




ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Analysing Abraham's Sacrifice in Genesis 22: Unveiling the Chosen 'Only Son'

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT	
Article History: Received: 17 May 2024 Revised: 10 July 2024 Accepted: 08 August 2024		SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: The paper delves into the event of Patriarch Abraham's intended sacrifice of his 'Only Son' on Mount Moriah. The study aims to determine the true identity of the 'Only Son' based on biblical verses.	
Key Words: Abraham Ishmael Isaac Sacrifice Covenant Only Son Old-Testament		METHOD & FINDING: Using a descriptive-analytical methodology, the research examines relevant Biblical texts and commentaries. It compares the sacrifice event to other significant occurrences, including the birth chronology of Abraham's sons, God's covenant regarding his offspring, the status of firstborns in the Old Testament, and Abraham's love for his son Ishmael. Through this analysis, the study concludes that the 'Only Son' ordered for sacrifice was Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael, rather than Isaac.	
DOI: 10.22034/imjpl.2024.9967		CONCLUSION: Through a detailed examination of biblical verses and related events, this study sheds light on the identity of the 'Only Son' in Abraham's sacrifice. Contrary to popular belief, the evidence points to Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn, as the son chosen for sacrifice on Mount Moriah. This conclusion challenges traditional interpretations and invites further exploration into the nuances of this pivotal moment in religious history.	
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Introduction

Patriarch Abraham is a central figure in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures. Abraham's covenant with God is one of the most important themes in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. Consequently, the 'Abrahamic Sacrifice' i.e., God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his 'Only Son,' has been interpreted by different religions differently. The Jewish scholars interpret Isaac's willingness to be sacrificed as the atonement for the sins of Israel while the Christian scholars interpret the incident as a prelude to the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Also, the identity of Patriarch Abraham's son taken up for sacrifice has been debated for centuries among the Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

About the identity of the son to be sacrificed, while the Jews and Christians unanimously agree that it is Isaac, the Islamic tradition by and large holds that it was Ishmael. This research will be beneficial to all the Abrahamic religions. For the Jews and Christians, this will present data and analysis regarding Abraham's sacrifice and the theological discussions related to it. Conversely, for Muslims, the research will provide additional information regarding the mainstream Islamic opinion about the identity of Abraham's son taken up for sacrifice.

This research paper discusses the 'Abrahamic Sacrifice' in the Old

Testament and the identity of Abraham's 'Only Son' who was taken up for sacrifice. The Holy Bible narrates the entire event in Genesis 22:1-19 but in the entire narrative only once has the Lord mentioned the name of 'Isaac' after the term 'Only Son.'

Also, a deeper analysis and scrutiny of the biblical version of the sacrifice along with other related verses - raises some valid doubts and apprehensions about the identity of the 'Only Son' and the 'Beloved One' of Abraham ordered to be sacrificed. The Biblical narrative contains contradictions and inconsistencies about the 'Only Son' being Isaac. Also, the bias against Ishmael, the firstborn of Patriarch Abraham, is clearly evident in the works of Jewish and Christian scholars. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, the research analyses pertinent Biblical texts and commentaries. It juxtaposes the sacrificial event with other notable occurrences, such as the birth order of Abraham's sons, God's covenant concerning his descendants, the significance of firstborns in the Old Testament, and Abraham's affection for his son Ishmael. The research tries to answer the main question: Who was Abraham's son taken up for sacrifice?

Theoretical Foundations

1. Sacrifice

Sacrifice refers to offering something to God as atonement for one's sins.

2. Abrahamic Sacrifice

The sacrifice of Prophet Abraham of Mount Moriah.

3. Abrahamic Covenant

God's covenant with Abraham.

4. Ishmael and Isaac

They are Abraham's sons.

Literature Review

Some of the books and articles written on this topic are as follows:

- *The Only Son Offered for Sacrifice, Isaac or Ishmael?* (2010) by A.S. Ghauri and I.R. Ghauri: This book explores the identity of the 'Only Son' in Abraham's sacrifice, analyzing whether it was Isaac or Ishmael, and investigates biblical and historical evidence to unravel this theological mystery.

- *Abram To Abraham* (2016) by J. Grossman: This book traces the transformation of the biblical figure Abram into Abraham and examines the significance of this name change and its implications within religious contexts.

- *Journeys in Holy Lands* (1990) by R. Firestone: This book chronicles spiritual and physical journeys to sacred places across different faith traditions and offers insights into the cultural, historical, and religious significance of these pilgrimage sites.

- *A Comparative Study of the Intended Sacrifice of Isaac/Ishmael in the Bible and the Qur'ān* (2002) by A. Afsar: This book compares the narratives of Abraham's intended sacrifice in both the Bible and the

Qur'an. While exploring the theological differences and similarities between the two texts.

Despite many books and articles that discuss Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac's relationship in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literature, and the comparison of the event itself in Jewish and Muslim Literature, no work dedicates itself to purely studying the identity of Abraham's Only Son' taken up for sacrifice from the Old Testament. Although A.S. Ghauri and I.R. Ghauri, the authors of the book *The Only Son Offered for Sacrifice, Isaac or Ishmael?*, dedicate a major part of their book to analyzing the story of sacrifice from Genesis 22, their research is not exclusive to the event from Jewish sources; they also heavily rely on Islamic literature throughout the book.

The uniqueness of this research lies in the fact that the entire research is undertaken in the light of the event of sacrifice from the Old Testament (Genesis 22) and different events and the chronology of the events are examined to conclude the identity of the son taken up for sacrifice in Jewish and Christian exegeses. The following research paper analyses the central figures involved in the sacrifice, the background, and the chronology of events to reveal the true identity of the 'Only Son' in the light of the Old Testament.

Status of Abraham and The Importance of His Sacrifice

Patriarch Abraham is highly revered in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and his attempted sacrifice is very significant to all these three religions that trace their roots to him and are known as Abrahamic faith.

Historian S. Noegel writes, “Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son plays an important role in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim exegesis. Jewish exegesis views the willingness of Isaac as atoning for the sins of Israel, and Christian texts see Isaac as foreshowing Christ's sufferings for Christians. For the Muslims, the account of sacrifice is attached to Abraham and Ishmael's building of the Ka'aba at Mecca. A significant note of difference separating the Jewish and Muslim accounts is the description of the sacrifice itself” (*Noegel & Wheeler, 2002, p. 8*).

Jews and Christians believe that God's covenant with Abraham was fulfilled solely through his son Isaac, rather than through Ishmael. They view Isaac as the rightful heir to Abraham's covenant, while Ishmael, being the son of the ‘slave-girl,’ is considered to have no role in that covenant and was even sent away to a distant land for this reason. “Isaac is the son promised by God to Abraham and his wife Sarah and born to them in old age. The story of Annunciation is found in the Bible” (*Ibid, p.152*).

The ‘Abrahamic Covenant’ holds immense significance across Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. In the Jewish tradition, Abraham became the first human to reject false gods in favor of the one true God. Also, the Jews believe that this covenant extends to all Jews, marking the start of their relationship with God and carrying the promise of the land of Canaan. In Christian Tradition the Abrahamic Covenant is foundational to Christianity, revealing God's grace, commitment to redemption, and his plan for humanity.

It shapes the core of Christian identity, emphasizing the concept of being a chosen people with a specific mission. Finally in Islamic Tradition Abraham (Ibrahim) is revered as a prophet in Islam, and the covenant plays a central role. The Holy Qur'an highlights Abraham's unwavering faith, his role in building the ‘Ka'aba’ in Mecca, and his legacy as a model for believers. In summary, while the covenant remains consistent across these traditions, each interprets and emphasizes different aspects based on their unique theological perspectives.

The argument regarding Isaac being the one taken up for sacrifice is thoroughly examined, aiming to conclude the son's identity. This research paper utilizes verses from the Holy Bible, primarily referencing the New International Version (*The Holy Bible*).

The story of Abraham's sacrifice is recounted in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament or the Torah (*Ibid*).

Genesis 22: 1-19 narrates God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his 'only son,' Isaac, whom he loves, at Mount Moriah. Abraham, accompanied by his son and servants, sets out for Moriah. On the journey, Isaac enquires about the sacrifice, but Abraham reassures him that God will provide. Eventually, Abraham builds an altar, binds his son, and prepares to sacrifice him. However, just before the sacrifice, Abraham is informed that his sacrifice has been accepted and is commanded to restrain himself from sacrificing his son but instead sacrifice a ram (*Genesis 22: 13*).

Thus, according to the Holy Bible, one can safely assume that the son who was taken up for sacrifice by Abraham is Isaac because the Holy Bible clearly names the son as Isaac. However, a deeper analysis of the text has a different story to tell.

The Identity of Abraham's 'Only Son' Genesis 22:1-19

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his

son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."

And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "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."

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket, he saw a ram caught by its

horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place “The LORD Will Provide.” And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba (*The Holy Bible, Genesis 22: 1-19*).

Abraham was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born (*Genesis 16: 16*) and a hundred years old when Isaac was born (*Genesis 21: 5*). Thus, for fourteen years, Ishmael was Abraham’s only son, and throughout his life, Isaac could never have been called the only son of Abraham because Isaac and Ishmael together buried their father, Abraham (*Genesis 25: 9*).

Etymology of the ‘Only’ in the Old Testament

According to Bible dictionaries, the Hebrew word for “only” is “יָחִיד”

pronounced as ‘Yawkheed.’ This term is derived from the primary root “יָחִיד” (yachid), which means “to be (or become) one” (*Strong, 1980, entry 3173, p. 49; Brown & Briggs, 1996, p. 996*).

The word “Isaac” in a specific verse appears out of place when paired with ‘only son.’ Authors A.S. Ghauri and I.R. Ghauri argue that this combination is a deliberate interpolation (*Ghauri & Ghauri, 2010, p. 57*).

Opinions of Bible Scholars about Isaac being the ‘Only Son’

1. Robert Alter writes that since the term ‘your only one’ for Isaac is technically inaccurate some scholars have preferred to use the yadid (meaning ‘favored one’) instead of the word yahid (only one) mentioned in the verse. In other words, instead of translating Genesis 22: 2 as “Take your son, your only son Isaac,” some scholars have translated the verse as ‘Take your son, your favored son Isaac.’ Since Isaac was not Abraham’s only son, referring to him as such is technically inaccurate.

However, R. Alter disagrees with these scholars, asserting that Isaac was the only son Abraham loved because he was his legitimate wife’s child (*Alter, 1997, p. 103*).

2. According to John Gill, Ishmael was the son of Hagar, who was Abraham’s maid and concubine, but not his wife. In contrast, Isaac was Abraham’s only legitimate son, born to his lawful wife,

Sarah. And the seed of Abraham was to flourish only through Isaac, Abraham's beloved son and the promised one, on whom all of Abraham's hopes of numerous offspring rested and Isaac was the one from whose progeny the messiah was to come (*Gill, 1980, p. 392*).

3. Matthew Poole says that Sarah was Abraham's legitimate wife and her son was the only one to inherit his wealth and divine covenant. Whereas, Ishmael was abandoned by Abraham (*Poole, 2018*).

4. Albert Barnes believes that 'the only son' here is the only son of Sarah, the heir of the promise (*Barnes, 1962, p. 324*).

5. Keil and Delitzsch opine that the Lord desired Abraham's heir through his wife Sarah and had directed Abraham to send away his son from the 'maid' [stress added] (*Keil & Delitzsch, 2009, p. 248*).

6. David Guzik believes that Ishmael was banished from Abraham's family and as for the covenant of God Abraham had only one son (*Guzik, 2018, p. 1*).

7. Haydock asserts that the only son in the verse is Isaac, who was Abraham's son from Sarah his most dignified wife (*Haydock, 1859, p. 30*).

8. John Wesley assumes that by Only Son, God meant his only beloved child from Sarah as Ishmael was sent away and only Isaac remained with Abraham (*Wesley, 1987, pp. 8249–8250*).

9. Matthew Henry mentions an imaginary conversation between God and Abraham where he suggests that God desired the only son of Sarah to be

sacrificed. Also, in the conversation, Abraham tells God that he loves Isaac more than Ishmael but God does not oblige and insists that only Isaac must be sacrificed (*Henry, 1706, p. 2*).

10. Thomas Hale Jr. Isaac was the son Abraham had waited for so many years, the son who was miraculously born and it was him on whom all of God's promises were to be fulfilled (*Hale & Thorson, 2007, p. 164*).

Contesting the Opinions of Bible Scholars

1. Those scholars who did accept the technical inaccuracy in calling Isaac the only son, found another way out, and that is by mistranslating and interpolating the word 'only son' and calling Isaac 'the favored son.' Also, Robert Alter insists on the claim that Isaac is indeed the only son despite having proof against his beliefs.

2. In The Rabbinical Literature, recorded by The Jewish Encyclopedia, Hagar is referred to as the daughter of a Pharaoh and a pious saint known for her fidelity and high degree of Godliness even after she stayed in the deserts of Paran away from her husband Abraham (*Singer & Adler, 1901, Vol. 6, p. 138*).

Despite Hagar's noble lineage and marriage to Abraham, she is consistently referred to as a 'slave-woman,' not his legal wife. If she were recognized as his lawful spouse, Ishmael would rightfully be considered Abraham's firstborn. The refusal to acknowledge this suggests bias

among Bible scholars. The argument that only Isaac was intended to carry on the lineage of Abraham lacks biblical support. Numerous verses in the Bible suggest that God's blessings extend to all of Abraham's descendants, including Ishmael. For example, when Abraham and Lot separate, God promises Abraham abundant land and descendants, implying a broad lineage (*Genesis 13:15-16*). Additionally, God establishes a covenant with Abraham and promises a fruitful future for his descendants, not limited to Isaac but encompassing all his offspring (*Genesis 17: 2-7*).

3. The idea that Isaac is the sole 'seed' of Abraham is disputed when examined through biblical verses. Many passages speak of God's blessings for Abraham and his descendants, including Ishmael and Isaac. For example, after Abraham and Lot part ways, God promises Abraham that his descendants will inherit the land he sees, with a bountiful progeny that cannot be numbered (*Genesis 13: 15-16*). The covenant between God and Abraham is also mentioned, along with the promise of a fruitful and prosperous generation from Abraham's children, extending to his seeds after him (*Genesis 17:2-7*).

Before the birth of Isaac and Ishmael, God made promises to Abraham about numerous progeny. It's unfair to suggest that these blessings only apply to Isaac. While Isaac is promised great blessings, this

doesn't deny Ishmael's rightful status. Interestingly, Hagar is also promised a bountiful progeny from Ishmael, too numerous to count (*Genesis 16: 10*).

God's Covenant with Abraham and the Identity of His Beloved Son

In the Bible, God assures Abraham that his son Isaac will be the recipient of an everlasting covenant (*Genesis 19: 17*). Additionally, during a time of famine, God appears to Isaac and instructs him not to go down to Egypt. Instead, Isaac is to dwell in the land designated by God, and he will bless him with a great progeny (*Genesis 26: 2-3*).

Victor P. Hamilton notes that Isaac's name was chosen by God before birth, making him the 'special, promised son' (*Hamilton, 1995, p. 73*). However, the Bible actually shows that both Ishmael and Isaac received their names from God before birth, contradicting Hamilton's conclusion.

Genesis 16: 11 reveals that Ishmael's name was chosen by God before birth, just like Isaac's in Genesis 17: 19. Moreover, we see in numerous verses of the Bible that God promises to make a great nation of Ishmael, but these verses are deliberately ignored out of bias and prejudice for Ishmael and his descendants. For instance, Hagar, Ishmael's mother, is promised of a progeny too numerous to count (*Genesis 16: 10-11*).

Similarly, when Abraham is commanded to leave his wife Hagar and son Ishmael in a barren desert, God

consoles him and tells him that since Ishmael is his seed, God will make a great nation out of him (*Genesis 21: 13*).

A promise similar to that of Abraham is made to Hagar when she is alone in the wilderness searching for water for her thirsty child, the Angel of God allays her fears and assures her that God has heard the boy cry and he will make him into a great nation (*Genesis 21:17-18*). Also, we read that Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself and all the male members of his household after the birth of Ishmael, his firstborn (*Genesis 17: 12*).

After this, he gets the name Abraham (from Abram) meaning the father of nations (*Genesis 17: 5*), and he is promised of a bountiful progeny. Interestingly, this event takes place ten years before the birth of Isaac. Therefore, to make Isaac look better than Ishmael is a great disservice to the Holy Bible.

Moreover, let us analyze the phrase 'Whom you love' to describe Abraham's son taken up for sacrifice. Firstly, the use of the phrase 'Whom you love,' is not a random remark but rather an important distinguishing factor for the son in question. Thus, we cannot overlook this phrase while analyzing Genesis 22.

Abraham's affection for Ishmael is evident throughout the narrative, even when he learns of Isaac's impending birth. Despite his laughter at the news of Isaac (*Genesis 17: 17*), Abraham's immediate

concern is for Ishmael (*Genesis 17: 18*), highlighting his love for his firstborn. Thomas Nelson observes, "Abraham's plea shows his love for his son Ishmael" (*Nelson, 2018, p. 31*).

Abraham's love for Ishmael is evident when Sarah requests Abraham to expel Ishmael and his mother (*Genesis 21:10-11*). Pfeiffer and Harrison note, "This was very painful for he loves his son Ishmael" (*Pfeiffer and Harrison, 1962, p. 56*).

Charles Ward Smith observes, "Casting out of Ishmael was grievous in the sight of Abraham and he was 'torn' and 'really hurt' for he loved Ishmael" (*Jackson, 2006*), Marcus Dods asserts that Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn and the apple of his eyes for many years thereby occupying all his attention, also, he loved his son Ishmael very much and this attachment of Abraham had become a source of insecurity for Sarah (*Dods, 1891, p. 5*).

Daniel Denison Whedon says, "The boy of thirteen has won a deep place in his father's heart, and notwithstanding the promise of a son by Sarah, he yearns to see Ishmael blessed by God" (*Whedon, 1889, Vol.1, p. 199*).

Albert Barnes observes, "This was painful to Abraham" (*Barnes, 1962, p.319*). John Gill observes that Abraham's petition -that Ishmael might live under God's commandments shows

his love and regard for Ishmael's welfare (*Gill, 1980, p. 315*).

Rachel Yudkowsky observes that Abraham's petition for Ishmael is very unique and special because he has never done this for anyone, neither Sarah nor Lot or even Isaac for that matter and she believes that this is an indication of his immense love for Ishmael. She observes, "How great was Abraham's love for Ishmael that he makes such a request to God" (*Yudkowsky, 2007*).

Dr. Cohen, a renowned Jewish Bible commentator notes that separation from Ishmael was extremely painful for Abraham and this pain was for Ishmael and not Hagar (*Cohen, 1947, p.108*).

Evidently, Abraham's 'beloved son' referred to in Genesis 22 is Ishmael, not Isaac. There's ample evidence of Abraham's love for Ishmael, while no verses specifically depict his affection for Isaac. Therefore, Ishmael holds the primary position as Abraham's beloved son in the narrative.

Status of the Firstborn

The firstborn son holds significant rights and privileges, as highlighted in various Bible verses. These verses emphasize the exclusive dedication of firstborn sons and the first fruits of labor to Yahweh. In Exodus 22, there is mention of dedicating both the firstborn and the initial produce solely to God.

Peake's Commentary underscores the importance of sacrificing the firstborn, but it clarifies that human firstborns were to be redeemed with money rather than physically sacrificed (*Peake & Grieve, 1920, p.179*).

Van Seters writes that in ancient Israel, human firstborn sacrifice was practiced early on but later generations replaced it with redemptive theology, where money was offered instead of sacrificing human firstborns (*Van Seters, 1998*). Leading Bible Commentators have made the following observation about the 'Status of the firstborn' mentioned in Deuteronomy 21: 15-17, Donald C. Fleming writes, "The firstborn son was always the heir, whether he was the son of the favorite wife or not. This protected the rights of the firstborn against family jealousies and prejudices" (*Fleming, 1994, Commentary on Deuteronomy 21*).

John Calvin writes, "For if the father substituted another son in the place of his firstborn, it was unquestionably a kind of theft. (*Calvin, 1844, Commentary on Deuteronomy 21*).

The firstborn son's privileged position is unchangeable, even if a father desires to deny him his rightful status. Sacrificing the firstborn was considered the best form of offering, and in Abraham's case, Ishmael held the honor of being the firstborn and thus the ideal sacrifice. Based on these points, it becomes evident

that if God had requested a sacrifice from Abraham, it would have been none other than his firstborn, Ishmael.

The Age of Isaac at the Time of Sacrifice

The age of the 'Only Son' of Abraham taken up for sacrifice is a crucial factor in determining his identity. There are different opinions about Isaac's age among Jewish/Christians at the time of the intended sacrifice according to Jewish/Christian Scholars:

1. According to the Jewish scholar Jose ben Zimra at the time of the 'Akedah' or 'Sacrifice' Isaac was just weaned and he was around 2-3 years old (*Singer & Adler, 1901, Vol. 6, Akedah*).
2. The Rabbis believe that the news of the 'Akedah' or 'Sacrifice' became the cause of Sarah's death, for as soon as she received the news of the sacrifice, she died out of grief. Therefore, the Rabbis conclude that because Sarah was 127 years old when she died and she gave birth to Isaac when she was 90. Thus, Isaac's age at the time of sacrifice was 37. i.e., 127 minus 90 (*Berman, 1997, p. 66*).
3. Josephus asserts in his Antiquities believes that Isaac was 25 years old at the time of sacrifice (*Josephus, 2015, ch. 13.2, p. 20*).
4. Ellen G. White believes that Isaac was 20 years old at the time of Akedah or Sacrifice (*Ghauri and Ghauri, 2010, p. 23*).

We read in the story of the sacrifice that Abraham lays the wood on Isaac to be carried for the burnt offering (*Genesis 22:6*), therefore Isaac couldn't have been a child who was just weaned, who could carry wood. Whether Isaac had been 'just weaned' or thirty-seven years old, or twenty-five or twenty years old he still cannot be called a 'lad' as mentioned in Genesis 22: 5 and 22: 12. Therefore the 'only son' of Abraham who is described as a 'lad' in the story is certainly not Isaac because Isaac did not fit into any of the possibilities mentioned by the Jewish /Christian scholars.

Abraham Returns Alone

The story of sacrifice in Genesis 22: 1-19 ends with Abraham's return from Mount Moriah, this verse too is important in determining the identity of the son taken up for sacrifice. We read at the end of the story of sacrifice that Abraham returned to his servants alone and left with his servants to Beer-sheba (*Gen 22: 19*).

Hamilton asserts, "The apparent absence of Isaac from the end of the narrative parallels the apparent absence of Sarah at the beginning of the narrative. Thus, the reader of Gen. 22 knows that Isaac was spared, and yet v. 19 seems to leave some unanswered questions" (*Hamilton, 1995, p. 119*).

He further observes that Isaac did not return with Abraham after the sacrifice and the 'they set out together' at the end of the narrative refers to

Abraham and his servants and not Isaac. Also, the early part of the narrative (*Genesis 22: 6, 8*) used the expression ‘the two of them together’ (Abraham and his son), but in vol. 19 ‘the two of them’ is missing. All that is present is ‘they set out together’ (i.e., Abraham and his servants) (*Ibid*).

Stephen J. Stern too, acknowledges that Isaac did not return with Abraham after the intended sacrifice at Mount Moriah (*Stern, 2009*). Why did Abraham return alone after the intended sacrifice?

In Genesis 21: 14, we read that Hagar and Ishmael were sent away. Also, Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac lived in Hebron, where Sarah passed away and was buried (*Genesis 23: 2*). Thus, if Isaac was the son who accompanied Abraham, he would have naturally returned with Abraham, but he did not. This proves that the son was none other than Ishmael, who was taken up to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed and after God accepts Abraham’s sacrifice and spares Ishmael’s life, Abraham sends him back to his mother and returns to Hebron with his servants.

Origin and Authorship of the Book of Genesis

An analysis of the origin and the authorship of the book of Genesis endorses the possibility of interpolation or redaction in the story of Abraham’s sacrifice. Regarding the Authorship of the Pentateuch - or the first five books of the Old Testament

which includes Genesis - scholars greatly differ in their opinion. There are three widely accepted opinions among Bible scholars.

1. One group believes that all five books in their entirety or a large part of it were authored by Moses (*Waltke, 2016, p. 22*).
2. While the second group says that ‘a part’ of it was authored by Moses (*Ibid*).
3. The third group says the author of the first five books of the Old Testament including Genesis is unknown (*Ibid, p.28*).

The first view that the first five books of the Bible -namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy- were completely written by Moses can be outrightly refuted by a verse in the book of Deuteronomy which says that Moses died and was buried (*Deuteronomy, 34: 5*).

If Moses was the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, how can he write his own obituary? Thus, it is clear that Moses was not the author of Genesis or the first five books of the Old Testament. When it comes to the second opinion that a part of the first five books of the Old Testament was authored by Moses, then in that case, who is or who are the authors and collectors of the remaining part of the first five books of the Old Testament? Finally, the last opinion is that the author/ authors of the first five books are unknown, this too is problematic because without knowing

the identity of the authors and those who collected them or who edited them, how can we be so sure about the authenticity of these books? Ultimately, whether the author of the book of Genesis was Moses, in entirety or part or its author is completely unknown, it is true that the book of Genesis has undergone many redactions, omissions, and changes at the hands of unknown authors, scribes and Rabbis over centuries. Thus, there is a high probability that Genesis 22:1-19 too has changed and the name of Isaac was deliberately inserted due to the prejudice against Ishmael and his progeny.

Former British MP and author, Charles Bradlaugh asserts that there are many inconsistencies, contradictions, and factual discrepancies in the book of Genesis which renders it unreliable and doubtful (*Bradlaugh, 1882, p. 5*). He further quotes the Jewish scholar Spinoza who – against the widely held belief – outrightly rejects the possibility of Moses playing any role in the authorship of the first five books of the Old Testament and also casts serious doubts about the identity of its authors and the authenticity of its claims (*Ibid, p.2*).

Who Was The Sacrifice According to The Qur'an: Ishmael or Isaac?

The Holy Qur'an does not explicitly mention which of Abraham's (Ibrahim) two sons was to be sacrificed, leading to differing opinions among commentators. Some early commentators, all Shia

commentators, and some Sunni commentators have identified Ishmael as the one to be sacrificed, while other early commentators and most Sunnis, following the Bible, have identified Isaac as the one to be sacrificed.

Both groups have presented evidence from the Qur'an and hadith to support their views. However, the evidence that Ishmael was the one to be sacrificed, is more abundant and stronger. When Abraham, after being saved from the fire of Nimrod, left his people and migrated from Babil, he prayed to God to grant him a righteous child (*Qarai, 2004; The Qur'an, 37: 100*).

This request indicates that at that time, Abraham had no children, because the phrase 'from among – min' indicates a portion, meaning at least one child. After this prayer, he was given the good news of a 'forbearing boy' (*Ibid; The Qur'an, 37: 101*). Therefore, the 'forbearing boy' mentioned by the Holy Qur'an, who was to be sacrificed, was Abraham's firstborn son.

The Bible and all Muslims believe that Ishmael was born before Isaac and was Abraham's first son. The Holy Qur'an also reports the good news of Ishmael's birth before the good news of Isaac's birth. According to the Bible, since Sarah, Isaac's mother, could not bear children, she gave her maid, Hagar, to Abraham in marriage. After the birth of Ishmael, she expelled him and his mother. Also, according to the

Bible, Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his firstborn son, so naturally, the son to be sacrificed was Ishmael.

However, the Bible, inconsistently, identifies Isaac as Abraham's only son and the one to be sacrificed. After reporting the good news of the 'forbearing boy' and the story of his intended sacrifice, the Holy Qur'an also reports the good news of the birth of Isaac (*Qarai, 2004; The Qur'an, 37: 101-107, 112*).

Therefore, Isaac cannot be the 'forbearing boy' because if he were, the good news about him would be redundant. Reflection on the verses shows that the good news about the 'forbearing boy' is different from the good news about Isaac. Some have responded to this reasoning by saying that the good news about Isaac pertains to his prophecy, not his birth and that since he successfully passed the test of being sacrificed, God gave him the good news of prophethood.

However, this interpretation contradicts the apparent meaning of the verse. The characteristics of the 'forbearing boy' and Ishmael are consistent with each other. The Holy Qur'an describes the boy who will be born to him as 'forbearing' (*Qarai, 2004; The Qur'an, 37: 101-102*), and also describes Ishmael as forbearing in Qur'an 21:85. Conversely, Isaac is not described as 'forbearing' anywhere in the Holy Qur'an; instead, he is explicitly described as knowledgeable (*Ibid; The*

Qur'an, 15:53). This indicates that Ishmael and the 'forbearing boy' are the same person, and Ishmael showed patience when he was about to be sacrificed. Additionally, the Holy Qur'an describes Ishmael as 'truthful in his promise' (*Ibid; The Qur'an 19:54*).

This is interpreted to mean that he fulfilled his promise to his father to be patient during his sacrifice. Besides, the good news of Isaac's birth was given to Ibrahim along with the good news of the birth of a son named Jacob (*Ibid; The Qur'an 11:71*). Moreover, if there had been a divine command to sacrifice Isaac, there would have been no possibility of Jacob's birth and the fulfillment of God's promise regarding him.

Hence, Isaac had to remain alive for Jacob to be born. In summary, this suggests that when the Holy Qur'an announces the birth of Isaac, it also promises that Isaac will have a son, Jacob. However, when the glad tidings are given about Ishmael's birth, the promise is limited to the birth of a forbearing lad (*Ibid; The Qur'an 37:101*), without mention of his descendants. Therefore, when Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son, he is unaware of whether this son will survive the ordeal or not. On the other hand, if Isaac were the son chosen for the sacrifice, Abraham would already know from God's promise that Isaac would have a son, Jacob.

This knowledge would make it clear that Isaac would survive, which would undermine the trial's essence. Likewise, the sacrifice of Ishmael is also mentioned in supplications and Ziyarat texts, and it has been widely recognized by scholars and narrators throughout all periods (*Majlisi, 2000, Vol. 12, p. 135, 137*).

Moreover, this sacrifice shows the peak of submission where Abraham believed that what he saw in a dream did not need an interpretation. That is why he hastened to fulfill what came in his dream, sacrificing his son Ismail. Fulfillment of the dream showed the perfection of faith and submission of both Abraham and his son before Allah. The fulfillment of his vision was a reason for the emergence of a new perfection and knowledge, which is the knowledge of interpretation in which slaughter and closeness to the Almighty is the form of Abraham's true Islam with ecstatic absorption in Allah (*Ali & Mustafa, 2023*).

A Comparison of the Biblical and the Qur'anic Narrative of the Sacrifice

In the Holy Qur'an, we read that when Prophet Abraham's son reached maturity, Abraham said to him, "O my son, I have seen in a dream that I am sacrificing you. What do you think?" His son responded, "O my father, do as you are commanded; you will find me, if God wills, among the patient" (*Qarai, 2004; The Qur'an, 37: 102*).

This interaction shows that Prophet Abraham was testing his son to gauge his response. The son's reply reflected not only his acceptance of the sacrifice but also a reassurance to his father, indicating his lack of fear. After this exchange, both Prophet Abraham and his son obediently prepared to carry out God's command. Abraham laid his son down to sacrifice him, but at that crucial moment, God informed him that he had fulfilled the command.

The Holy Qur'an after recounting the sacrifice of Abraham's patient son, immediately announces the good news of Isaac's birth. Thus, the patient's son is believed to be Ismail. However, some Sunni commentators argue that the son to be sacrificed was Isaac, interpreting the glad tidings as a reference to his prophethood rather than his birth. However, according to the Old Testament, Abraham had kept his son Isaac ignorant of the fact that he was the one Abraham intended to sacrifice (*Genesis 22: 8*).

Additionally, Abraham also bound (tied) his hands before placing him on the altar to sacrifice (*Genesis 22: 10*), this shows that Abraham was doing this without the consent of Isaac. In the Holy Qur'an, when addressing the issue of the son's sacrifice, it clearly states that Prophet Abraham openly discussed the matter of his son's sacrifice with him and sought his opinion. Abraham recognized his son's

independent personality and free will and never intended to deceive him or lead him blindly into this great test. In this story, Prophet Abraham wanted his son to also participate in the struggle against the *Nafs* (carnal self) and experience the joy of submission and acceptance. The son, too, wanted his father to remain resolute in his determination. Thus, he did not say, “Sacrifice me,” but rather, “Do whatever you have been commanded, for I am submissive to the command of God.” Abraham’s address to his son as ‘O my little son’ and the son’s response with ‘O my father’ show that this matter did not diminish their fatherly and filial affection even a bit, and God’s command was dominant and prioritized above all else. Also, it exhibits the highest levels of faith and submission, as the son never relies on his own faith, will, or decision but rather on God’s will and says, “If God wills, you will find me among the patient.” Thus, father and son successfully pass the first stage of this great test (*Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2023, Vol. 33*).

Conclusion

In the light of the above information, one can conclude that Ishmael was Abraham’s ‘firstborn’ from his legally married wife - Hagar, and both Ishmael and Isaac had a high status in the eyes of God and Abraham was promised of bountiful progeny not just from one, but both his sons. Regarding God’s covenant

with Abraham, it was sealed after all the male members of his household were circumcised along with his son Ishmael even before the birth of Isaac.

According to the Holy Bible, Abram is named Abraham, the father of nations after the birth of Ishmael, his firstborn. Moreover, Ishmael was Abraham’s ‘Beloved’ and ‘Only Son’ for a good fourteen years until Isaac’s birth, and Isaac could never be called Abraham’s ‘Only Son’ because Ishmael and Isaac together buried their father. Also, God’s command to Abraham was very clear that he offers his ‘Only Son’ ‘Whom You (Abraham) Love’ for sacrifice, and therefore, calling ‘Isaac’ Abraham’s ‘Only Son’ and ‘Whom You (Abraham) Love’ is an interpolation. Besides, the use of the word ‘lad’ in the narrative makes it clear that the son who was taken up for sacrifice was none other than Ishmael.

Finally, the fact that Abraham returns alone after the intended sacrifice proves beyond doubt that the son taken up to Mount Moriah was Ishmael and not Isaac. If it was Isaac, he would have returned home to his mother Sarah along with his father Abraham. Finally, the unknown origin and authorship of the book of Genesis and the prospect of changes to later editions, leave open the possibility that the story and the narrative of the event of Abrahamic sacrifice could have

undergone changes and the name of Abraham's son could have been interpolated at a later stage.

Consequently, we can draw several conclusions regarding the narrative of Abraham and his sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Here are the key considerations:

- Textual Nuances: The conclusion should recognize the significance of specific language and terminology used in the biblical account. The term 'only son' is not merely a factual descriptor; it carries theological and literary weight. While some scholars debate its accuracy, the phrase emphasizes Ishmael's unique role in God's plan.
- Historical and Cultural Context: To fully understand the events, we must delve into the historical and cultural context. Abraham's household, including Ishmael, was circumcised as part of God's covenant even before Isaac's birth. This context informs our interpretation of the 'only son' reference as being that of Ishmael.
- Theological Interpretations: Traditionally, Isaac is considered Abraham's 'only son' in certain theological contexts, especially within Christianity. The narrative serves as a foreshadowing of God's ultimate sacrifice through Jesus. However, when examined in the light of textual evidence this can have a significant effect on

theological interpretations in Judaism and Christianity.

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