
FAQ

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Isaac, Sacrificed

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I once heard a Messianic teacher say that Isaac was actually sacrificed by Abraham, and then resurrected. Do you have any opinion about this?

This entry has been reproduced from the paperback edition of the commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*

Hebrews 11:17-19 details the faith of Abraham, who believed in God so strongly that he was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac without hesitation:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED’ [Genesis 21:12]. He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type” (NASU).

All should be in agreement that Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:1-19) does represent and foreshadow the much greater sacrifice that Yeshua the Messiah would endure for us. But is it necessary for Isaac himself to have actually died, and then be resurrected, to fulfill a valid typology?

There are a few out there in the Messianic community who have gone a little too far, interpreting v. 19 as though Abraham actually did sacrifice Isaac. It cannot go overlooked in the ISR Scriptures (1998), commonly used among Sacred Name Only advocates in the independent Messianic movement, that Hebrews 11:17, 19 reads, “By belief, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Yitshaq, and he who had received the promises offered up his only brought-forth son... reckoning that Elohim was able to raise, even from the dead, from which he received him back, as a type.” One teaching based on this rendering can be quoted as saying, “The text is clear. He was offered, and then raised back to life by Elohim [God].”

There are several problems with this view, two of which are only solved by an examination of Greek verbs. V. 17 includes two usages of the verb *prospherō* (προσφέρω), “to present, offer, give” (LS, 699). Its first usage, pertaining to Abraham having “offered up Isaac,” is *prosenēnochen* (προσενήνοχεν), appearing in the perfect active indicative tense, describing an action that has already taken place: “had offered.” Those who are totally unacquainted with the Isaac narrative in Genesis could conclude that Abraham actually offered him up as a sacrifice. However, the second rendering of “offered,” appearing in ISR, KJV, and NKJV is unjustified. The Greek verb form *prosepheren* (προσέφερον) in v. 17b appears in the imperfect active indicative tense. While describing a past action, that past action is not “offered,” but is more accurately “was offering” (LITV, HCSB), being imperfect. This is also rendered as “was ready to offer up” (RSV, NRSV), “was about to sacrifice” (NIV), and “was in the act of offering” (ESV).

Abraham “offered” up Isaac; but this was an action that took place in his mind—not in the physical world—as Abraham was resolved to sacrifice his son. V. 17b tells us that he was only in the process of killing him. The command from God was, “Do not lay a hand on the boy...Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son” (Genesis 22:12, NIV). While Isaac’s participation in this event prefigures Yeshua’s death and resurrection for us, the connection is typological; Isaac *did not die* as a part of this “rehearsal.” Only “a ram caught in the thicket by his horns” (Genesis 22:13) was killed at this event.