

Abraham

The Urth list — 6 messages, 3 voices, 09 Apr 2005

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Nathan Spears — 09 Apr 2005, 08:54

Another Hyperion fan! Excellent...

Simmons answer is rather ingenious, but also still flawed.

I mean, suppose he had tested Yaweh, and Yaweh turned out to naught but another flase god, that apparently abounded at the time of the Pentateuch's composition; Abraham would turn out to have been not just a sucker, but also a... whatever -cide applies to a guy who just killed his son in a rather nasty way.

But you also have to remember that Yaweh had (apparently) given Abraham that son. This situation for Abraham (if you buy this story) is radically different from anything we experience. Imagine that someone, who is so much more powerful than you that you believe He might be all-powerful, speaks to you and tells you that He is going to help you out and that your descendents are going to be His special people. You scoff because you are old and your wife is barren, but this being tells you that your wife is going to bear a child. She does, and so now you're starting to wonder if maybe it wasn't just the pizza and beer talking. Then this same being commands you to sacrifice your new son, which feels like a gift from him, back to him. For Abraham, now he really is tested the nature of the universe. If this being he's speaking to really is all-powerful, and He really wants Abraham to kill his own son, then it seems the universe is actually being run by a demon, and so there's not much to look forward to anyway. Even if he's not all-powerful, he's much more powerful than Abraham, and so the world is a cruel place where capricious spirits give and take back life according to their own whims. But if somehow everything works out, then Abraham has a son and a promise of safeguard from a benevolent divinity. It's a rough spot to be in, and pretty uncomparable to most moral dilemmas, I think. I mean, just the premise, "a god speaks to you and . . .," kind of throws most of our moral systems off base, doesn't it? We don't account for that kind of stuff because it doesn't happen much.

I don't think the question, "Why did Abraham do as he did?" is as puzzling as the question, "Why would a benevolent God ask his follower to sacrifice his own son?" It seems like a pretty awful place to put someone in, because on the one hand, you want complete devotion, but on the other, you don't want your follower to be the kind of person who would kill their own son! The only answer I can think of from a Biblical perspective is that God wants his followers to be like Him, and God was prepared to sacrifice His own Son.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Apr 2005, 12:34 · in reply to Nathan Spears

Nathan,

The "Sacrifice of Isaac" (or "Abraham's Sacrifice") is a huge topic in Jewish theology. Aside from the entire discussion of Abraham trusting the God who had given him this son when it should have been impossible, there's a question of Isaac - as a common ancestor of all the Tribes - being in some way emblematic of the Tribes as a sacrifice for all the world ("In your name shall all nations be blessed"). And, it's tied into the theology of survival and the Remnant.

It isn't small in Christian theology either, of course, with the sacrifice of a miraculously-born son being a "type" of the Father's sacrifice of His Son.

--Dan'l

You probably do not want to know what that odor is.
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

James Wynn — 11 Apr 2005, 14:35 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

It isn't small in Christian theology either, of course, with the sacrifice of a miraculously-born son being a "type" of the Father's sacrifice of His Son.

Who has a ram provided by God sacrificed in his place. In Christian theology, Isaac is a "type" for the Christ *and* mankind. The story is literally stewing in available Christian symbolism. Just the sort of overloading of symbolism that Wolfe is so keen on.

~ Crush

Nathan Spears — 11 Apr 2005, 15:24 · follows James Wynn

I'm with you. But for those who believe in the story literally, or even those who look to Biblical story as templates for their own actions, the fact that it is symbolic of later events doesn't change the facts of the almost-sacrifice of Isaac itself. In other words, God wouldn't have acted this way, or even told such a story, in order to simply illustrate a future event. The actions of the story also have to be consistent with the way God behaves, right?

Nate

--- James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:

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~ Crush

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Apr 2005, 15:44 · in reply to Nathan Spears

On Apr 11, 2005 3:21 PM, Nathan Spears <spearofsolomon at yahoo.com> wrote:
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Yes, it does.

One thing it seems to indicate - to Christians and Jews alike - is that God asks us to be willing to sacrifice everything, and doesn't promise to provide a ram (Abraham went to the mountain fully expecting to sacrifice his son).

Another: God keeps promises. But does not promise that it will look that way.

Another: That obedience will sometimes be painful and terrifying.

--Dan'l

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James Wynn — 12 Apr 2005, 08:53 · in reply to Nathan Spears

Blattid wrote:

It isn't small in Christian theology either, of course, with the sacrifice of a miraculously-born son being a "type" of the Father's sacrifice of His Son.

Crush wrote:

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Nathan wrote:

I'm with you. But for those who believe in the story literally, or even those who look to Biblical story as templates for their own actions, the fact that it is symbolic of later events doesn't change the facts of the almost-sacrifice of Isaac itself. In other words, God wouldn't have acted this way, or even told such a story, in order to simply illustrate a future event. The actions of the story also have to be consistent with the way God behaves, right?

Sure they have to be consistent.

God didn't have Abraham perform a human sacrifice; he only asked Abraham to show that he WOULD...that the gift was not more precious to him than the Giver. That Pharisee the Apostle Paul asserted that Abraham himself did not believe that Isaac would be ultimately murdered because of God's promise. He said Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead (more Christian imagery). Since God did not permit a human sacrifice, I don't see anything inconsistent to his stated nature.

A historical reading of the text does not preclude the typological reading. Much to the contrary, those who read it historically ALL read it JUST like the woman in tBotNS who said "the reason things were made so was so the cathedral would rise just like it did...the Hand in nature."

Those who read the story as an historical event believe God did what he did with Abraham to reveal Himself to him personally but they believe that at the same time God had his eye to a larger audience. He didn't *have* to do it the way he did with the sacrifice but He opted to place Abraham unwittingly on a stage with the future generations in the audience. Thus (they say) God had Abraham go through a test, the results of which He already knew the outcome since He knew Abraham's thoughts and heart. In Numbers, He sends snakes to bite rebellious Israelites and has Moses make a graven image (talk about your inconsistencies)...a bronze serpent... and lift it on a pole so that whoever looked at it would be healed. He does this even though He could have healed them directly in order to present an image of Christ's crucifixion

and his "becoming sin for us". In Deuteronomy, He punished Moses for striking a rock with his staff instead of talking to it with the seemingly arbitrarily severe (yet, they would say, entirely just) punishment of denying him access to the Promised Land to show that the Law could take the Jews only so far and they would need Joshua (the same name as Jesus [Y'shua]) to lead them out of the wilderness of Zin (possibly phonetically indistinguishable from "sin"). I'm not prepared to prove it, but I suspect typological reading of the Bible is something Christians inherited from the Jews.

This is just like the way Wolfe presents rationalizations for Christian mysteries (such as the Trinity) within SF stories that have nothing ostensibly to do with the Bible, Jesus, etc.

~ Crush