on Isaac and forget the Giver? The climactic line is 'Now I know that you

worship [fear] God,' with the implied 'and that you do not worship your son.'"[45]

Four Maccabees 13:12 agrees with this reading of Abraham's shift in loyalties from Isaac to God: "Remember whence you came, and the father by whose hand Isaac would have submitted to being slain for the sake of devotion [to God; εὐσέβειαν, *eusebeian*]."[46] Philo, too, was on the right track when he noted that though Abraham was "attached to his child by an indescribable fondness," because he was "wholly influenced by love towards God, he forcibly repressed all the names and charms of the natural relationship," "inclining with his whole will and heart to show his devotion to God" (*On Abraham,* 32.117; 35.195).[47] Though Abraham's son was "well-beloved," "the commands of God are loved still more." Therefore, Ambrose exhorts, "Let us then set God before all those whom we love, father, brother, mother. . . . Let us, then, imitate the devotion of Abraham" (*On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus*, 2.97, 99).[48] Origen expressed it this way: "For Abraham loved Isaac his son, the text says, but he placed the love of God before love of the flesh . . . ."[49] In sum, the test "proved" the patriarch's absolute allegiance to God—his unadulterated love for, and loyalty to,

45. Phyllis Trible, *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (ed. Bill Moyers; New York: Doubleday, 1996), 227.

46. Sirach 44:20 and 1 Macc 2:52 declare that Abraham was "found to be faithful in his testing" (ἐν πειρασμῷ εὑρέθη πιστός, *en peirasmō heurethē pistos*). "Hence in the pre-Christian Jewish tradition reflected here, the basis of Abraham's uprightness is no longer his 'faith,' but his stalwart fidelity" (also see Jas 2:21, 23). Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, "The Interpretation of Genesis 15:6: Abraham's Faith and Righteousness in a Qumran Text," in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 94; eds. Shalom M. Paul, Robert A. Kraft, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Weston W. Fields; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 259.

47. So also Josephus: Abraham "preferred what was pleasing to God, before the preservation of his own son," proving his "piety" (θρήσκεια, *thrēskeia; Ant.* 1.13.1).

48. Ambrose also declared that Abraham did not "put love for his son before the commands of his Creator," thus demonstrating his "devotion to God" (*On the Duties of the Clergy,* 1.25.119). Calvin, while agreeing with Abraham's agonies, thought it was directed elsewhere and not primarily a paternal anguish. "For the great source of grief to him was not his own bereavement . . . but that, in the person of this son, the whole salvation of the world seemed to be extinguished and to perish" (Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis,* 22:1). It is a little hard to imagine a father with a knife poised to strike his beloved son being more worried about his posterity than about his bound child lying helpless before him on the altar. Kierkegaard depicts the pathos well: "There was many a father who lost his child; but then it was God, . . . it was His hand took the child. Not so with Abraham. For him was reserved a harder trial, and Isaac's fate was laid along with the knife in Abraham's hand" (Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* [trans. H. Honig and E. Honig; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983], 36).

49. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 8.7 (cited in Oden and Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, 106–7). And likewise, "[U]nless you are obedient to all the commands, even the more difficult ones, unless you offer sacrifice and show that you place neither father nor mother nor sons before God [Matt 10:37], you will not know that you fear God. Nor will it be said of you, 'Now I know that you fear God'" (Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 8.8 [cited in Oden and Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, 107]).

deity. Nothing would stand between Abraham and God and, in a circumspect way, the text actually tells us that (see below).

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The love of God's people for God brooks no rival claim for their love, whatever its object.

Isaac's Disappearance

One element of the account that has perplexed interpreters throughout the ages is the apparent disappearance of Isaac from the Abraham stories after the mention of "son" in Genesis 22:16. Indeed, father and son are never shown speaking to each other again after this narrative; Isaac does not even show up in the account of Sarah's death and burial (Gen 23). The only mentioned contact between father and son after the stunning episode of the *Aqedah* is at Abraham's funeral (25:9).[50] In fact, in the Gen 22 account itself, it appears that Isaac, after the aborted sacrifice, has vanished. Abraham, we are told, returned from his test, apparently *without* Isaac: "Then Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived in Beersheba" (22:19). The use of the same phrase, "went together," used to describe the trip of father and son (22:6, 8), is now used of the return journey of master and servants (22:19), making it all the more strange that Isaac is nowhere visible.

The rabbis recognized the strangeness of this omission in Gen 22:19 and responded with some even stranger solutions. "'And where was Isaac?' R. Berekhiah asserted: 'He had sent him to Shem to study Torah with him.' R. Yose bar Haninah said, 'He sent him away by night, on account of the evil eye.'" And, equally confusingly, R. Levi explained, "He took him and hid him away. He thought, 'Lest that one who tried to seduce him [Satan] throw a stone at him

50. Moreover, "[a]fter the *Aqedah,* there is no more direct divine revelation to Abraham and *vice versa,* no contact of Abraham with God in the rest of Abraham's stories in the book of Genesis" (Isaac Kalimi, "'Go, I Beg You, Take Your Beloved Son and Slay Him!' The Binding of Isaac in Rabbinic Literature and Thought," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 13 [2010]: 16). All this despite Abraham's endeavors to find a bride for Isaac (24:1–9, 62–67), and his giving his all to Isaac (25:6)—but there is no interpersonal contact or conversation between father and son explicitly noted in these texts.

and render him unfit for use as an offering'" (*Gen. Rab.* 56:5).[51]

When the documentary hypothesis (with its many refinements) was in vogue—dividing the Pentateuch between sources J, E, D, and P—Gen 22 was usually ascribed to E on the basis of the employment of אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*) in 22:1, 3, 8, 9, and 12. The appearance of יְהוָה (*yhwh*) in 22:11 and 14 was then attributed to faulty redaction, as was also this return of Abraham *alone*.[52] The speculation was that perhaps the sacrifice of Isaac actually did happen, but the redactor(s), in a bit of sloppy editing while attempting to valorize Abraham and concoct an account of an averted sacrifice, neglected to tweak the original conclusion of the return journey of the patriarch *sans* sacrificed son.[53] This oversight resulted, it is surmised, in the awkward stitching together of the story of an abandoned sacrifice with the absence of Isaac at the end of the account. However, none of these explanations is satisfactory for the one who wants to preach the final form of the text and accepts it as it is (see Rule of Finality in chapter 1).

Because of this seeming inconsistency regarding the presence/absence of Isaac in Gen 22:15–18, the conclusion of the narrative has often been considered an addendum to the main story: there appear to be stylistic differences between the two parts (economy of wording and heavy background in the latter, and repetitiveness and the use of synonyms and similes in the former), as well as vocabulary distinctions (two phrases in 22:15–18 are unparalleled in Gen but common in prophetic literature: "By myself I have sworn," and "declares Yahweh" (22:16). Yet, the story's opening in Gen 22:1 is neatly concluded in 22:18, and the recurrent motif of "only son" (22:2, 12, 16) further strengthens the unity of the whole account. Moberly is right in proposing that Gen 22:15–18, integral to the main account, "should be described as the earliest and canonically recog-

51. Other creative speculations as to the fate of the missing son are collected in Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice: The Aqedah* (trans. Judah Goldin; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967, 3–8). They include: Isaac out of weariness, from the shock of the whole affair, fell behind in his walking; Abraham sent him back home by another route to bear the glad tidings to Sarah; God took Isaac to the Garden of Eden where he remained for three years to be healed (of the wound inflicted by his father?); etc. Spiegel labels all this "paradoxical haggadic lore"—a "deviation from the patent sense of Scripture." He asks rhetorically, "The story of the Aqedah—is it possible that these pious generations failed to be affected by the plain meaning of the words of Scripture?" (ibid., 8). Good question!

52. See Robert Crotty, "The Literary Structure of the Binding of Isaac in Genesis 22," *ABR* 53 (2005): 32.

53. So, according to Coats, "[T]he Yahwist has appropriated an ancient story of child sacrifice, altering it so that it becomes an example of Abraham's faith and an occasion for God's renewing the promise for great posterity, for possession of land, and for blessing open to all the nations of the earth" (George W. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature* [FOTL 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 161).

nized commentary on the story"—a commentary from God himself.[54]

But one is still left with the burden of explaining the disappearance of Isaac. What happened to the lad after the sacrifice of the ram and the reissuing of God's promises?

As was noted earlier, there is one significant difference in the description of Isaac in the pre-test and post-test accounts (22:2 vs. 22:12, 16)—the "love" motif, missing after the abandoned sacrifice (see above). Quite interestingly, in parallel, while there are three assertions of Abraham being accompanied by one or more companions (וַיֵּלְכוּ . . . יַחְדָּו, *wayyelku . . . yahdaw,* "they walked on together," 22:6, 8, 19), the last such statement—the post-test version—is significantly different from the other two: in 22:6 and 8, "them" indicates Abraham and Isaac; in 22:19, Isaac is missing—"they" indicates Abraham and his two young men.

Pre-test:

22:6 "so the two of them [Abraham and Isaac] walked on together"

22:8 "so the two of them [Abraham and Isaac] walked on together"

Post-test:

22:19 "they [Abraham and his young men] . . . walked on together"

After the test, it was as if Isaac had altogether vanished; the narrator apparently took an eraser and wiped out any mention of Isaac after the "sacrifice." But there was a purpose behind this: the author was *doing* something with what he was saying (in this case, with what he *failed* to say, creating a striking gap in the narrative, but that, too, is to "say" something). No more would the account portray father and son speaking to each other or even being in one another's presence until the older one dies (25:8–9). When one remembers that the test was actually an examination of Abraham's loyalties—to God or to son, "the one you love"—one understands what it was the author was doing in Gen 22:19; he was describing, in yet another way, Abraham's success in this critical test. The author was depicting a line drawn; the relationship between father and son had been clarified, the tension between fear of God and love of son had been resolved. One might almost say: *For Abraham so loved God that he gave his only begotten son.* . . . This test had shown that Abraham loved God more than any-

54. R. W. L. Moberly, "The Earliest Commentary on the Aqedah," *VT* 37 (1988): 307–8, 314.

one else.[55] And to bring that home to readers, father and son are separated for the rest of their days—*literarily* separated, that is, for the purpose of achieving the narrator's theological agenda.[56] He was *doing* something with what he was *saying.*

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The love of God/the fear of God trumps every other allegiance.

Consequences of Abraham's Success

The consequences of Abraham's action, as depicted in the narrative of Gen 22, also give credence to the interpretation of the story as one that teaches what it means to fear God. That Abraham successfully passes this test is not only expressly depicted, but it is also strongly implied: the narrative is both the zenith of the Abrahamic saga and the climax of Abraham's worship. Of the three altars in the patriarch's story (12:8; 13:18; and 22:9), the one in Gen 22 is the only one with a sacrifice; with the others, Abraham only calls on the name of Yahweh (12:8; 13:4). At any rate, the satisfactory completion of the test ensures God's promise to Abraham; in fact, it *enhances* God's promise.

Scholars have generally held that the Abrahamic promises (in Gen 12, 15, 17, 18, and 22) are unconditional.[57] Yet, upon examination of the promise made to the patriarch at the conclusion of the momentous events of Gen 22, one cannot but notice contingency: the clauses "because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son" and "because you have obeyed my voice" (*A* and *A′* below) bookend the promised blessing (Gen 22:16c–18).

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55. The equation of "fear of God" and "love for God" is not illegitimate: Deut 6:2, 13 command fear, while the *Shema* calls for love (6:5); Deut 10:12 and 13:3–4—each has both elements; also see Deut 10:20 with 11:1; as well as Pss 31:19, 23; and 145:19–20. There is considerable overlap between these two concepts, as is evident in the *Aqedah* itself.

56. As to whether they were *actually* separated, that is an issue *behind* the text that need not concern the interpreter.

57. However, for more recent doubts about that assumption, see Gary Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?" *JAOS* 116 (1996): 670–97; Richard S. Hess, "The Book of Joshua as a Land Grant," *Bib* 83 (2002): 493–506; and Steven McKenzie, "The Typology of the Davidic Covenant," in *The Land that I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honor of J. Maxwell Miller* (eds. J. Andrew Dearman and M. Patrick Graham; London: Continuum, 2001), 152–78.

A	because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,
B	indeed I will greatly bless you (בָּרֵךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָּ, *barak 'abarekka*)
C	and I will greatly multiply your seed (זֶרַע, *zera'*)
D	as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore;
C′	and your seed (זֶרַע) shall possess the gate of their enemies.
B′	In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (הִתְבָּרֲכוּ, *hitbaraku*)
A′	because you have obeyed my voice.

This reiterated promise is quite different from the earlier promises in several ways: Gen 22:17a has "greatly bless" (*B* above; בָּרֵךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָ, emphatic and in the infinitive absolute, unique in Gen[58]); likewise, "greatly multiply" (*C*; וְהַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה, *wharbah 'arbeh,* is also found in Gen 16:10, but 22:17b is the only instance of this promise to the Abraham-Isaac-Jacob lineage). Moreover, 22:17c employs two similes—stars of the heavens, and sand of the seashore (*D*)—used elsewhere in Gen singly, but never together (Gen 15:5; 26:4; 32:12; also Ex 32:13); and the possession by Abraham's seed of "the gate of their enemies" (*C′*; 22:17d) is unusual in the promises in Gen.[59] The nations being blessed "in your seed" (*B′*; 22:18a and 26:4; 28:14) is also new—thus far the blessing of the nations had been explicitly "in Abraham" (12:3; 18:18). This focus on descendants is appropriate given that the *Aqedah* deals with the "saving" of a descendant.[60] Thus, there are significant differences—*contingent enhancements*—to the promises already given to Abraham in Gen 12, 15, 17, and 18. While the essence of the blessing remains the same in its various iterations, the attachment of the contingency of obedience (though there was already a hint of this in Gen 17:1–2 and 18:19), along with the enhancements, is certainly striking.[61]

Origen disagrees: "I see nothing additional. The same things are repeated which were previously promised" (*Homilies on Genesis* 9.1). He explains that the first promises were given at the time of Abraham's circumcision to the "people of circumcision" (those of the flesh), and the second promises, at the time of the "passion of Isaac," to "those who are of faith and who come to the inheritance through the passion of Christ."[62] Thus Origen employs the story to create a dis-

58. This construct is also found in Num 23:11, 25; Josh 24:10; Deut 15:4; Ps 132:15; 1 Chron 4:10.

59. This phrase also occurs in Gen 24:60, with the blessing of Rebekah by her family.

60. Moberly, "The Earliest Commentary on the Aqedah," 316–17.

61. This "enhancement" of the promise is more like an unexpected bonus, which, of course, is what grace is all about.

62. Cited in Oden and Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, 116–17.

junction between Israel and the church. Likewise, Calvin asserts: "Certainly, before Isaac was born, this same promise had been already given; and now it receives nothing more than confirmation" (*Commentary on Genesis,* on 22:15).

But this is not what one infers from the divine (re)promise in this account (22:16–18). Every element of the original promise is fortified here, ratcheted up a notch, *because of obedience.* It is an enhancement of the earlier promise, especially solidified in Yahweh's unique swearing by himself ("By myself I have sworn," 22:16)—the first and only such divine oath being made in the patriarchal stories, though that oath is frequently referred to elsewhere (24:7; 26:3; 50:24; Ex 13:5; Num 14:16; Deut 1:8; etc.).[63] The oath is validated further by the addition of "declares Yahweh" (נְאֻם־יְהוָה, *n'um yhwh*), which echoes often in the prophetic corpus (Isa 45:23; Jer 22:5; 49:13) but, in the Pentateuch, is only found in Gen 22:14 and Num 19:28. Thus this promise in Gen 22 is made far more definitive than all the preceding ones, and carries added solemnity and gravitas. Abraham's possession of the land was promised earlier in Gen 12:7; 13:14–17; 15:7–21; and 17:8; but here in 22:17, we find the most militant and triumphant version of that promise ("your seed will possess the gate of their enemies" = conquer their enemies' cities). And, correspondingly, the blessing is focused upon all the *nations* of the earth, not just the *families* as in 12:3. Contingent upon his obedience, every aspect of the earlier promises to Abraham is now "augmented and guaranteed by the Lord unreservedly."[64]

Moberly understands the changes in the promise of Gen 22 this way: "A promise which previously was grounded solely in the will and purpose of Yahweh is transformed so that it is now grounded *both* in the will of Yahweh *and* in the obedience of Abraham. It is not that divine promise has become contingent upon Abraham's obedience, but that Abraham's obedience has been incorporated into the divine promise."[65] While this is a reasonable explanation of the theological worth of human obedience, it does not take the textual evidence into account: there *are* actual changes in the elements of the promised blessing—significant changes in degree of their fulfillment. Thus, in my accounting, human obedience has greater value than merely being incorporated into divine plan, and the resulting blessing is more than just a confirmation of what God has already promised. There is, indeed, a *contingent* divine response to human

63. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 111. The phrase, "by myself," is also unique in Genesis, but is found in Jer 22:5; 49:13; Amos 4:2; 6:8; and in the NT, in Heb 6:13–18.

64. Ibid., 116.

65. "The Earliest Commentary on the Aqedah," 320–21.

obedience—in a sense, a divine reward for the latter. So Wenham concludes: "God's test had put Abraham on the rack. Yet torn between his love for his son and his devotion to God, he had emerged victorious with his son intact and his faithful obedience rewarded beyond all expectation."[66] It is exactly this divine reward that is emphasized in the promise to Isaac in Gen 26:2–5, where the blessing is expressly based upon the obedience of Abraham ("because Abraham obeyed me and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws," 26:5). This contingency of faithful obedience heightens the *degree of blessing*, not that the blessing itself is changed in character, but that, in some sense, the quantum of blessing is supplemented and its quality intensified. Obedience *does* result in reward (the concept of obedience resulting in rewards will be addressed later).

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Demonstration of faith in God's promises and his word results in divine blessing/reward.

Putting the various theological foci together, one arrives at the comprehensive version of the pericopal theology of Gen 22.

COMPREHENSIVE THEOLOGICAL FOCUS[67]

Faith in God's promises and his word is required from the child of God, and such a faith is liable to be tested (precepts of the world in front of the text). *This faith, equivalent to a supreme love/fear of God that trumps every other allegiance* (priorities of the world in front of the text), *is manifest in self-sacrificial obedience to his word* (practices of the world in front of the text). *Such faith in God (love/fear of God), God sees fit to reward with blessing* (precepts of the world in front of the text).

66. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 116. Also see idem, "The Aqedah," 101. This, then, is God's gracious reward upon seeing his child's "fear of the Lord" (obedience): notice the use of שָׂכָר (*sakar,* "reward") in the promise of God to Abraham in 15:1.

67. Elements of the "Theological Focus" discovered earlier in the analysis are brought together here in a "Comprehensive Theological Focus" of the pericope (a summary statement of the theology of the pericope). It is not always the case that this "Comprehensive Theological Focus" will have all three elements—precepts, priorities, and practices of the *world in front of the text*. In fact, quite frequently, there is a blurring of the boundaries between those three facets. Needless to say, labels are not what is important; rather it is what the author is *doing* with what he is saying that ought to be attended to, no matter what the nomenclature adopted or category created.

"What, then, does Abraham teach us? To put it briefly, he teaches us not to prefer the gifts of God to God. . . . Therefore, put not even a real gift of God before the Giver of that gift" (Augustine, *Serm.* 2). Thus the intent of the author was to call for an identification of the readers with the protagonist of this story—Abraham, the paragon of faith. God's people everywhere are to exercise the kind of faith in God that Abraham had, the kind of love for God that Abraham demonstrated, the kind of fear of God that Abraham exhibited: nothing comes between God and the believer. *Nothing!* This is the lesson the preacher must proclaim; this is what the reader must do. Calvin recognized the exemplary features of Abraham's action: "This example is proposed for our imitation. . . . [W]e pay Him the highest honor, when, in affairs of perplexity, we nevertheless entirely acquiesce in His providence" (*Commentary on Genesis,* on 22:7).[68] That is no less a christological understanding of Gen 22 than any other interpretive option, for part of what it means to be Christlike is to exercise the kind of faith, demonstrate the kind of love, and exhibit the kind of fear that Abraham did (see below for the development of the concept of *imitatio Christi*).

The interpretation of Gen 22 proposed in this work, discovering the theology of the pericope, gives direction to the preacher as to the divine demand propounded in the text—what the A/author was *doing* with what he was saying, the theology of the pericope. However, that does not answer the question of how such a theology abides by the Rule of Centrality proposed in chapter 1: *The Rule of Centrality focuses the interpretation of canonical texts for applicational purposes upon the pre-eminent person of Christ and his redemptive work that fulfills the will of the Father in the power of the Spirit.* How is Christ to be seen in this text and its interpretation? In the next section, this issue will be addressed and a new hermeneutic proposed, one that respects both the specific theology of an OT pericope *and* the Rule of Centrality.

CHRISTICONIC INTERPRETATION

One of the questions raised by the method described so far is regarding christocentric interpretation. In the scheme of pericopal theology, as propounded in this work, where does Christ fit in, particularly in the preaching of OT texts? This section, the concluding portion of this work, will address some

68. "Abraham alone ought to be to us equal to tens of thousands if we consider his faith, which is set before us as the best model of believing, to whose race also we must be held to belong in order that we may be the children of God" (Calvin, *Institutes,* 2.10.11).

of the issues of christocentric interpretation and preaching, assessing the arguments of some of the major proponents in that camp. Subsequently, a solution will be propounded—*christiconic* interpretation—that respects both the specificity of pericopes and a canonical vision of Jesus Christ in Scripture.

Christocentric Interpretation

Christocentric interpretation—particularly as it deals with the hermeneutic of preaching—is the interpretation of a biblical text in such a way that its main theme is directly and explicitly related to the Second Person of the Trinity: it is "appreciating the Old Testament as it is in the design of God: a witness, foreshadowing, anticipation, and promise of salvation as it has now been accomplished by the work of the triune God in Jesus Christ Incarnate."[69] As is obvious, such an operation is firmly based upon a canonical, bird's-eye view of biblical history; the focus is upon the work of God in redemption across a historical timeline, centered upon Jesus Christ, the Author of salvation. Thus "redemptive-historical" (RH) is an alternative descriptor for "christocentric" interpretation. The NT, of course, maintains an obvious focus on Jesus Christ; the complexity of christocentric interpretation relates particularly to the preaching of OT pericopes.

Greidanus's solution is for preachers to "interpret the Old Testament in the light of its fulfillment in the New Testament."[70] The potential problem with this approach is that the specific thrusts of individual OT texts may get neglected in the rush to correlate the OT with the NT, making the value of preaching from the OT doubtful, at best. For example, when preaching the seventh commandment of the Decalogue that prohibits adultery, Clowney wants the "biblically grounded preacher" to connect this command with Jesus' statement on adultery and, even further, his commandment to love. "Love for neighbor flows from love of God, and love for God is our response to His love for us," which leads Clowney to the cross: "Only at the cross do we know the real meaning of love—of God's redeeming love."[71] But one does not need the seventh commandment to arrive at this NT summit.

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69. Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 285.

70. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 119.

71. Edmund P. Clowney, "Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures," in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (ed. Samuel T. Logan; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 183–84. The eventual product of such an approach is a topical sermon on adultery or "love."

When preaching on the commandment against murder, following Clowney's method one could conceivably move to Christ's command against hatred. In turn, one could once again ascend to love and the cross of Calvary, the acme of love. Such an operation culminating in love could be conducted for any pericope, but it would deny the specificity of the particular pericope and what the author was *doing* with what he was saying. This work defends the thesis that divine demand is found in pericopes across the breadth of the canon; every one of them is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). And, for preaching purposes, the specific voice of each one must be heard and respected, without being drowned out by the sounds of other texts in the canon.

For Carson, christocentric preaching is based upon "strong biblical theology" that comes from examining the canonically interweaving threads of ideas, tracking such biblical themes as kingdom, priesthood, temple, or sacrifice. According to him there are roughly twenty such broad canonical themes that enable the preacher to trace Christ from any text, "without making a wild leap."[72] Biblical theology does help place the particular event of a narrative pericope against the backdrop of God's deeds in history, and there is, of course, a place for this in the teaching program of the church. The contention of this work, however, is that the sermon is not the place for such a display; rather, preaching is the event where the specific message of a particular text—its divine demand—is exposited and brought to bear upon the life of the children of God to transform them for the glory of God. If the preacher relates every text every Sunday to the larger theme of redemption, or perhaps to the even broader theme of the glory of God, it reduces preaching to painting these big pictures every week—the same twenty-odd vistas recommended by Carson. In such biblical-theology transactions, the specifics of the pericope being preached—the miniatures—tend to get swallowed up in the capacious canvas of RH interpretation.

72. D. A. Carson, "Of First Importance (part 1): Eight Words that Help Us Preach the Gospel Correctly," n.p. [cited June 3, 2012]. Online: http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/gettinggospelright/offirstimportance1.html (access is restricted to subscribers). Goldsworthy, too, asserts that "[t]he riches in Christ are inexhaustible, and biblical theology is the way to uncover them" (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 30). However, for Mohler, also firm in the RH tradition, systematic theology takes precedence: "preaching is an exercise in the theological exposition of Scripture"—by "theological" he means concepts of Trinity, deity and humanity of Christ, atonement, ecclesiology, eschatology, etc. (R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* [Chicago: Moody, 2008], 111 [also see 109–10]).

> Indeed, preaching in the RH tradition is often comparable to a ride in a Boeing 747 high above the landscape with its hot deserts, its snowpeaked mountains, its wide rivers, its dense forests, its open prairies, its craggy hills, and its deep lakes. The view is panoramic, majestic, impressive, breathtaking, and always comfortable. But there is one problem. The Christian is not "above" things. He is in the middle of things. He is trekking through the landscape.[73]

This move away from the specifics of a text to a level of canonical abstraction, as biblical theology envisages, is counterproductive for preachers. With such reduction (or abstraction) to biblical theology, a tedious repetition of sermonic themes is inevitable, to the detriment of the faith and practice of God's people. Robinson points out that "[w]hen we shove a passage under some broad theological abstraction without interacting with its specificity, we will end up with sermons as much alike as the repeated patterns on wallpaper."[74] On the other hand, in drilling down to the specifics of a text, the theology particular to that pericope may be discretely and sequentially preached week by week. It is by this privileging of the text and its specific theology that one can preach for concrete life change in small increments, pericope by pericope, sermon by sermon.

Lest it be assumed that preaching employing pericopal theology is a means to godliness apart from Christ, let me reiterate what was stated in chapter 3: one can preach only because of Christ, who made possible salvation; because of Christ there is therefore no condemnation for sin; because of Christ the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is made possible, and it is that indwelling Spirit who empowers the child of God to obey divine demand wherever in Scripture it may be. In other words, what is called for in any given pericope is the obedience of faith, the meeting of divine demand, *by the grace of God, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, all made possible by the redeeming work of the Son.*