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# The testing of Abraham in Genesis 22 and the testing of Job

## ABSTRACT

*This article analyses and compares the testing of Abraham and that of Job. The analysis of Genesis 22 examines the meaning of God testing Abraham in comparison to other instances of God testing individuals in the Bible and draws parallels with the book of Job. Both positive and negative interpretations of human sacrifice are considered with reference to Jewish sources. The tension between the narrative and the poetic part of the book of Job is understood as a correction of a fatalistic, obedient world view. Such critical thinking is lacking in Genesis 22 and is only part of the reception history.*

## 1. THE TESTING OF ABRAHAM AND JOB

The testing of Abraham abounds in internal biblical references, mainly to the books of Genesis and Exodus; there are also references to the book of Job. Genesis 22, previously attributed to the E-source, is now considered to be part of the J-source, which is dated to the Persian period and is one of the youngest texts in the Pentateuch (Fischer 2012:293-295). The Book of Job dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Veijola 2002:142). Both texts are different in terms of genre, date of composition, *Sitz im Leben*, and so forth. However, they share literary and theological relationships and deal with the trial of a faithful person. Job and Abraham both submit to God's will. Abraham passes the test of obedience described by the verb נסה in Genesis 22:1. This term is not used for Job, but he



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does pass a test of faithfulness. In a sense, Genesis 22 forms the literary background to the Job narrative. This article analyses and compares the trials of Abraham and Job for differences and similarities.

## 1.1 Previous research

In the Western academic tradition, a comparison of Abraham and Job has rarely been more than a side note. Shapiro (1962), Japhet (1994), Michel (2001), Veijola (2002), and Lombaard (2020) have undertaken a few studies. In Rabbinic interpretation, Abraham and Job have long been linked and will be referred to in this analysis.

## 1.2 Interpretations of Genesis 22 reflected in its headings

The various traditions of interpretation and their emphasis on the text are reflected in the different headings given to this chapter in Genesis.

The chapter opens with “God tested Abraham” (Gen. 22:19). God addresses Abraham and tells him to sacrifice his son (Gen. 22:1-2). The sentence structure emphasises God as the initiator of the test.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere does it mention that Abraham was aware that God’s command was a test.

God addresses Abraham twice. First, God said to Abraham: “Abraham!”, and he replied: “Here am I.” (Gen. 22:1). We learn only later about the detailed content of God’s first address when Abraham “set out for the place God had told him about” (Gen. 22:3). Secondly, when Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, the angel of YHWH called (קרא) to him from heaven and said: “Abraham, Abraham!”, and he replied: “Here am I.” (Gen. 22:11). The dramatic tension intensifies as the divine communication shifts from “God said” to “The angel of YHWH called from heaven”. The second time, when in a divine dramatic intervention he shouts from heaven, he cannot not be heard. Both times Abraham gives the same reply (Gen. 22:1, 11) and shows that he is paying attention to God, who commands him “take your son, your only son, whom you love” (Gen. 22:2). Alter (1996:103) observes that the “Hebrew syntactic chain is exquisitely forged to carry a dramatic burden”, which follows immediately: “and offer him there as a burnt offering” (והעלהו שם לעלה) (Gen. 22:2). No reason is given as to why God is tempting Abraham so terribly (Auerbach 2013:8-9). As the sacrifice is Abraham’s obedient response to God’s command to sacrifice his son,

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1 “and God tested Abraham” (Gen. 22:1) In a x-qatal-x-sentence – an inverted perfect sentence preceding a waw imperfect narrative, the emphasis is on God as the initiator of the test (Veijola 2002:135; Levin 2021:39).

the chapter could also be titled “Abraham’s obedience”. When the angel of YHWH intervenes and stops Abraham from sacrificing his son, he concludes: “Now I know that you fear God” (Gen. 22:12). Therefore, the chapter could be titled “Abraham’s obedience and fear of God”.

The Jewish interpretation usually speaks of “the binding of Isaac” or simply “the binding/Aqedah”, echoing the phrase that Abraham “bound his son Isaac” (ויעקוד את-יצחק בנו) (Gen. 22:9). It emphasises Isaac’s devotion, his willingness to surrender and be obedient. However, לעקוד is a metonym, meaning both “to sacrifice” and “to bind”. Abraham can hope that when he sacrifices Isaac, he will only have to bind him (Kundert 1998:59). Both interpretations, the execution and the non-execution of the sacrifice, are present in the Jewish interpretive tradition. Over time, Isaac has become a symbol of Jewish suffering, a prototype of the martyr who willingly sacrifices his life for God (Kundert 1998:1). Some interpretations shift the text’s dramaturgy to the focus on Isaac, as reflected in the words of the pious widow Judith, who encourages the elders to remember all that Abraham and Isaac went through (Judith 8:26). Therefore, an appropriate heading for this section could be “How God tested Isaac”.<sup>2</sup>

In Christian tradition, Genesis 22:1-19 has widely been known as “the sacrifice of Isaac”. Even though Isaac was not killed, he is considered a worthy sacrifice because of Abraham’s devotion to God. This interpretation is already present in the New Testament (Hebr. 11:7; Jas. 2:21).

Total obedience is the interpretation in the Qur’an (Sura 37:99-113). When Abraham tells his son (it remains ambiguous whether it is Isaac or Ishmael) that he must sacrifice him, he replies to his father: “O my dear father! Do as you are commanded. Allah willing, you will find me steadfast.” (Sura 37:102; Quran.com, 2024)

Abraham is the main character, although the narrative centres around Abraham and Isaac. “God tests Abraham” emphasises the test of faith or obedience that Abraham undergoes. “Abraham’s sacrifice”, “Abraham’s obedience and fear of God” or “the sacrifice of Isaac” are secondary issues, as is the “naming of the place” (Van Seters 1973:273).

### 1.3 Human sacrifice

The command to offer Isaac, his only son, as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2) must have seemed horrendous to Abraham, contradicting all his expectations and experiences of God. Abraham had been given the promise of offspring

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2 Wills (2019:268) recognises that the test of Isaac is not a common theme in the tradition and raises the question as to whether Judith refers to Isaac’s life story in its entirety.

(Gen. 12:3; 17:16). He had already sent his son Ishmael with Hagar into the wilderness (Gen. 21), and now he is told to offer his remaining son as a burnt offering. This larger dimension is the background to the trial.

Human sacrifices have served different functions in different cultures and times (Eeckhout & Owens, 2008:390). In the Ancient Near East, ritual human sacrifice was used for purposes that included building sacrifice; retinue sacrifice; prisoner sacrifice; sacrifice of the dead and heroes, and fertility ritual (killing of the first-born) (Bauks 2016:1.1).

Even if human sacrifices have served different functions in different cultures and times, “death by sacrifice tends to be the exception rather than the rule in any given society” (Eeckhout & Owens 2008:381).<sup>3</sup> It can be viewed as an act of honouring God by sacrificing a beloved son to Him.

It is important to note that offering human sacrifices to deities was not entirely obsolete. In the Hebrew Bible, human sacrifice is mentioned a few times as a negative example of foreign practices (Mic. 6:7; 2 Kgs 16:3; 21:6), even as a burnt offering of the king’s son (2 Kings 3:27). Human sacrifice is abolished by the God of the people of Israel/Judah, even if it was not totally abandoned (Jer. 7:31).

The narrative of Jephthah’s daughter deserves attention. It originated from a vow made by Jephthah to offer a burnt offering to YHWH in exchange for victory (Judg. 11:29-40). The text portrays the act of keeping a vow in a positive light, especially since Jephthah made his vow after the Spirit of YHWH had come upon him. In addition, Jephthah’s daughter accepts her fate without complaint and even encourages her father to keep his vow. The text describes an unimaginable deed as being accomplished by the protagonist, but only mentions that he did what he had vowed to do.

Considering Jephthah’s sacrifice, it cannot be concluded that Isaac would have refused his own sacrifice. Abraham’s enigmatic statement that God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering (Gen. 22:8) sidesteps the issue. It can be interpreted positively as an expression of faith that God will provide a solution, as was the case when Isaac was replaced by a ram. However, no divine intervention occurred when Jephthah offered his daughter as a burnt offering.

Is it then so difficult to believe, as some do, that Abraham killed his son? A close reading shows that Abraham and Isaac went together to Moriah (Gen. 22:6), but only Abraham is mentioned as returning (Gen.

3 Eeckhout & Owens’ subject is the human sacrifices of the Inca culture in Pachacamac, Peru. They point to different interpretations. In their specific research area, “sacrifices were intended to bless objects or missions, give thanks, or appeal for supernatural favours or assistance” (Eeckhout & Owen 2008:375).

22:19). Literary criticism concludes that, at a certain point in the story, Abraham killed his son. Ibn Ezra contradicts this opinion:

Those who say that Abraham slaughtered Isaac and left him on the altar and following this Isaac came to life are contradicting Scripture (Strickman & Wilver, 1998-2004).

The reasoning is that the firstborn belongs to God (Ex. 22:28) right from the foundation of the redemption of the people of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 13:2).<sup>4</sup> From the beginning, animal sacrifice replaced human sacrifice (Ex. 13:7, 12-13), and human sacrifice was forbidden (Lev. 18:21).

By contrast, the Aqedah sets out the right of a prophet such as Abraham to temporarily suspend the law because they are believed to know the will of God (Jacobs & Sagi, 2007 see also bT Sanh. 89b).

## 1.4 God testing people

### 1.4.1 Biblical instances of God testing people

The root נסא expresses “testing”. God is portrayed as testing the faith and obedience of his people several times (Ex. 15:25, 16:4, 20:20; Deut. 8:2, 16; Judg. 2:21-3:1). Believers may even ask God to test them to demonstrate their faithfulness (Ps. 26:2).

Babylonian envoys visit King Hezekiah after his miraculous healing (2 Kings 20:12-19; 1 Chron. 32:31). God tests Hezekiah. He accepts God’s judgement and resigns himself to God’s will. That he prospers after this incident indicates that he passed the test (Klein 2012:469). His statement might, in its spiritual composition, be compared to that of Job (Job 1:21, 2:10), as Japhet (1993:996) suggests.

Overall, the purpose of a test is to strengthen one’s relationship with God.

### 1.4.2 The purpose of God testing Abraham

Shapiro (1962:212) asks if God tests Abraham because he needed “reassurance of Abraham’s wholehearted devotion to Him”.

God brings about or allows circumstances in which someone can prove himself. A divine test is a special form of the deed-consequence-act. Abraham is rewarded when he learns that God provides (Gen. 22:14) and renews the blessing (Gen. 22:15-18).

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4 Gunkel (1902:213) sees an original saga about a child sacrifice.

In Jewish interpretation, the binding of Isaac is the seventh (see Jub. 17:16) in a series of ten trials<sup>5</sup> of Abraham. In all of it, Abraham “was faithful and one who loved the Lord” (Jub. 17:18). This is explained as a sign of Abraham’s strength because God tests those who are righteous (Ps. 11:5) and strong (Van der Heide 1987:108). Later it was also viewed as a test to show obedience to the Torah, “whilst as yet the Torah had not been given, Abraham kept all the precepts of the Torah” (Friedlander 1916:223).

When considering the cruelty of the test, these explanations may seem oversimplified and fail to acknowledge the otherness of God, as portrayed in the book of Job. Similarly, what Abraham endured was a test and not a true reflection of God’s character.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.4.3 Abraham’s obedience and fear of God

Abraham obediently followed God’s command to sacrifice his son without showing any emotion. This contrasts with the emotions that the command to sacrifice his own son would evoke in the implicit reader.

Despite any doubts or motives he may have had, Abraham obediently binds his son to offer him as a burnt offering. The scene reaches its climax when Abraham takes the knife to slay his son (Gen. 22:10). Abraham passes the test by not withholding his son from God and proving his fear of God (Gen. 22:12).<sup>7</sup> Early Judaism recognised that Abraham’s willingness to give his utmost allowed him to pass the test (Sir. 44:20; 1 Macc. 2:52). The inconsistency with God’s promise of descendants (Gen. 21:12) is evident to readers familiar with the broader context of the Abraham stories. This issue is discussed in the Jerusalem Talmud, where Abraham is considered a faithful believer:

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5 According to VanderKam (2001:54), this is counted as Abraham’s eighth trial. Later, he corrects himself (VanderKam 2018:564-565) to make it the seventh trial, which would be a significant number. The tenth and final test is the death of Sara (Jub. 19:8).

6 According to Levin (2021:400), this is not “die eigentliche Weise der Gotteserfahrung” (“the true authenticity of experiencing God”), taking up Heidegger’s term “Eigentlichkeit” “authenticity”, as being oneself.

7 On the contrary, using a text-pragmatic approach, Hardmeier (2006:16) concludes that God did not ask Abraham to kill Isaac, but that they should together offer a burnt offering. The Hebrew root עלה literally means “to go up” and is used as a term for burnt offerings, where the smoke and odour go up to God. According to Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, God did not command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but to take him up to the mountain. There God says: “When I said to you: ‘Take you your son’, I did not say: ‘Slaughter him’, but rather, ‘take him up’. I said this to you in affection. ‘You have taken him up and fulfilled My words, now take him down.’” (Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 56.8).

Abraham said before the Holy One ... You said to me, for in Isaac will your descendants be named, and now You are saying, sacrifice him as elevation offering. Heaven forbid that I should have done this, to the contrary I suppressed my inclination and did Your will (Taanit2:4/PTaan 65b; Guggenheimer 1999-2015).

This serves as a lesson for the future of the people of Israel:

The Eternal will see. You will remember for them the binding of Isaac and be filled with mercy for them. (Taanit2:4/PTaan 65b; Guggenheimer 1999-2015; see also Rottzoll 1993:312).

In the New Testament, Abraham's faith provides a solution. However, it is executed differently by introducing a new anachronistic aspect, namely that God can raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19).

## 2. THE BOOK OF JOB

The book of Job introduces Job as a blameless and upright person who fears God (Job 1:1). The figure of Job is introduced with an inverted sentence: איש היה בארץ אוז ("a man was in the land of Uz"). The text discusses the emphasis on a man, using Job as an example of a universal experience, and on God as the one who tests (Veijola 2002:134-135). It consists of two main sections: a narrative forming the prologue and epilogue of the book (Job 1:1-2:10; 42:11-17) and the poetic section (Job 3:1-42:6). The three friends bridge these sections (Job 2:11-13; 42:7-9).

### 2.1 Job's suffering

The book of Job is characterised by a discussion about suffering. All the bad things that happen to Job are the result of a wager between God and "the Satan", who appears in the function of the accuser and, therefore, always carries the article (השטן). Job's suffering is caused by Satan and lies in the permissive will of God which Job accepts.

The narrative begins by introducing the protagonist, Job, who is a blameless and faithful follower of YHWH, serving as a role model for others. However, his fate changes dramatically as he experiences a series of devastating blows in a short period of time. They seize his household possessions, crops, and offspring (Job 1:14-19). As if that was not enough, a little later Job becomes seriously ill (Job 2:7). War, natural disasters, and loss of health are the three strokes of fate that are paradigmatic. Job stands firm in his faith in YHWH and confesses his faithfulness to YHWH (Job 1:21; 2:10).

This frame narrative can be read as an example of faith in a retributive deed-consequence concept. How should we deal with strokes of fate in life? The answer is: Be faithful. If you are faithful, God will turn everything into good. Job is not only compensated for his loss, but his property is even multiplied, and he is rewarded. The deed-consequence act is preserved (Job 42:10-13).

However, the poetic section of the book is not relevant to this discussion. Instead, it concentrates on God and the relationship between righteousness, and good living, or the lack thereof, and proposes a practical solution for dealing with suffering.

## 2.2 The testing of Job

The root נסה, “to test”, is not used in the book of Job. Instead, the root בוחן is used. However, these roots can be used as synonyms, as in the phrases “Prove me (בוחן), YHWH, and test me (נסה)” and “examine (צרף) my heart and my mind” (Ps 26:2).

Job uses the term בוחן in two different ways. He complains about God testing him every day (Job 7:18) and expresses his negative experience of God, wishing that God would leave him alone (Job 7:19). Job’s complaint is bitter, and he feels that God is oppressing him and hiding from him (Job 23:2-9). Job asks God to acknowledge his righteousness, saying, “If God were to test (בוחן)<sup>8</sup> me, I would come out as gold” (Job 23:10).<sup>9</sup>

## 2.3 Reasons for evil

The prose narrative takes place on earth and in heaven. For Job, Satan is not considered at all. Many arguments for Job’s suffering are presented in the dialogues with his friends, but Satan is never an issue.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it gives the reader an answer to the question as to why bad things happen to good people.

It has been suggested that the scenes with Satan are later additions (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-10). If they are left out, a simple story about Job’s faithfulness remains, but it would be a short and boring story with a simple concept of retribution. The events in heaven and the wager between God and Satan give the story a twist and make it an interesting plot.

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8 The qatal form should not be translated as a perfect but as an optative.

9 Furthermore, the root בוחן is used in the phrase “the ear tests words” (Job 12:11; 34:3).

10 It is likely that the dialogues predate the frame narrative when the concept of Satan was not yet a part of Israel’s theology.



That bad things happen to good people is not simply an experience of Job but they are addressed in several crisis texts in the Hebrew Bible (for example, Ps. 73:23-28; Eccl. 7:15; Jer. 12:1) and in Ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts (for example, “Ludlul Bel Nemeqi” understands it as the withdrawal of divine protection).<sup>11</sup> The loss of protection means that other forces/spirits can attack a defenceless person.<sup>12</sup> The absence of God is the reason for Shubshi Meshre Shakran’s lament:

I called to my God, but he did not show his face; I prayed to my Goddess, but she did not raise her head (II, 4-5; Lambert 1996 [1960]:39).

The latter is in line with Job’s constant complaint that God hides and does not answer him (Job 13:18-24; 23:3-7; 31:35).

## 2.4 The poetic part of Job as a correction and extension of the prose narrative

Although the frame narrative views suffering as a test of the pious, the poetic section offers a different perspective on the loss of Job’s health and sons (Job 8:4). It suggests that they died due to their own guilt, thereby highlighting individual responsibility. This notion has been present since the time of the exile (Ezek. 3:18-20; 14:15-20; 33:8-9). Job transforms from a faithful person to a depressed one who curses the day of his birth and accuses God of mistreating him (Job 3). Job, along with his three friends, represents retributive theology from different perspectives. Job defends his righteousness and challenges God to a legal dispute. He acknowledges that he is fallible, but disputes that he deserves such a fate. He accuses God of denying him his rights, acting unjustly, and turning against him. Job’s friends offer alternative explanations. Suffering is a consequence of human guilt. Suffering is part of human nature and a form of divine education and rebuke. These explanations stand side by side in the book of Job, and in this way, they correct each other (Müllner 2006:59).

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11 I, 43-48 translated in Lambert (1996 [1960]:33).

12 II, 52-55 translated in Lambert (1996 [1960]:41).

### 3. COMPARISON OF THE TESTING OF ABRAHAM IN GENESIS 22 AND THE TESTING OF JOB

#### 3.1 Parallels in time and themes

Abraham and Job have in common that they are attributed to the prehistoric times of Israel. As a founding father of Israel, Abraham views this as a necessity. Jewish tradition makes Abraham and Job contemporaries because of their similar longevity (Job 42:16; Gen. 25:7), similar religious practices (sacrifices, no priesthood), and social circumstances (no people or kingdom of Israel mentioned). According to rabbinic exegesis, Abraham and Job lived in the same era (Bava Batra 15a.12, Steinsaltz 1965-2010). This is evidenced by the fact that Abraham's nephew Uz (Gen. 22:21) is linked to Job in the land of Uz. In addition, it is suggested that Job married Dinah, Abraham's great-granddaughter (Genesis Rabbah 19:12; 57:4).<sup>13</sup>

Both narratives, presented by an omniscient narrator who provides additional information to the reader, describe a trial of a pious man that was planned by God in heaven. They simultaneously present the perspective of the protagonist on earth (Abraham, Job). Grammatically, both narratives begin with an inverted sentence. Genesis 22 emphasises God, whereas the book of Job points out the figure of Job.

In the frame narrative, Job and Abraham share many similarities in their theology. Both remain faithful to God, regardless of what happens to them. The difference is that God addresses Abraham, while Job is not addressed. After Abraham passes the test, the angel of YHWH confirms his faithfulness (Gen. 22:12). Job is a person of complete righteousness, whose fear of God is repeatedly emphasised (Job 1:1, 8-9; 2:3). This fear of God is the prerequisite and reason for testing Job. Job's blamelessness begins where Abraham's ends (Veijola 2002:136-137). The frame narrative and Abraham's sacrifice both convey the same message to the faithful, namely if you are tested, remain faithful and pass the test. Both Job and Abraham are heroes to be admired.<sup>14</sup> In the Job narrative, when Satan appeared before God, he acknowledged that, in the whole world, he had "not found anyone as faithful as your servant Job" (Bava Batra 16a.3, Steinsaltz 1965-2010).

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13 Kalman (2005:29-31) lists further points of comparison between Abraham and Job, but he does not refer to Genesis 22.

14 According to Jauß (1972:46), admiration is one of five typical reactions to a novel.

## 3.2 Contrasts and challenges

### 3.2.1 God speaks to Abraham but remains silent with Job

Job expresses his frustration with God's silence, repeatedly calling out for a response (Job 13:22; 31:35; 32; 33:5). God remains silent until he suddenly speaks to Job out of the storm (Job 38:1). This changes the scene and shows God's power over the chaotic forces of creation. They are not demonic and do not pose a threat to human existence (Lindström 1994:19), as is the case in *Ludlul bel nemeqi*, where unprotected human beings are inferior to demonic forces.

### 3.2.2 Friend or foe – Abraham's obedience and Job's complaint

Abraham and Job appear to have an exceptionally strong, superhuman faith in God. Abraham's faithfulness to God is mentioned after the test, whereas Job's is mentioned prior to the test. This difference in perspective alters the interpretation of the test. Abraham passed his test and Job's faithfulness is tested to show his righteousness.

Abraham is God's beloved (Isa. 41:8), with a faithful, steadfast heart (Neh. 9:8). He is a faithful friend of God (Jas. 2:23). His positive image is not challenged. Job, on the other hand, is a more ambivalent character. The perfect Job of the frame narrative is supplemented by the Job of the poetic section. Job complains and wants to bring a case against God. He views God as an enemy who may kill him and feels that he has no hope (Job 13:14-15).<sup>15</sup>

This aspect of Job is not taken up in the history of reception. Jewish and Christian sources primarily view Job as an example, a model of patience (Tob. 2:12 VUL), endurance (Jas. 5:11), and justice (Ezek. 14:14; 20). He held firmly to all the ways of righteousness (Sir. 49:9)<sup>16</sup> and was a prophet, according to a Qumran manuscript (Sir. 49:9).<sup>17</sup>

15 The Qere changes the negation לֹא to the preposition לִי and makes a positive statement: "I will wait/hope for him", so that God is not offended by Job's words.

16 LXX reads "Job as 'enemy'" (iyyōb as 'ōyēb) and so confused the sense of the verse (Skehan & Di Lella 1987:542).

17 וְגַם הִזְכִּיר אֶת אִיּוֹב נְבִיאָה "and he also held in memory Job as a prophet" (Ms.B18v,14, quoted from Kratz 2023).

### 3.2.3 Setting a test

“God tested Abraham” (Gen. 22:1). In Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, it is debated whether this was a genuine test or whether God intended to make Abraham great (Krupp 1995:29).

According to Rabbi Yosei HaGelili, he exalted him like the ensign [nes] on a ship. Rabbi Akiva mentions that he tested him in the literal sense, so that people should not say: He stunned him and confused him, and he did not know what to do (Bereshit Rabbah 55.6a, The Sefariah Midrash Rabba 2022).

This is reminiscent of the dialogue between Satan and God, in which God boasts of his servant Job as “a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8).

Unlike Abraham, Satan questions Job’s faith in God. Job remains faithful throughout his trials and tribulations. Ultimately, Satan loses the wager and disappears from the scene. In the poetic part of the text, Job’s ideal image is shattered, and he answers as a desperate human being. Job does not view his bitter experiences as a test from God. Instead, he asserts the purity and genuineness of his actions.

### 3.2.4 Acting as a priest – Bringing a sacrifice

The prerequisite for offering sacrifices is cultic purity. We can assume that Abraham and Job are acting as priests, as was common for heads of a household before the cult was organised by professional priests. Abraham brings burnt offerings (Gen. 15:9-17) and now he is ordered to bring his son as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2). Job brings sacrifices for his children on a regular basis, as is told in an iterative way: “as he did each time” (Job 1:4-5).<sup>18</sup> Satan challenges the piety of Job, demonstrated through his selfless and caring sacrifice. With reference to Leviticus 9:22-24, Awabdy and Häner (2022:160) mention that Satan’s claim portrayed “a worldview in which obedient sacrifices are one of the prerequisites of YHWH’s blessing of his people” and that Job’s sacrifices were “aimed at preventing the possible loss of his divinely blessed status”.

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18 Why Job does not offer a sacrifice for his friends, but Eliphaz must do so is a controversial issue (Job 42:8).

### 3.2.5 Satan as cause of testing

Although the figure of Satan is not mentioned in Genesis 22, early Jewish and rabbinic sources consider him to be the cause of Abraham's testing.<sup>19</sup> It is likely that the figure of Satan was borrowed from the book of Job. The dialogue between Satan and Abraham is modelled after the Job prologue, where he appears as an eloquent adversary or accuser. In his encounter with Abraham, Satan also quotes words from Eliphaz's first speech (Job 4:2-7; 12), with which he had rebuked Job.

The Babylonian Talmud views the idea of not killing his son as a Satanic temptation:

Satan preceded Abraham to the path that he took to bind his son and said to him: ... The sheep is to be sacrificed as a burnt-offering, and Isaac is not to be sacrificed as a burnt-offering. Abraham said to him: Perhaps that is so. However, this is the punishment of the liar, that even if he speaks the truth, others do not listen to him. Therefore, I do not believe you and will fulfil that which I was commanded to perform (bT Sanh 89.13, Steinsaltz 1965-2010).<sup>20</sup>

In the Book of Jubilees, Mastêmâ, the fallen archangel, replaces Satan. God and Mastêmâ argue over Abraham's faithfulness (see also 4Q225 frg. 2),<sup>21</sup> akin to the dispute over Job's piety in Job 1-2. It is suggested that Mastêmâ challenges God to test Abraham's faith, by commanding him to offer his son as a sacrifice on an altar (VanderKam 2001:52). This will determine whether Abraham is truly faithful. The Lord already knows that Abraham is faithful in every difficult situation (Jub. 17:16-17).

The test of Job's faith and that of Abraham are compared in the Talmud. God praises Job as a perfect and upright man, surpassing even Abraham in his fear of God and avoidance of evil. Rabbi Yoḥanan emphasises the greatness of Job's characterisation (Job 1:8), highlighting that praise for Job exceeds that given to Abraham (bT Bava Batra 15b). In addition, Rabbi Levi suggests that Satan's accusations against Job were motivated by a desire for heavenly justice, as he acted with intent that was for the sake of heaven (bT Bava Batra 16a) and aimed to ensure that God did not overlook Abraham's love. This perspective challenges a conventional understanding of Satan as purely malevolent.

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<sup>19</sup> See Shapiro (1962:217).

<sup>20</sup> See Kundert (1998:54-56).

<sup>21</sup> 2 i 9b-10. According to Kugler (2007:174), 4Q225 is an independent composition that nonetheless traded on its audience's awareness of Jubilees.

In a Midrash, Satan appears in the guise of an old man, questions the morality of Abraham's act of killing his son, and warns Abraham of potential consequences:

'If you believe that you will have another son, you are listening to the words of a seducer. And furthermore, if you destroy a soul, you will be held legally accountable for it.' Abraham answered: 'It was not a seducer, but the Holy One, blessed be He, who told me what I must do, and I shall not listen to you' (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 22:10, Bermann 1996).

### 3.2.6 The perception of God

In the test of Abraham, God moves from demanding a human sacrifice to providing a ram as ransom. As the angel of YHWH, he intervenes and sets a limit to himself (Japhet 1994:170). He does not demand that Abraham sacrifices his son.<sup>22</sup>

In the frame narrative, Job perceives YHWH as static, reliable, and unquestionable. However, in the dialogues, Job undergoes a change as he struggles to cope with his situation. By contrast, God remains unchanged, hidden, and impenetrable. He does not respond to Job's questions by redefining or defending retribution. Instead, he demonstrates his superiority, by boasting of his power in creation (Fischer 2020:87). When God speaks out of the storm (Job 38-41), he speaks as YHWH, who is unchanging and unquestionable, even when his actions seem illogical and incomprehensible (Japhet 1994:170). The way in which YHWH speaks out of the storm may appear boastful. Job should have replied: "If you are in control, why did I have to suffer?", but he does not.

YHWH's speech silenced Job (Job 40:4). Job appears as a silent and attentive student of YHWH (Fischer 2021:26). He seems to give in, but it is also possible that he gives up because God denies him an answer. If Job had known that his suffering was only a means for God to prove to Satan that He was right, he may have lost hope.

In the story of Abraham, God changes his demand for a human sacrifice to providing a ram as a substitute. As the angel of YHWH, he intervenes and sets a limit for himself. Abraham is no longer required to sacrifice his son. God has changed.<sup>23</sup> Human sacrifice is an abomination to God.<sup>24</sup>

22 To me, this is a positive development, while Michel (2001:93) is of the opinion that the figure of God did not emerge unscathed from these relations.

23 Shapiro (1962:219) does not see a change in God, but he views this as part of God's self-revelation: "God had ... revealed to Abraham, in prohibiting the sacrifice of Isaac, that He never suspends the ethical."

24 This contradicts the New Testament, where God sacrifices his own son (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32-34).

### 3.2.7 A critical approach to Abraham's obedience and Job's submission to God's will

In the frame narrative, Abraham and Job are positive characters. However, both are flat characters who lack emotional depth and whose feelings remain hidden.

- A critical approach raises questions in a hermeneutic of suspicion. How can Abraham be certain that he heard God's voice and not another voice? Or was it his own inner voice? Considering that Abraham loved Ishmael, whom he sent away with Hagar, this may have caused resentment towards Sara and Isaac. When he hears "Isaac, whom you love" (Gen. 22:2), it may have created resistance. It is also possible that his non-acceptance of the situation was unconsciously transformed into a religious delusion that God had told him to make the sacrifice. Obedience and fanaticism can be easily confused.
- Abraham answers Isaac's question about where the burnt offering is, by saying that God will provide it. In this way, he expresses his trust in God to Isaac. This corresponds to the final experience of God providing the ram. However, Abraham gives an evasive answer. He does not disclose to Isaac that God has instructed him to offer him as a burnt offering, but instead makes him carry the firewood. How mean is that?<sup>25</sup> Why did Abraham not discuss the sacrifice with Isaac, and why did Isaac accept it without resistance? Despite being replaced by a ram, it could still create resentment towards his father for being willing to sacrifice him. The story depicted does not exemplify humanity, but rather an inhuman and fatalistic obedience.
- In his work *The conflict of the faculties*, Kant compares theology and philosophy, and argues that, due to man's inability to "apprehend the infinite by his senses", he can never know if God is speaking, but

in some cases man can be sure that the voice he hears is not God's; for if the voice commands him to do something contrary to the moral law ... he must consider it an illusion (Kant 1979:115).

Abraham would not have had to accept this voice as God's voice and obey it. He should have contradicted it in the name of morality and replied to this supposedly divine voice:

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 if this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven (Kant 1979:115).

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<sup>25</sup> Kant (1979:115) observed this immorality and laments: "the poor child, without knowing it, even brought the wood for the fire".

Yet this critical questioning is strange to the text. What would have happened if Abraham had refused God's command? Veijola (1988:162) concludes that, if Abraham had refused God, he would have voluntarily renounced his future. In this respect, Abraham had no choice. Trusting in God was thus also a prerequisite for him to prove himself as God-fearing.

Johannes di Silentio developed the whole problem into a short drama,<sup>26</sup> and Kierkegaard (2013:48) elaborated on this in his work *Fear and trembling*. He examines the story of Abraham and Isaac, illustrating how Abraham believed and did not doubt and, therefore, failed; he "was great by reason of his hope whose form is madness".

Following the events of Auschwitz, this critical approach is also reflected in Judaism. Abraham had failed the test when God instructed him to sacrifice his son. Instead of saying "Yes", he should have said "No" (Krupp 1995:9).

- In the frame narrative, Abraham and Job accept their fate without questioning it. The book of Job includes criticism within the text, which distinguishes it from the story of Abraham. In the book of Job, the poetic section portrays Job's behaviour differently, as he does not simply accept his fate. It is hard to accept that Job suffers because of the wager between God and Satan. Even in all the theological disputes between Job and his friends, this is never an option. Commentators avoid addressing this problematic image of God. Instead, they emphasise God's trust in Job: "God accepts the challenge; he has no doubts about his servant Job" (Van Selms 1985:25).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Both texts depict the trial of a pious man planned by God and are presented by an omniscient narrator who provides additional information to the implicit reader (God tested Abraham, a wager between God and Satan). At the same time, the narrative is told by an external reader who describes the event as experienced by the protagonists without this background information.

Both Abraham and Job remain faithful to God, regardless of their circumstances. "While God addresses Abraham directly, He does not do so with Job." In addition, Abraham's faithfulness to God is affirmed after his test, whereas Job's is affirmed prior to his test. Job's faithfulness is tested to prove God's righteousness or, from Job's perspective, to

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26 An anonymous author, whom some have identified as Søren Kierkegaard. See Berg (2011:88).



remain faithful to God. Unlike Abraham, Job's faith in God is called into question. Rabbinic sources have modelled the test of Abraham after the Job prologue. However, in Genesis 22, the test was not to kill his son, but rather to refrain from doing so. The voice of God is never questioned. The call to sacrifice Isaac and the subsequent divine intervention depict a changing image of God, while God is portrayed as unchanging and static in the Book of Job.

The book of Job does not simply deal with God who allows Job's misfortunes as a wager, but problematises multiple approaches. The critical reflection upon God's test is an integral part of the redaction history of the Book of Job.

The Book of Job's poetic section provides a critical response to Job's unwavering faith in the frame narrative. This critical approach is absent in Genesis 22 and is only to be found in the history of its reception. Doubts about whether Abraham heard the voice of God only arise through a critical, rational reading and ethical thinking from the time of the Enlightenment onwards, with a few exceptions in Rabbinic exegesis.

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