

The Akedah or Binding of Isaac

Genesis 12:1-3

1. Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

2-3. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...."

Genesis 22:2, 15-17

2. God said [to Abraham], "Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

15-17. The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven...."

But we are your people, the members of your covenant, the children of Abraham who loved you, and to whom you swore an oath upon Mt. Moriah; the descendants of Isaac his only son, who was bound on the altar; the community of Jacob, Your first-born son, whom you named Israel and Yeshurun because of your love for him and the delight you took in him. *Jewish Daily Liturgy*

And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, "Let my son go that he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your first born son.'" *Exodus 4:21-23*

The affinity of the *aqedah* with the story of the first Passover in which the blood of a yearling lamb saves the Israelite first-born from the Destroyer (Exod 12:1-28) is patent. Indeed, Gen 22:1-19 presents the strongest biblical evidence for the proposition that the story of the Passover is, in part, a secondary etiology for an older and more general substitutionary ritual. Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, p. 111

The special status of the first-born son in the Hebrew Bible is inextricably associated with the theology of chosenness. [...] The first-born and the chosen are not, of course synonymous, but their semantic fields overlap so extensively that an investigation of the one concept will inevitably illumine the other. In the case of the Patriarchal narratives of Genesis, the urgent and constantly repeating issue of which son is chosen cannot be disengaged from the painful question of which shall inherit the status of the first-born, or, to put it differently, which is the beloved son. For in the narratives of Israel's origins, chosenness means having the status of one upon whose very life God has acquired an absolute claim. Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, p. 60