

REDEMPTION AND GENESIS XXII

THE BINDING OF ISAAC AND THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS

The story of the Binding of Isaac played a prominent part in the doctrinal development of Judaism. By consenting to offer to God his only son, Abraham proved his perfect love, and his example became the corner stone of the whole Jewish theology of the love of God. As Professor VAJDA remarks, "Le thème du service d'amour d'Abraham n'a pas manqué d'être médité par le Talmud et le Midrash, le plus souvent en connexion, précisément, avec le sacrifice d'Isaac".<sup>1</sup>

In the biblical drama, the principal actors on Mount Moriah are Abraham and God. Isaac is the victim of a mysterious divine command and of his father's unswerving trust in the Lord. The same picture appears in the mediaeval representation of the sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

The older sources, however, somewhat surprisingly shift the emphasis and focus their interest on the person of Isaac.<sup>3</sup> For them, Genesis xxii, as well as serving to illustrate an ideal religious behaviour of love and obedience, is the key to the doctrine of Atonement or Redemption.

It is the purpose of this enquiry to examine this exegetical change, to analyse the theological development resulting from it, and to outline the salient points of its impact on the Christian doctrine of Redemption.

*Genesis xxii in the Palestinian Targums.*

The biblical account of Abraham's ordeal may be summarized as follows:

1. Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering on a mountain in the land of Moriah (vv. 1-2).
2. He departed the next morning accompanied by Isaac and two servants. On the third day of his journey he saw the mountain and leaving his servants behind, went on with his son. Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice (vv. 3-6).

<sup>1</sup> G. VAJDA, *L'amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du Moyen Age*. Paris, 1957, pp. 41-2.

<sup>2</sup> S. SPIEGEL, העקדה מאגדות in ספר הזיכרון לכבוד אלכסנדר מארכס (Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume), Hebrew Section, New York, 1950, p. 519.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. MARMORSTEIN, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinical Literature*. London 1920, p. 149.

3. To Isaac's question concerning the victim, the Patriarch answered evasively: God will see for Himself a lamb (vv. 7-8).

4. Abraham built an altar, bound Isaac and made ready to kill him, but an angel prevented him from doing so (vv. 9-12).

5. He discovered a ram and offered it in the place of Isaac and called the place *יהוה יראה* (vv. 13-14).

6. As a reward for Abraham's obedience God renewed His promises to him (vv. 15-18).

7. Abraham returned to his servants and they travelled on together to Beer-Sheba (v. 19).

When the targumic sources, which usually contain the simplest form of exegetical tradition, are examined, they reveal two different types of exegesis. The primitive kernel is represented by the Fragmentary Targum and Neofiti, but Ps.-JONATHAN and a Tosefta fragment of Targum Yerushalmi give a secondary version of the original interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

The following is a translation of the Fragmentary Targum. The variant readings of Neofiti affecting the meaning of the account are given in the foot-notes.

xxii. 8. And Abraham said: The Word of the Lord shall prepare a lamb for Himself.<sup>2</sup> If not, my son, you shall be the burnt offering.<sup>3</sup> And they went together with a quiet heart.<sup>4</sup>

xxii. 10. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill Isaac his son. Isaac answered and said to Abraham his father: Bind my hands properly that I may not struggle in the time of my pain and disturb you and render your offering unfit<sup>5</sup> and be cast into the pit of destruction in the world to come. The eyes of Abraham were turned to the eyes of Isaac, but the eyes of Isaac were turned to the angels of heaven. Isaac saw them<sup>6</sup> but Abraham did not see them. In that hour the angels of heaven<sup>7</sup> went out and said to each other: Let us go and see the only two just men in the world.<sup>8</sup> The one slays, and the other is

<sup>1</sup> Ms. T-S, B 8/9, published by P. GRELOT, *Une Tosefta targumique sur Genèse xxii dans un manuscrit liturgique de la Geniza du Caire*, in *REJ.*, xvi (cxvi), 1957, pp. 5-26.

<sup>2</sup> *Neof.*: "A lamb for the burnt offering shall be prepared from before the Lord". The *2TJ* reading is given in the margin of *Neof.*

<sup>3</sup> *Neof.*: "You are the lamb of the burnt offering".

<sup>4</sup> *Neof.*: "With a perfect heart". The *2TJ* version is inscribed in the margin.

<sup>5</sup> *Neof.*: "Bind me properly that I may not kick (resist) you and your offering be made unfit".

<sup>6</sup> *Neof.*: omitted.

<sup>7</sup> *Neof.*: "A heavenly voice".

<sup>8</sup> *Neof.*: "The only two in my world (?)".

being slain. The slayer does not hesitate, and the one being slain stretches out his neck.

xxii. 14. Abraham worshipped and prayed the Name of the Word of the Lord, and said: <sup>1</sup>O Lord, You are He that sees and is unseen!<sup>1</sup> I pray: all is revealed before You. It is known before You that there was no division in my heart at the time<sup>2</sup> when You told me to offer Isaac my son, and to make him dust and ashes before You. But I departed immediately in the morning and did Your word with joy and fulfilled it.<sup>3</sup> Now <sup>4</sup>I pray for mercy before You, O Lord God that<sup>4</sup> when the children of Isaac come to a time of distress, You may remember on their behalf the binding of Isaac their father, and <sup>5</sup>loose and forgive them their<sup>5</sup> sins and deliver them from all distress, so that the generations which follow him may say: In the mountain of the Temple of the Lord, Abraham offered Isaac his son, and in this mountain – of the Temple – the glory of the Shekhinah of the Lord was revealed to him.

The distinctive features of this oldest targumic narrative are:

1. Abraham told Isaac that he was to be the sacrificial victim.
2. Isaac gave his consent.
3. He asked to be bound so that the sacrifice might be perfect.
4. He was favoured with a heavenly vision.<sup>6</sup>
5. Abraham prayed that his own obedience, and Isaac's willingness, might be remembered by God on behalf of Isaac's children.
6. His prayer was answered. Although God's reply is missing here, it was obviously inferred from Genesis xxii. 17-18, as an old liturgical formula, quoted in the Mishnah, shows:

May He who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, answer you, and may He listen to the voice of your cry this day!<sup>7</sup>

In short, instead of reducing his role to that of a passive victim, as the Bible does, the Targum ascribes to Isaac an active and prominent part in the story of the Akedah. This was rightly observed by G.F. MOORE when he wrote:

<sup>1</sup> *Neof*: omitted.

<sup>2</sup> *Neof*: "The first time".

<sup>3</sup> *Neof*: "Your decree".

<sup>4</sup> *Neof*: omitted.

<sup>5</sup> *Neof*: "Listen to the voice of their prayer and answer them".

<sup>6</sup> Whereas according to the Targum on xxii. 10 Isaac saw the angels of heaven, the Targum on verse 14 states that the Shekhinah of the Lord was revealed to him. The latter vision appears to express the real meaning of the legend and is supported by midrashic comments. "When his father bound him and took the knife to slay him, the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself above the angels and opened the heavens. Isaac lifted up his eyes... and saw the Holy One... and the angels." *Tanh. B.*, ii. 141. *Gen. R.*, lxv. 10 attributes the weakness of Isaac's eyes to this revelation. Cf. also *2TJ* on *Ex.* xii. 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ta'an.*, ii. 4.

In Genesis it is Abraham's faith and his obedience to God's will even to the offering of his only son, the child of promise, that constitutes the whole significance of the story; Isaac is a purely passive figure. In the rabbinical literature, however, the voluntariness of the sacrifice on Isaac's part is strongly emphasized.<sup>1</sup>

A disconcerting detail appearing in the Cambridge fragment of the Tosefta of the Palestinian Targum may be discarded as foreign to the most ancient version of the narrative. According to this, Abraham left his home not knowing which son God required of him – Eliezer his adopted son, Ishmael, or Isaac. When they approached Moriah, Isaac and Abraham saw God in the form of a column of cloud above the mountain, but the others saw nothing. Abraham therefore concluded that Isaac was the divinely chosen victim.

And Abraham said to his servants: Do you see anything at all? They answered: We see nothing. He answered and said to Isaac his son: Do you see anything? He replied: Behold, I see a column of cloud from the heavens to the earth. Then the father knew that Isaac was chosen for the burnt offering.<sup>2</sup>

Ps.-JONATHAN and Genesis Rabbah include a similar passage, but insert it much more relevantly into the general framework of the narrative to explain two problems of minor importance, viz., how the Patriarch knew where God wished him to sacrifice his son since the divine command mentioned only one of the mountains in the land of Moriah, and why the two servants were left behind on the third day. Ps.-JONATHAN on xxii. 4 answers the first question thus:

On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the cloud of Glory rising like smoke above the mountain, and he recognized it from a distance.

The same vision is mentioned in Genesis Rabbah but with reference to the second problem:

He said to Isaac: My son, do you see what I see? He answered: Yes. Then he asked his two servants: Do you see what I see? They answered: No. – Since the ass does not see it and neither do you, Stay here with the ass.<sup>3</sup>

Tosefta borrows, in this case, from the Ps.-JONATHAN-Genesis Rabbah tradition, but reshapes it, apparently with the aid of xxii. 8,

<sup>1</sup> G. F. MOORE, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. I. Cambridge, Mass., 1932, p. 539.

<sup>2</sup> T-S, B. 9, col. B 1, lines 1-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Gen. R.*, lvi. 1-2.

אלהים יראה לו השם בני. By reading *יִרְאֶה לוֹ*, the text is understood to mean: God is revealed to him; the lamb is my son. Hence the interpretation: Then Abraham knew that Isaac was chosen for the burnt offering. For the rest, Tosefta – as far as it is extant – follows the main tradition recorded in the Fragmentary Targum with its emphasis on Isaac's *self*-offering.

Rabbinic exegesis develops this aspect of the story further still. Whereas in the oldest sources God tried Abraham's love and faithfulness in order to put Satan to shame,<sup>1</sup> or to silence the jealous angels,<sup>2</sup> Ps.-JONATHAN presents the whole episode as a test of Isaac's fidelity as well. When Isaac and Ishmael argue which of them is worthier to be Abraham's heir, Ishmael remarks that while he acquired merit by voluntarily submitting himself to circumcision at the age of thirteen, the eight-day old Isaac underwent the painful rite without either his knowledge or consent. Isaac replies:

Behold, I am now thirty-seven years old, but were the Holy One, blessed be He, to ask for all my members, I would not deny them to Him. These words were immediately heard before the Lord of the world. Immediately also, the Word of the Lord tried Abraham.<sup>3</sup>

The most pregnant illustration of Isaac's role in the sacrifice comes from R. Meir, who cites R. Akiba's interpretation of the commandment of the love of God in Deuteronomy vi. 5 ("You shall love the Lord your God... with all your soul")

like Isaac, who *bound himself* upon the altar.<sup>4</sup>

Does this mean that the targumic tradition derives from Akiba's interpretation, and that it consequently originated in the second century AD?

The answer is simple. This tradition is implicit in the Akedah interpretations of three works dating from the previous century; namely, the Jewish Antiquities of JOSEPHUS, IV Maccabees, and Ps.-PHILO's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*.

In his long and strongly moralising account (JA, I, xiii. 1-4, §§ 222-236), JOSEPHUS writes a rather sentimental description of Abraham's fatherly love and of his reflections on the divine command which he had received. According to him, the Patriarch concealed his plan from

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Jub.*, xvii. 15 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *LAB*, xxxii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *ITJ* on *Gen.* xxii. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Sifre-Deut.*, § 32.

Sarah.<sup>1</sup> Isaac was adult, as in Rabbinic chronology, but his age is given as twenty-five;<sup>2</sup> and the mountain of the sacrifice was that "upon which King David would later build the Sanctuary".<sup>3</sup> JOSEPHUS tells how Abraham built the altar, and then, exhorting him to be courageous, informed his son that he was to be the victim.<sup>4</sup> Isaac heard his father's words with joy and ran to the altar;<sup>5</sup> but God prevented the execution of the deed and promised His never-failing protection to both Abraham and his descendants.<sup>6</sup> Then he revealed to them the ram for the sacrifice.<sup>7</sup>

All the features of the targumic tradition appear in Jewish Antiquities, and the insistence on Isaac's merit and on his voluntary self-surrender, could not be more stressed. But, as in Genesis, Abraham's ordeal takes pride of place.

In IV Maccabees, Isaac is the proto-martyr.

Isaac offered himself to be a sacrifice for the sake of righteousness.<sup>8</sup>

Isaac did not shrink when he saw the knife lifted against him by his father's hand.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, in several other passages there is clear allusion to the virtue of the blood of martyrs, albeit without explicit reference to Isaac.

Cause our chastisement to be an expiation for them. Make my blood their purification and take my soul as a ransom for their souls.<sup>10</sup>

They have become as a ransom for the sin of our nation, and by the blood of these righteous men and the propitiation of their death, Divine Providence delivered Israel.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, § 225. Cf. *Tanh. Vayyera*, § 22; *Midr. ha-Gadol* on *Gen.* xxii. 3, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, § 227. According to the Rabbis, Isaac was thirty-seven years old. They reached this conclusion from the haggadah recording the birth of Isaac to Sarah at the age of ninety, and her death – caused by the false news of his having been killed – at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven. Cf. *Gen. R.*, lviii. 5. See also H. FREEDMAN's note in his translation of *Gen. R.*, in *Midrash Rabbah, Genesis*, vol. I, London, 1951, p. 497, n. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, § 226.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, §§ 228–9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, § 232.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, §§ 233–4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, § 236.

<sup>8</sup> *IV Macc.* xiii. 12. Cf. also *Gen. R.*, lvi. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi. 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, vi. 28–9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii. 22. For the theology of martyrdom in *IV Macc.*, see R. B. TOWNSEND's introduction to this book in R. H. CHARLES, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. II, Oxford, 1913, pp. 663–4. Cf. also A. DUPONT-SOMMER, *Le Quatrième livre des Machabées*, Paris, 1939, pp. 41–3; R. H. PFEIFFER, *History of New Testament Times*, New York, 1949, pp. 220 f.

Ps.-PHILO's testimony is even more important. Strangely enough, this writer omits the story of the sacrifice of Isaac when relating the life of Abraham, but he mentions it elsewhere on three separate occasions: in his account of a divine revelation to Balaam (xviii. 5), of the Song of Deborah and Barak (xxxii. 2-4), and of the answer of Seila to her father Jephthah (xl. 2).

This last text may be dealt with very summarily. Jephthah made a thoughtless vow to God that if he defeated the Ammonites he would sacrifice the first living being he met on his return (xxxix. 10). God was angry and decided to punish him. "If a dog is the first to meet Jephthah, shall it be offered to Me? Now let the prayer of Jephthah be on the first-fruit of his body, and his vow be on his only daughter" (xxxix. 11). On his return from victory, the divine order was fulfilled, and although his triumph filled him with joy, his vow made Jephthah sad. But his daughter answered bravely:

*Et quis est qui contristetur moriens, videns populum liberatum? Aut inmemor es que facta sunt in diebus patrum nostrorum, quando pater filium imponebat in holocaustum, et non contradixit ei, sed epulans consensit illi, et erat qui offerebatur paratus et qui offerebat gaudens (xl. 2).*

Isaac did not contradict his father, but gladly agreed to be his victim. Ps.-PHILO intended to underline the contrast between Abraham's sacrifice and Jephthah's, and doing this he presents the former according to the targumic tradition.

Incidentally, Jephthah's offering was valueless. Ammon was destroyed, not because of Jephthah's vow, but because of the prayers of Israel (xxxix. 11).

It is in the Song of Deborah that the principal source of Ps.-PHILO's interpretation of the Akedah is to be found. Despite difficulties which are probably due, for a large part, to the poor quality of the Latin translation, this account shows not only the antiquity of the targumic version, but also the frank realization of its doctrinal impact, namely, that the binding of Isaac was intended to be more than just a test of Abraham's obedience.

*Et dedit ei filium in novissimo senectutis eius, et eiecit eum de metra sterili. Et zelati sunt eum omnes angeli, et invisi sunt ei cultores miliciarum. Et factum est cum zelarent eum, dixit ad eum Deus: Occide fructum ventris tui pro me, et offer mihi in sacrificium quod donatum est tibi a me. Et Abraham non contradixit, sed profectus est statim. Et cum proficis cretur, dixit ad filium suum: Ecce nunc offero te holocaustum Deo, in manus te trado ei qui donavit te mihi. Filius*

autem dixit ad patrem: Audi me pater. Si agnus ex pecoribus acceptatur in oblatione Domini in odorem suavitatis, et pro iniquitatibus hominum pecora constituta sunt in occisionem, homo autem positus est ad inhereditandum seculum, et quomodo nunc dicis mihi. Veni hereditare securam vitam, et inmensurabile tempus? Quid si non essem natus in seculo, ut offerer sacrificium ei qui me fecit. Erit autem mea beatitudo super omnes homines quia non erit aliud, et in me annuntiabunt generationes et per me intelligent populi quoniam dignificavit Dominus animam hominis in sacrificium. Et cum obtulisset pater filium in ara, et ligasset ei pedes ut eum occideret, festinavit Fortissimus et misit vocem suam de alto dicens: Non interficias filium tuum, neque disperdas fructum ventris tuum. Nunc enim manifestavi ut apparerem ignorantibus me, et clausi ora maledicentium semper adversum te. Erit autem memoria tua in conspectu meo in sempiternum, et erit nomen tuum et huius in generationem generationum (xxxii. 2-4).

Although this text is patently neither clear nor easy, three important points emerge. First, Isaac offered his life freely and willingly. Second, his sacrifice is related to other sacrifices offered to God and accepted by Him for the sins of men. Third, Isaac was aware of the beneficent effect of his self-offering upon future generations.

However, the passage is too important to be dealt with thus briefly and demands further study.

According to Ps.-PHILO, Isaac's sacrifice was provoked by the jealousy and dissatisfaction of the angels, who appear to have criticized God's favours towards Abraham. The offering justified God by proving that Abraham was worthy of them:

Now I have revealed Myself so that I may appear to them who know me not, and shut the mouth of them that ever spoke evil against you.

For Abraham, the divine command was an order to return to God the gift which he had received from Him, ritually sanctified:

Slay the fruit of your body and offer to Me in sacrifice that which was given to you by Me.

This command is repeated by the Patriarch, almost word for word, when he tells Isaac that he is to be the victim:

Now I offer you as a burnt offering to God and surrender you into the hands of Him who gave you to me.

For Isaac, his father's words appeared to contradict the common belief that God created man to inherit this world and appointed lambs for sacrifice; but Abraham invited him to

Come and inherit sure life and measureless time (i.e. eternity).



The command which his father had received from God proved that the purpose of his own miraculous birth was the sanctification of his life by means of a sacrificial death:

As though I had not been born into this world to be offered in sacrifice to Him who made me.

PS.-PHILO believed that by Isaac's unique example God conferred upon human nature its true dignity, the dignity of a divinely required and freely offered self-sacrifice. The blessing resulting from it would extend to all men for ever, and they would understand that they possess the same humanity which was made holy by Isaac's sacrifice.

Thus, the Akedah, in PS.-PHILO's mind, is to be judged on two levels. Abraham's obedience justified his divine election; and Isaac's self-offering justified God in His choice of mankind as heir to the created world.

This interpretation of the Akedah becomes clearer when it is compared with the haggadah of the angels' criticism of the creation of man. When God said, "Let us make man", etc., (Gen. i. 26), they are supposed to have replied in the words of the Psalm: "What is man that You should remember him, and the son of man that You should visit him? Yet You have made him little less than God... You have made him to rule over all the works of Your hand, and You have put all things beneath his feet, all sheep and oxen... (Ps. viii. 5-8).

Now, one of the explanations is that "man" and "son of man" refer to Abraham and Isaac. Through the merits of the Akedah, they vindicated man's peculiar dignity among creatures, a dignity envied even by the angels.

When the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to create the world, the ministering angels said to Him: What is man that You should remember him? He replied: You shall see a father slay his son, and the son consenting to be slain, to sanctify My Name.<sup>1</sup>

This scriptural passage (i.e. Ps. viii) speaks of Isaac son of Abraham.<sup>2</sup>

When, at the end of PS.-PHILO's account, God declares that He will remember for ever the names of Abraham and Isaac, it is implicitly understood that He thereby confirmed Isaac's hope concerning the efficacy of the Akedah. This is more clearly stated in the third text from *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* relating to Isaac's sacrifice:

Et filium eius petii in holocaustum et adduxit eum ut poneretur in

<sup>1</sup> *Tanh. Vayyera*, § 18.

<sup>2</sup> *T. Sofah*, vi. 5. For further references, see S. SPIEGEL, *art. cit.*, p. 526, n. 138.

sacrario, ego autem reddidi eum patri suo, et quia non contradixit, facta est oblatio in conspectu meo acceptabilis, et pro sanguine eius elegi istos (xviii. 5).

These texts from JOSEPHUS, IV Maccabees, and Ps.-PHILO, not only show that the essence of the targumic exegesis of Genesis xxii was already traditional in the first century AD, but that two of them at least – IV Maccabees and Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum – may lead to the discovery of the origin of this haggadah.

Short of an entirely gratuitous supposition that an historical tradition, unrecorded in the Bible, is latent in the targumic story, the most obvious explanation is to be sought in the usual midrashic process, namely, in the interpretation of one scriptural passage by the light of another. So far as I am aware, there is no definite mention in midrashic sources of any association of this kind between Genesis xxii and some prophetic text. But is it nevertheless possible to identify one?

In the passages quoted from IV Maccabees, the self-offering of the martyrs is considered as an atonement for the sins of Israel, and the life of the just is offered as a ransom for sinners. By offering his life in expiation, the martyr imitates Isaac. To this, Ps.-PHILO contributes the belief that Isaac's unique sacrifice is infinitely worthier than the offering of a lamb for the sins of men, and that the merits of his deed will be known to all the peoples for ever.

At this point, it is impossible not to recall the figure of the Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah. Clearly, the whole of the fourth Song cannot be applied to Isaac, but the leading idea of Isaiah liii is parallel in *leitmotiv* to the targumic tradition on Genesis xxii. Isaac freely offered his life and it was accepted by God in favour of his descendants, and even of the Nations, according to Ps.-PHILO. The Servant is compared to a lamb brought to the slaughter (liii. 7); Isaac was also a holocaustal lamb. Isaac's sacrifice was ordained by God; so also was the Servant's (liii. 10). These common features of the two stories are on the scriptural level. On the targumic level, the resemblances are plainly realized and the nature and effect of the Servant's passion are applied to the sacrifice of Isaac so that Genesis xxii becomes the story of a just man who offered himself for the sake of sinners.<sup>1</sup>

This reconstruction is not based on purely hypothetical grounds.

<sup>1</sup> The targumic belief that at the moment of sacrifice Isaac saw a divine vision, may have originated from an interpretation of יהוה יראה, "The Lord shall be seen", in conjunction with Is. liii. 11, מעמל נפשו יראה, "because of the travail of his soul he shall see".

There exist at least two midrashic passages in which the self-offering of a just man mentioned in the Torah is interpreted by quoting Isaiah liii. The first relates to Moses' intercession for Israel after the worship of the golden calf. He implores God either to pardon his people, or else to blot his own name from the Book of Life (cf. Ex. xxxii. 32). According to Sotah 14a, Isaiah liii. 12 refers to this event:

He delivered his soul to death... and he took away the sins of many.

The second text, Sifre on Numbers xxv. 13, § 131, applies the same verse of Isaiah to Phinehas, who was considered to have endangered his life by his zeal for God. His self-sacrifice and atonement are given a permanent value, and will continue to expiate Israel's sins until the time of the Resurrection.

To these must be added a third text referring directly to Isaac, namely, *Targum of Job*, iii, 18. In the biblical poem in chapter iii, Job curses the day he was born and wishes that he had passed straight to Sheol from the maternal womb. The corresponding targumic section, whose language testifies clearly to its Palestinian origin, replaces Sheol, the common abode of both the just and the wicked, by the dwelling-place of the blessed of God. Following up this basic transformation, the Targumist, interpreting verse 18 – "The little one is there and the great one, and the servant freed from his master" – identifies the three characters as the Patriarchs, "the little one" being Jacob, "the great one" Abraham, and the freed "servant", Isaac.

Jacob, called the young one, and Abraham, called the old one, are there, and Isaac, the Servant of the Lord ('abda d' YHWH) who was delivered from bonds by his Master.

It is precisely on account of his having been bound, i.e. because of his self-sacrifice, that Isaac appears to have been given the title, "Servant of the Lord".

It would seem, therefore, safe to assume that the targumic haggadah on the Akedah resulted from the association of Genesis xxii and Isaiah liii. In addition, it is almost certain that this association was due to reflections on the significance of martyrdom. If the blood of martyrs is viewed by God as an expiatory sacrifice, *a fortiori*, the self-offering of Isaac atoned for the sins of his descendants.

If this theory is correct, the *terminus post quem* of the creation of the haggadah is the beginning of the religious persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC; the martyrdom of the seven sons of a pious

woman, recorded in II Maccabees vii, may have been the precise occasion. S. SPIEGEL remarks, in his excellent study, that a certain parallelism between Abraham's sacrifice and that of the Maccabean woman is strongly emphasized in midrashic writings.<sup>1</sup>

At its present stage, therefore, this investigation yields the following results of importance.

1. The two main targumic themes of the Akedah story, namely, Isaac's willingness to be offered in sacrifice and the atoning virtue of his action, were already traditional in the first century AD.

2. Genesis xxii was interpreted in association with Isaiah liii. That is to say, the link between these two texts was established by Jews independently from, and almost certainly prior to, the New Testament.

3. The theological problem which apparently led to the creation of this exegetical tradition was that of martyrdom.

4. The tradition must consequently have established itself some time between the middle of the second century BC and the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>2</sup>

It now remains to enquire into the further development of the doctrinal exegesis of Isaac's sacrifice, and its impact upon the understanding of the sacrifice of Christ by Judeo-Christians in the apostolic age.

*Theological reflections on the targumic story in midrashic literature.*

Because of its highly important contribution to the doctrine of Atonement in ancient Judaism, the targumic account of the Binding of Isaac was the object of much reflection and discussion among the Rabbis. Relevant midrashic texts are examined in this section with the following questions in mind;

1. Was the Akedah a true sacrifice?
2. What are its fruits for posterity?
3. What was the relation between Isaac's sacrifice and sacrifices offered in the Temple of Jerusalem?
4. Is the memorial of the Akedah attached to any of the principal festivals in the Jewish liturgy?

*The sacrificial character of the Akedah*

As already noted, to the biblical account of Abraham's ordeal the Targum adds the story of Isaac's self-oblation. From an early date,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *art. cit.*, pp. 476-7.

<sup>2</sup> M. BLACK's suggestion that the Akedah tradition inspired the author of the *Test. of Levi* would point to a relatively early date. cf. *The Messiah in the Testament of Levi xviii*, in *The Expository Times*, 61, 1949-50, p. 158.

and despite serious difficulties, this self-oblation came to be regarded as a true sacrifice in its own right.

The main problem was, of course, the obvious fact that Isaac did not actually die on the altar. But the Rabbis argue that even if God had not provided a ram to be offered in his place, Isaac would gladly have given his life, so the value and the merit truly belong to him.

Though he did not die, Scripture credits Isaac with having died and his ashes having lain upon the altar.<sup>1</sup>

The expression, "the ashes of Isaac", is often used in midrashic and talmudic writings:

God regards the ashes of Isaac as though they were piled upon the altar.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of Isaac as a victim possessing all the qualities necessary for a burnt offering is another manifestation of the same doctrinal preoccupation. While building the altar, Abraham hid his son in case he should be maimed by Satan and be disqualified as a sacrificial victim.<sup>3</sup>

These arguments were, however, bound to have appeared unsatisfactory for the important reason that, according to Jewish theology, there can be no expiation without the shedding of blood: **אין כפרה אלא בדם**.<sup>4</sup> No virtue of atonement could convincingly be imputed to Isaac unless this condition were fulfilled. There is, of course, no scriptural foundation whatever for the belief that Isaac shed his blood, but, as has been shown more than once, theological theses had to be maintained even at the price of disregarding the Bible, and the new doctrine took root that atonement for the sins of Israel resulted both from Isaac's self-offering and from the spilling of his blood. It appears already in *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*:

Quia non contradixit, facta est oblatio in conspectu meo acceptabilis, et *pro sanguine eius* elegi istos (xviii. 5).

The "blood of the Binding of Isaac" is mentioned four times in the Mekhilta of R. Ishmael in passages to be examined later.<sup>5</sup> In addition,

<sup>1</sup> *Midr. ha-Gadol* on *Gen.* xxii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Sifra*, ed. Weiss, p. 102c; *J. Taan.*, 65a; *Ta'an.*, 16a; *Gen. R.*, xlix. 11; xciv. 5; *Lev. R.*, xxxvi. 5; *Tanh. Vayyera* § 23, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Gen. R.*, lvi. 5; *Tanh. Vayyera*, § 23; *Lev. R.*, xx. 2, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Yoma* 5a. The antiquity of this talmudic rule is attested by the Epistle to the Hebrews ix. 22: *χωρὶς αἱματεγχυσίας οὐ γίνεται ἄφεσις* "without the shedding of blood there is no remission".

<sup>5</sup> *Mekh.*, I, pp. 57, 87-8.

S. SPIEGEL draws attention to the haggadah recording that Isaac shed one quarter of his blood on Mount Moriah.<sup>1</sup> In the Mekhilta of R. Simeon ben Yohai, the following words are quoted in the name of R. Joshua (before 130 AD):

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: I keep faith to pay the reward of Isaac son of Abraham, who gave one fourth of his blood on the altar.<sup>2</sup>

All these statements referring to Isaac's fitness as a sacrificial victim, and to his blood and ashes, leave no room for doubt that the Akedah was indeed considered a true and genuine sacrifice. But the unique feature, distinguishing it from, and raising it above, all other sacrifices is – as Ps.-PHILO emphasizes – the free consent of the victim. That this victim was the righteous ancestor of the Chosen People made it all the more inevitable that Palestinian Jews considered Isaac's sacrifice as the sacrifice *par excellence*, whose lasting benefits would be felt for all time.

### *The effects of the Binding of Isaac*

Now I pray for mercy before You, O Lord God, that when the children of Isaac come to a time of distress You may remember on their behalf the Binding of Isaac their father, and loose and forgive them their sins and deliver them from all distress.

In his prayer after the Akedah, as given in the Fragmentary Targum, Abraham asks God to remember Isaac's merit. He beseeches Him to deliver the descendants of his son from trouble and to pardon their transgressions for Isaac's sake.<sup>3</sup> Neofiti, Ps.-JONATHAN, and other midrashim,<sup>4</sup> mention only deliverance; but since distress and trouble were believed to be the consequence of sin, deliverance from them necessarily implied forgiveness also.

As midrashic literature shows, this redemptive virtue of the Binding of Isaac was recalled in the context of the most important events of Jewish history. Through his merits,

a) the firstborn sons of Israel were saved at the time of the first Passover:

And when I see the blood, I will pass over you (Ex. xii. 13). – I see the blood of the Binding of Isaac.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Art. cit.*, pp. 491-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. HOFFMANN, p. 4. Cf. also *Tanh. Vayyera*, § 23.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also *Lev. R.*, xxix. 9; *Tanh. Vayyera*, § 23, etc..

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Gen. R.*, lvi. 10; *J. Ta'an.*, 65d, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *Mekh.*, I, p. 57. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 88.

b) the Israelites were saved when they entered the Red Sea:

R. Jose the Galilean says: When Israel entered the sea, Mount Moriah was moved from its place, with the altar of Isaac built upon it, the pile of wood placed upon it, and Isaac as it were bound and put upon the altar, and Abraham as it were stretching out his hand and holding the knife to slay his son.<sup>1</sup>

c) Jerusalem was saved from the Destroying Angel after the sinful census of David:

God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. While he was destroying, the Lord saw and repented of the evil (1 Chron. xxi. 15). What did He see? He saw the blood of the Binding of Isaac.<sup>2</sup>

d) forgiveness was obtained for Israel after the sin of the golden calf and deliverance from the massacre planned by Haman:

Remember, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Ex. xxxii. 13). Why are the three Patriarchs mentioned here? Our Rabbis say: Moses said, If they are guilty to be burnt, remember Abraham who gave himself to be burnt in the fiery furnace... If they are guilty to be slain, remember Isaac their father who stretched out his neck on the altar to be slain for Your Name's sake. May his immolation take the place of the immolation of his children.<sup>3</sup>

May the merit of Abraham precede me! May the Binding of Isaac keep me upright! May the grace of Jacob be given to my mouth!<sup>4</sup>

Thus, to Isaac's merit was due Israel's salvation and the preservation of his descendants from death and divine disfavour. Furthermore, the virtue of his offering was believed to extend even beyond the barriers of history, as is shown in certain texts establishing a bond between the Akedah and the resurrection of the dead.<sup>5</sup>

Through the merits of Isaac, who offered himself upon the altar, the Holy One, blessed be He, shall raise the dead. For it is written (Ps. cii. 21): (From heaven the Lord looked upon the earth) to hear the groaning of the captive, to deliver the children of death.<sup>6</sup>

Isaac was granted a new life by God. For the midrashists, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> *Mekb.*, I, pp. 222-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Mekb.*, I pp. 57, 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Ex. R.*, xlv. 5

<sup>4</sup> Prayer of Esther in 2 *Tg Esther*, v.1.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. SPIEGEL, *art. cit.*, pp. 522-3.

<sup>6</sup> This text is quoted as *PRK*, Piska 32, f. 200b by I. LÉVI in *Le sacrifice d'Isaac et la mort de Jésus*, *REJ*, 64, 1912, p. 170, and the same reference is repeated in H. J. SCHOEPS, *The Sacrifice of Isaac in Paul's Theology*, in *JBL*, 65, 1946, p. 390, and in S. SPIEGEL, *art. cit.*, pp. 492, n. 8, and p. 523, n. 120. However, in S. BUBER's edition of this midrash the quotation is to be found in the last Piska (31), f. 180a = p. 359.

he was the prototype of risen man, and his sacrifice followed by resurrection was, in some way, the cause of the final Resurrection of mankind.

In short, the Binding of Isaac was thought to have played a unique rôle in the whole economy of the salvation of Israel, and to have a permanent redemptive effect on behalf of its people. The merits of his sacrifice were experienced by the Chosen People in the past, invoked in the present, and hoped for at the end of time.

### *The Akedah and the sacrifices in the Temple*

Since the Binding of Isaac was represented as a true, and in a sense unique sacrifice, with an everlasting effect, its relation to the sacrificial services of the Temple must have been the object of much speculation. If Isaac's self-offering on Mount Moriah atoned for the sins of Israel, why should animal victims be offered daily for the same purpose in the Sanctuary on Mount Zion?

Two different aspects of Jewish sacrificial laws must be considered here: Israel's substitution of animal victims for human sacrifice and the Law of the Sanctuary.

Against the Canaanite custom of child-sacrifice the Bible proclaims that God does not desire the offering of human life. The Genesis story of Isaac's life having been spared and a ram offered in his place was probably intended to illustrate this. Among the interpreters, JOSEPHUS, addressing Gentile readers, insists on God's hatred of human blood, and he makes a point of emphasizing that the whole episode was essentially a test of Abraham's obedience.

God said that it was not because of desire for human blood that He had commanded him to slay his son... but He wished to try his soul, whether he would obey even such commands.<sup>1</sup>

Jews living in the post-exilic era needed no such explanations.<sup>2</sup> Though all firstborn males belonged to God,<sup>3</sup> they had subsequently to be redeemed<sup>4</sup> and Rabbinic exegesis holds that this religious rite was founded on the vicarious offering of Isaac's ram,<sup>5</sup> an example repeated at the Passover in Egypt, when lambs were killed in place of the firstborn of Israel.

<sup>1</sup> *JA*, I, xlii. 4, § 233.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Lev.* xviii. 21; xx. 2-5, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ex.* xiii. 1, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, xiii. 11-16, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Gen. R.*, lvi. 9, etc.



Another fundamental teaching of Judaism is illustrated in the traditional interpretation of Genesis xxii, i.e. that Jerusalem was destined to be the one place where Jews might offer sacrifices agreeable to God. For this reason, targumic tradition from at least the time of the first century (JOSEPHUS), but probably from a much earlier date,<sup>1</sup> identifies Mount Moriah with the mountain of the Temple. Sacrificial victims were slain in the Sanctuary where, long ago, Abraham had erected his altar. According to Jewish theology, Mount Zion is the cosmic rock uniting heaven and earth,<sup>2</sup> and all the great sacrifices of the past were offered there.

And Abraham built here the altar which Adam had built, and which was demolished by the waters of the Flood; which Noah rebuilt, and which was demolished by the generation of the Division. He placed upon it the wood, bound Isaac his son, and laid him upon the altar on the wood.<sup>3</sup>

Genesis xxii counted, therefore, as biblical proof of the rejection of human sacrifice and of the eternal choice of Jerusalem, although at the time when the targumic tradition of the Akedah was formed, neither of these arguments needed any demonstration.

However, the crucial theological problem directly relating to the haggadah of Isaac's sacrifice is its connection with the sacrifices of the Temple.

Rabbinic writings show clearly that sacrifices, and perhaps the offering of all sacrifice, were intended as a memorial of Isaac's self-oblation. Their only purpose was to remind God of the merit of him who bound himself upon the altar. Leviticus Rabbah ii. 11 on Leviticus i. 5 and 11, provides one of the key-texts:

Concerning the ram, it is said: And he shall slaughter it on the side of the altar northward (צפונה) before the Lord. It is taught: When Abraham our father bound Isaac his son, the Holy One, blessed be He, instituted (the sacrifice of) two lambs, one in the morning, and the other in the evening. What is the purpose of this? It is in order that when Israel offers the perpetual sacrifice upon the altar, and reads this scriptural text, Northward (צפונה) before the Lord, the Holy One, blessed be He, may remember the Binding of Isaac.

The institution of a perpetual sacrifice burning day and night upon the altar was intended to remind God of the event it symbolized, the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 2 Chron. iii. 1; *Jub.*, xviii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. JEREMIAS, *Golgotha*. Leipzig, 1926, pp. 51 f.

<sup>3</sup> *1TJ* on xxii. 9.

sacrifice of Isaac. Ps.-JONATHAN also, commenting on Numbers xxviii. 4, writes that the two lambs of the perpetual sacrifice atone for the sins of the day and of the night not in their own right, but solely through the virtue of the one true sacrifice.

The excerpt from Leviticus Rabbah is anonymous and dateless, but its conformity with the ancient targumic tradition suggests its antiquity. This, of course, does not apply to the artificial exegesis of צפונה. The midrashist appears to have understood the word as being related to the verb צפה, "to watch", "to regard". This entirely unwarranted exegesis is the result of historical necessity. When daily sacrifice perpetuating the ritual remembrance of the Akedah ceased to be offered, the memorial rite was replaced by a memorial prayer:

Let us be looked upon by the Lord (through the merit of the sacrifice of Isaac)!

The same passage from Leviticus Rabbah continues:

I call upon myself heaven and earth as witnesses that whosoever, Gentile or Jew, man or woman, slave or maid-servant, reads this scriptural text, צפונה before the Lord, the Lord remembers the Binding of Isaac.<sup>1</sup>

Although this last interpretation and the exegesis of צפונה are posterior to AD 70, it does not necessarily follow that the reference to the availability of Isaac's merit to the Gentiles is of recent date; a similar opinion figures already in Ps.-PHILO.<sup>2</sup>

These observations should be borne in mind when reading Israel LÉVI's commentary on Leviticus Rabbah ii. 11:

L'intention de l'auteur anonyme de ce morceau n'est pas douteuse: le sacrifice journalier d'un bœlier, rappelant le bœlier offert par Abraham à la place d'Isaac,<sup>3</sup> répète l'action accomplie sur le Moria et vaut à ceux qui le font le mérite du sacrifice d'Isaac. Bien plus, à défaut de l'immolation de la victime, la simple récitation des mots qui visent le rite produit les mêmes effets.

Ce qui met hors cadre ce passage, c'est non seulement la réversibilité du mérite de la Akèda même sur les non-juifs, mais encore le rapprochement entre cet événement et le sacrifice journalier.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lev. R.*, ii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Erit autem beatitudo mea super omnes homines quia non erit aliud, et in me annuntiabunt generationes et per me intelligent populi, quoniam dignificavit Deus animam hominis in sacrificium (LAB, xxxii. 3).* This doctrinal conclusion springs from an interpretation of Gen. xxii. 18 ("By your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed").

<sup>3</sup> It would be more exact to write: "rappelant le sacrifice d'Isaac".

<sup>4</sup> *Le sacrifice d'Isaac et le mort de Jésus*, in *RIEJ*, 64, 1912, p. 165.

The Palestinian Targums on Leviticus xxii. 27 (1TJ and 2TJ) go even further than Leviticus Rabbah, and reveal what may be considered the basic significance of the relationship between the Akedah and the Temple sacrifices. Whereas the scriptural text states that bullocks, he-lambs, and kids are to be offered to God, the Targums specify that these offerings are intended to atone for Israel's sin.

Our offerings are to atone for our sins.

Concerning the lamb itself, the Fragmentary Targum reads:

The lamb was chosen to recall the merit of the lamb of Abraham, who bound himself upon the altar and stretched out his neck for Your Name's sake. Heaven was let down and descended and Isaac saw its perfection and his eyes were weakened by the high places. For this reason he acquired merit and a lamb was provided there, in his stead, for the burnt offering.<sup>1</sup>

The choice of bullocks and kids as sacrificial victims is explained by Abraham's having served a calf to his heavenly visitors (Gen. xviii. 7-8), and by Jacob's stratagem to obtain Esau's birthright (Gen. xxvii). But although these explanations helped to maintain the doctrine of the collective merit of the three Patriarchs, the distinctive importance of Isaac's place within the context of sacrifice can, of course, not be included in the same category as these others.

The meaning of these passages is clear. According to ancient Jewish theology, the atoning efficacy of the *Tamid* offering, of all the sacrifices in which a lamb was immolated, and perhaps, basically, of all expiatory sacrifice irrespective of the nature of the victim, depended upon the virtue of the Akedah, the self-offering of that Lamb whom God had recognized as the perfect victim of the perfect burnt offering.<sup>2</sup>

#### *The Binding of Isaac in the Jewish liturgy*

Was there any special commemoration of the Binding of Isaac in the

<sup>1</sup> The same text is written by a second copyist in the margin of *Neof*. The manuscript gives, however, a slightly different recension which may be translated: "After this (viz., the birth of Isaac), the lamb was chosen to recall the merit of the one man who was bound upon a mountain as a lamb for a burnt offering upon the altar. God delivered him in His merciful goodness, and when his (Isaac's) children pray in the time of their distress and say, as they are obliged to say, 'Answer us and listen to the cry of our prayer,' He agreed to remember on our behalf the Binding of Isaac our father."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Gen. R.*, lxiv. 3: אתה עולה תמימה

Jewish liturgical year in addition to the daily memorial of the Akedah; any anniversary, as it were, of the great event on Mount Moriah?

The Musaf of the New Year service in the present day Jewish liturgy includes a commemoration of this kind. In a series of prayers emphasizing God's lovingkindness towards Israel, He is asked to remember the Binding of Isaac, and to show mercy instead of justice to his children.

O our God, God of our fathers, remember us with a remembrance for good. Visit us with a visitation for salvation and mercy from the everlasting heavens. Remember on our behalf, Lord our God, the Covenant, the lovingkindness, and the oath which You swore to Abraham our father on Mount Moriah. May the binding with which Abraham our father bound Isaac his son upon the altar be seen before You, and the manner in which he overcame his love in order to do Your will with a perfect heart. Thus may Your love overcome Your wrath against us. Through Your great goodness may Your anger turn away from Your people, Your city, and Your inheritance... Remember today the Binding of Isaac with mercy to his descendants.<sup>1</sup>

From the present commemoration of the Akedah in the *Zikbronoth* of Rosh ha-Shanah, Israel LÉVI concludes that a similar remembrance must have been associated with the same festival already in the first century AD.

Le rituel de prières de Rosch Haschana existait déjà au Ier siècle de l'ère chrétienne, et comme le morceau relatif à la Akèda en est une partie intégrante, on peut être assuré que la doctrine qui l'inspire était déjà populaire à cette époque.<sup>2</sup>

H. RIESENFELD reaches, and even overstates, the same conclusion. According to this scholar, the memorial of Isaac's vicarious sacrifice took place, following the model of the ritual passion of the Babylonian king, in the liturgy of the pre-exilic Jewish New Year.<sup>3</sup>

The thesis of LÉVI and RIESENFELD requires some comment. One is immediately struck by the emphasis laid, in the prayer cited above, upon Abraham's role instead of on Isaac's merit. In fact, with the exception, perhaps, of the last supplication – "Remember today..." – the whole prayer corresponds to the mediaeval, and not to the ancient targumic representation of the Akedah. On the other hand, it is equal-

<sup>1</sup> *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*. London, 1956, pp. 251-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Jésus Transfiguré*. Copenhagen, 1947, pp. 86-96.

ly obvious that, despite a difference of perspective, this prayer is inspired by Abraham's words as interpreted in the targumic tradition. It occurs in a very similar form, as S. SPIEGEL has proved, in the teaching of R. Yohanan and his disciples in the third century AD.<sup>1</sup>

From the evidence of numerous talmudic and midrashic passages, it may safely be accepted that the annual commemoration of the Akedah in the New Year service was already an established tradition in the third century. According to Megillah 31a, the parashah of Isaac's sacrifice was read on the second day of Rosh ha-Shanah. The Tosefta of the Palestinian Targum quoted above<sup>2</sup> also appears to have been written for this festival.<sup>3</sup>

The recital of particular prayers for forgiveness, and the blowing of the *shofar* at the New Year, appear to have created a suitable atmosphere for the remembrance of the Akedah at that time.

Thus R. Bibi bar Abba, recalling the teaching of R. Yohanan concerning Abraham's prayer after the Akedah, concludes that it is answered at every Rosh ha-Shanah:

So when the children of Isaac commit sin, and do evil, remember on their behalf the Binding of Isaac ... and full of compassion towards them, be merciful to them... When? In the seventh month (Lev. xxiii. 24).<sup>4</sup>

R. Hanina ben R. Isaac insists on the significance of the ram's horn blown at Rosh ha-Shanah:

All the days of the year Israel is caught in transgression and tangled<sup>5</sup> in distress, but at New Year they take the *shofar* and blow it, and they are remembered before the Holy One, blessed be He, and He forgives them. And at their end, they will be delivered with the ram's horn, as it is written: The Lord God shall blow the ram's horn (Zech. ix. 14).<sup>6</sup>

From this, it was easily inferred that the original purpose of the blowing of the *shofar* was the remembrance of Isaac's sacrifice.

Why do they blow the ram's horn? So that I should remember the Binding of Isaac son of Abraham.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *art. cit.*, pp. 511 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P. GRELOT, *art. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Lev. R.*, xxix. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Like the ram which was offered in the place of Isaac.

<sup>6</sup> *Gen. R.*, lvi. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Rosh ha-Shanah* 16a.

These ancient texts express the same intention as the present-day prayers of Rosh ha-Shanah. Israel invokes the merits of the Akedah and begs forgiveness and deliverance, and the *shofar* is blown so that God may remember. It will sound again at the end of time to remind Him in a final memorial of Isaac's sacrifice.

It is tempting to conclude from all this that New Year's day was thought to be the real anniversary of the Akedah. This idea would fit in with the belief that the great events of the past occurred in Tishri, the month of Rosh ha-Shanah, viz., the creation of the world,<sup>1</sup> and the birth and death of the Patriarchs.<sup>2</sup> The same month was also expected to see, on New Year's day, and in virtue of what Israel Lévi calls the principle of "palingénésie générale", the final salvation of Israel, and the blowing of the messianic *shofar*.<sup>3</sup> But however widespread this tradition may have been, there appears to be no inherent relationship between the Binding of Isaac and Rosh ha-Shanah to account for the association of the two. The only biblical link seems to be the זכרון תרועה, specified as a blast of a ram's horn and symbolizing Isaac's ram.

It is in this indirect and roundabout way that the Akedah, with all its virtue of atonement and redemption, is introduced into the New Year liturgy, and since Rosh ha-Shanah is more naturally the festival commemorating Creation – past, present, and future – it is not unreasonable to ask whether the Akedah is not out of place in this context.

Displaying similar concern, Jewish writings attempt to associate the Akedah with some other festival. The Day of Atonement would, in a sense, be suitable, but no early evidence can be discovered in its favour.<sup>4</sup> Such is not the case, however, with the great spring memorial of the Passover.

In the old agricultural calendar of Israel, New Year fell in the month of Abib (later called Nisan), the month of the spring equinox.

This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be for you the first month of the year.<sup>5</sup>

In it occurred the festival of the offering of the firstborn,<sup>6</sup> and on the

<sup>1</sup> *Gen. R.*, xxii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 10b.

<sup>3</sup> *Gen. R.*, lvi. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. S. SPIEGEL, *art. cit.*, p. 495, n. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ex.* xii. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ex.* xiii. 1, 11-16.

fifteenth day of the month, the memorial of the Exodus, the first salvation. So it is not surprising that even after the change of the calendar, with the year beginning in Tishri, Abib-Nisan should have continued to be considered by many as the holiest of all the months because of the feast of Passover, and consequently the only fitting time to include memorials of the great events of the past and the future.

Rosh ha-Shanah 10b echoes with discussions on this subject. R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (of the first quarter of the second century AD) favoured Tishri, but his habitual opponent and contemporary, R. Joshua ben Hananiah, supported Nisan.<sup>1</sup> The following haggadah on Exodus xii. 2 is anonymous, but may, perhaps, be attributed to R. Joshua:

This month shall be for you the beginning of months (Ex. xii. 2). The Holy One, blessed be He... appointed for the Israelites a month of redemption in which they were redeemed from Egypt, and in which they will be redeemed... In this month was Isaac born, and in this month he was bound.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, there is definite evidence that the association of the Akedah with Passover was established well before the beginning of the Christian era. According to the Book of Jubilees, Mastema accused Abraham on the twelfth day of the first month. The Patriarch departed early the following morning and the Binding of Isaac took place on the third day of the journey.<sup>3</sup> Although the intention of the author of Jubilees was to prove the patriarchal origin of the Jewish feasts,<sup>4</sup> his dating of the Passover as the anniversary of Isaac's sacrifice was certainly not fortuitous. It represents a tradition whose voice is still to be heard early in the second century AD.

The bond between the two great events was, in fact, a doctrinal one. The saving virtue of the Passover lamb proceeded from the merits of that first lamb, the son of Abraham, who offered himself upon the altar. In this context, it may be useful to recall the saying of the Mekhilta of R. Ishmael:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also *Gen. R.*, xxii. 4; *Mekb.*, I, pp. 112-3. See also LAUTERBACH's comment on p. 113, n. 3a.

<sup>2</sup> *Ex. R.*, xv. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Doubtless on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month. *Jub.*, xvii. 15-16; xviii. 3; xlix. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham instituted a seven-day festival to be celebrated every year as a memorial of his journey to and from Mount Moriah. Cf. *Jub.*, xviii. 18-19. H. RIENSENFELD's identification of this festival with the Feast of Tabernacles is motivated rather by his general thesis than by the actual text of Jubilees. Cf. *Jésus Transfiguré*, p. 89, n. 47.

And when I see the blood, I will pass over you (Ex. xii. 13). – I see the blood of the Binding of Isaac.<sup>1</sup>

The firstborn sons of Israel were spared and the people delivered from captivity because the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb reminded God of the sacrifice of Isaac. Consequently, both the Passover and its fulfilment, messianic Redemption, point to the Akedah.

It is impossible to determine the exact date of the dissociation of the Binding of Isaac from the feast of Passover, and its first introduction into the Rosh ha-Shanah liturgy. By the early second century AD it was still not a *fait accompli*. But the most probable cause of the change was the ending, after 70 AD, of the Passover sacrifice itself. The blowing of the ram's horn at Rosh ha-Shanah was, of course, not affected by the destruction of the Temple and continued to provide a ritual link with the Binding of Isaac.

It is nevertheless legitimate to wonder how far the use of the Akedah theology by early Christians contributed to the suppression of all the bonds between the Binding of Isaac and the Passover. Be this as it may, the Palestinian Targums, slow to react to change, historical and doctrinal, continued to represent the pre-Christian tradition. In them, the night of Passover is the memorial of the Creation, of the Covenant with Abraham, of the birth of Isaac, of his Akedah, of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and finally of the coming of messianic salvation.

This is a night reserved for the Lord to bring them (the Israelites) out of the land of Egypt; this same night of the Lord is also to be observed for all the children of Israel in their generations (Ex. xii 42).

This is a night reserved and appointed by the Lord for deliverance, to bring out the children of Israel delivered from the land of Egypt.

Four nights are written in the Book of Memorials.

On the first night, the Word of the Lord was revealed upon the world to create it...

On the second night, the Word of the Lord was revealed upon Abraham between the (divided) parts (of the sacrifice of the covenant). Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety years, that the saying of Scripture might be fulfilled; Abraham aged one hundred years can beget, and Sarah aged ninety can bear. Was not Isaac our father thirty seven years old when he was offered upon the altar? The heavens were let down and descended and Isaac saw their perfection, and his eyes were weakened by the high places. God called this the second night.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mekh.*, I, pp. 57, 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Neofiti's* version of the passage concerning Abraham omits any mention of the covenantal sacrifice. The birth and sacrifice of Isaac are given as follows: "On the



On the third night, the Word of the Lord was revealed upon the Egyptians in the middle of the night. His right hand slew the firstborn of the Egyptians, but His right hand spared the firstborn of the Israelites, to fulfil the saying of Scripture: Israel is my firstborn son. He called this the third night.

On the fourth night, the world shall reach its end to be delivered. The bonds of wickedness shall be destroyed and the iron yokes broken. Moses shall come out of the wilderness and the King Messiah out of Rome. The one shall be led upon a cloud and the other shall be led upon a cloud,<sup>1</sup> and the Word of the Lord shall lead between them and they shall go forward together. This is the night of the Passover before the Lord, to be observed and celebrated by all Israel in their generations. *2TJ*.<sup>2</sup>

Before passing on to consider the impact of the Jewish theology of the Akedah upon the Christian doctrine of Redemption, it would be as well to recapitulate the main results of this study of the Binding of Isaac.

Firstly, the Palestinian Targum proves quite clearly that already in the first century AD there existed a firm belief that the principal merit of the Akedah sprang from the virtue of Isaac's self-offering. From an exegetical viewpoint, this tradition was prompted by the association of Genesis xxii with Isaiah liii.

Next, examining the theological significance of the tradition, it is apparent that the Akedah, although ritually incomplete, was indeed considered a true sacrifice and Israel's chief title to forgiveness and redemption. The purpose of other sacrifices, including the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, was to remind God of Isaac's perfect self-oblation and to invoke his merits.

second night, the Lord revealed Himself to Abraham, who was aged one hundred years, and Sarah who was aged ninety, to fulfil the saying of Scripture: At the age of one hundred years cannot Abraham beget; and cannot Sarah at the age of ninety years bear? Isaac was thirty-seven years old when he was offered upon the altar. The heavens were let down and descended, and Isaac saw their perfection and his eyes were weakened by their perfection. He called this the second night.

<sup>1</sup> *2TJ*'s text appears corrupt. One scarcely expects the verb יִדְבֵּר, "he will be led" (Itpe. of דִּבֶּר) to be followed by "on top of the cloud", בְּרִישׁ עֲנָנָא. In fact neither the Messiah nor Moses are supposed to descend from heaven. *Neofiti*'s reading appears to preserve the original text: דִּין יִדְבֵּר בְּרִישׁ עֲנָנָא, "The one shall lead the flock". There is no mention here of the Messiah but the omission must be accidental because the passage goes on to describe God walking between the two leaders: "Moses shall come out of the wilderness. The one shall lead the flock and the other shall lead the flock and my Word shall lead between the two. I and they shall lead together".

<sup>2</sup> *1TJ* on Ex. xii. 40-2 contains an abridgment of this, but although 15th Nisan is given as the date of the Creation and the Covenant with Abraham, this revised version of the Palestinian Targum fails to mention the Akedah.

Finally, it has been shown that in the ancient liturgy of Israel a powerful bond linked the Binding of Isaac with Passover and with eschatological salvation.

*The Binding of Isaac and the New Testament*

Almost fifty years ago, Israël LÉVI devoted an important study to the relationship between the haggadah of the Binding of Isaac and the Sacrifice of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Refuting A. GEIGER's thesis on the Christian origin of the Rabbinic Akedah theology, he asserts that it was already well known in the first century AD, and was used by St. Paul to interpret the death of Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement:

La théologie de Paul, opérant sur la mort de Jésus, s'est... élaborée dans une atmosphère propice. Elle a trouvé dans les idées juives du temps des matériaux qu'elle n'a qu'à mettre en oeuvre.<sup>2</sup>

This valuable contribution having passed unnoticed by New Testament scholars, H. J. SCHÖEPS, though less skilled in Rabbinics than LÉVI, judged it useful, in 1946, to write another article on the same topic.<sup>3</sup> In it, LÉVI's arguments are re-employed to show that Paul's symbolic use of the Akedah acts as a bridge between the genuinely Jewish teaching of atoning suffering, and the non-Jewish concept of a Saviour who was both man and God.<sup>4</sup> As an illustration, he quotes Romans viii. 32, "He who did not spare His own Son...", this being, in his view, a christological reinterpretation of Genesis xxii. 16.<sup>5</sup> Further on, he writes:

When Paul says in I Cor. v. 7 that "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" and in Rom. v. 9 that his blood justifies the Christians, it seems probable to me that he is under the influence of Jewish conceptions related to the Akedah.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, SCHÖEPS suggests the following key to the Pauline theology of Atonement:

Just as Paul patently identified the Servant of the Lord... with Christ..., so he built the doctrine of the expiatory power of the sacrificial death of Christ on the binding of Isaac, as interpreted in the familiar Rosh

<sup>1</sup> *Le sacrifice d'Isaac et la mort de Jésus*, in *REJ*, 64, 1912, pp. 161-184.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sacrifice of Isaac in Paul's Theology*, in *JBL*, 65, 1946, pp. 385-392.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 385-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

hashanah liturgy. ...Of course he developed out of it a different non-Jewish doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

Four years later, in 1950, S. SPIEGEL contributed an article on this subject to the *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*.<sup>2</sup> In his study, which is greatly superior to those mentioned above as far as Jewish literature is concerned, he discusses parallelisms and divergences between the doctrine of the Akedah and the theology of "Golgotha", and repeats the conclusions of LÉVI and SCHOEPS regarding the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> St. Paul is credited with the authorship of the Christian theology of Redemption, but he freely borrowed for its construction from the Jewish model, i.e. the Akedah, and from the prophecy concerning the Suffering Servant.<sup>4</sup>

What is to be thought of these theories? A re-examination of Jewish material seems, at first sight, to suggest that they contain a large amount of truth. Nevertheless, it would be an unjustifiable oversimplification to subscribe to them as they stand and I suggest the following two questions: viz., whether the theology of the Binding of Isaac does in fact underlie the Pauline synthesis of the significance of the Cross, and whether the association of Cross and Akedah in the New Testament is exclusively Pauline.

#### *The Akedah motif in St. Paul*

That the Pauline doctrine of Redemption is basically a Christian version of the Akedah calls for little demonstration. Paul may, in addition, even be dispensed from the initiative of associating the self-offering of Isaac with the figure of the Suffering Servant and the Passover, since, in the first century AD, this association was already firmly established in Jewish theological circles. They were ritually re-enacted every year during the Passover festival. The Akedah was considered a sacrifice of Redemption, the source of pardon, salvation,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* SCHOEPS' hypothesis is rejected by J. DANIÉLOU because "the texts in which the theology of Isaac's sacrifice appears plainly developed are much posterior to the Christian era". DANIÉLOU does not even entirely discard the possibility that the authors of the Akedah theology were unconsciously influenced by the Christian doctrine of Redemption. Cf. *Sacramentum Futuri*, Paris, 1950, p. 102. From the findings of the present study, I believe his statement requires no further consideration.

<sup>2</sup> מאגדות העקדה in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, Hebrew Section, New York, 1950, pp. 471-547.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. especially, pp. 505-547.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. pp. 507-9.

and eternal life, through the merits of Abraham who loved God so greatly as to offer Him his only son, but principally through the merits of Isaac, who offered his life voluntarily to his Creator.

For Paul, the Akedah prophesied a higher truth, a divine mystery revealed in Christ, in that although man was able to attain such heights of love and self-surrender, God did even greater things to show His love for man. The Father was ready to offer His only Son, and the Son consented to his own sacrifice so that man might be deified. This fundamental intuition was so luminous and self-evident to Paul, governing and unifying the whole of his thought, that he was able to write without further comment:

If God is for us, who shall be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but surrendered Him for us all, will He not grant us every favour with Him?<sup>1</sup>

In this perspective, the Akedah merely prefigures Redemption by Christ. In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul teaches that the blessing of Abraham promised to the Gentiles is available through Jesus, "the seed" of Abraham. The Saviour is Christ, not Isaac. The source of salvation is not the Binding of Isaac, but the Sacrifice of Christ. In Galatians iii. 6-29, Paul uses Genesis xii, xviii, and xxii indiscriminately,<sup>1</sup> but in verses 13 and 14 he obviously has Genesis xxii. 18 in mind:

Christ redeemed us... so that by Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the nations.

In developing his theological interpretation of the death of Christ,

<sup>1</sup> *Rom.* viii. 31-2. As ORIGEN notes in his commentary on Genesis (*PL*, 12, p. 203), Paul uses here *Gen.* xxii. 16. Compare especially οὐ ἰδὼν υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐπέσχετο with οὐκ ἐπέσχετο τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ Cf. also *Rom.* v. 6-11. Concerning *Rom.* iv. 25 ("who was surrendered because of our sins, and raised up because of the justification to be granted to us"), C. K. BARRETT notes: "The parallelism between Isaac and Jesus would be even closer if it could be maintained that Paul had in mind the 'binding of Isaac', which from time to time plays an interesting part in Rabbinic theology. It is just possible that this theme is in mind in v. 25; rather more likely that it appears in viii. 32. But Paul makes no serious use of it." (Cf. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, London, 1957, p. 99). By "serious use", Professor BARRETT means, I imagine, frequent and explicit use. If the Akedah had been an obscure and little known doctrine of Judaism, Paul would indeed have needed to express himself distinctly on this subject, but as I have pointed out, in the first century AD it was, in fact, a well established doctrinal tradition. Paul did not judge it necessary to develop a proper typology because it was not yet needed (though it would be, from the second century onwards, when the Christian message was being addressed to Gentiles only). For the patristic treatment of the subject, see D. LERCH, *Isaak's Opferung christlich gedeutet*, Tübingen, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. E. ELLIS, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, Edinburgh, 1957, pp. 152, 187.

Paul, in short, followed a traditional Jewish pattern which enabled him, with no very great difficulty, to coordinate within the framework of a coherent synthesis the most profound and anomalous religious concept ever known to the human mind.

The recognition of the use made by Paul of the Akedah theology does not, as the authors quoted above seem to think, mean that the doctrine of the redemptive death of Christ is a Pauline creation, or that he was responsible for the introduction of the Akedah motif into the New Testament. For although he is undoubtedly the greatest theologian of the Redemption, he worked with inherited materials and among these was, by his own confession, the tradition that

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The Akedah and pre-Pauline Christianity*

There is, of course, no developed theology of Redemption in the Synoptic Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles. Doctrinal statements are mostly implicit and conveyed by means of Old Testament quotations. It consequently remains to be seen whether Genesis xxii is used at all in these writings.

One passage from the Acts is unquestionably borrowed from this chapter of Genesis. After the healing of a lame man by Peter and John, Peter proclaims to the assembled crowd the saving virtue of faith in Jesus, who suffered to fulfil Scripture, but was glorified by God to transmit to all men, and first to Israel, the blessing promised to Abraham:

You are the sons of the prophets and of the Covenant which God established for your fathers, saying to Abraham, And by your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. xxii. 18). God having raised his Servant sent him first to you to bless you by turning every one of you away from your iniquity.<sup>2</sup>

Targumic tradition ascribes this blessing to Isaac's sacrifice, but Peter reinterprets it of Jesus, as Paul does in Galatians iii.

The parallelism with Galatians might be considered an objection against the pre-Pauline character of a text from the work of Luke, Paul's disciple, but against it must be opposed the primitive and essentially Jewish character of the first chapters of the Acts, which are

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *1 Cor.* xv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts* iii. 25-6.

based on pre-Pauline documents. As regards this particular passage, there are two concrete indications of antiquity: the title "sons of the Covenant" applied to the Jews – a "mark of genuineness" according to F. F. BRUCE<sup>1</sup> – and the title "Servant" applied to Jesus.

As regards the four places in the Acts (where Jesus is called "Servant of God"), an ancient date is suggested by the fact that the occurrence of *παῖς θεοῦ* is confined to Acts iii, iv; i.e. to a Palestinian stratum of tradition which in other respects, too, is marked by its ancient character.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the use of Genesis xxii. 18 in Acts iii is much better suited to its theological purpose than the somewhat twisted and confused argument in Galatians iii. Of the two, the interpretation given in Acts is the more straightforward and simple, reflecting positively the original scriptural evidence. This evidence, based on the theme of the Akedah, consequently appears to belong to the primitive Palestinian tradition of Christianity.

The same pre-Christian Jewish association of the Akedah and Servant motifs reappears in the Gospel account of the baptism of Jesus. By using words borrowed from Genesis xxii. 16 and Isaiah xlii. 1, the heavenly voice implies that Jesus is destined for salvation and deliverance from sin:

You are my beloved Son. In you I am well pleased. (Mk. i. 11; Lk. iii. 22).

This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. (Mt. ii. 17).

Instead of recognizing that the Gospel tradition transmits a composite citation of Genesis xxii and Isaiah xlii, most commentators make an entirely useless and inconclusive effort to show that the Mark formula is either based on Psalm ii. 7 and Isaiah xlii. 1, or that Isaiah xlii alone underlies the quotation but translated differently from the Septuagint. It is enough to re-read one or other of the recent examples of such unrewarding attempts<sup>3</sup> to realize the straightforwardness and extreme simplicity of the interpretation proposed here. One scholar, at least, has made the same discovery even without special reference to the Jewish background. A. RICHARDSON, in *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, writes:

The story of the sacrifice of Isaac is one of the Old Testament

<sup>1</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles*. London, 1951, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> W. ZIMMERLI-J. JEREMIAS, *The Servant of God*. London, 1957, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g., ZIMMERLI-JEREMIAS, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-2; E. LOHMEYER, *Das Evangelium Matthäus*, Göttingen, 2nd ed. 1958, p. 51, n. 2, etc.

themes which underlie the Synoptic account of the baptism, for the phrase in Mark. 1. 11 σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, is a clear echo of Gen. 22. 12 (LXX, τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ).<sup>1</sup>

Further evidence of the association of Genesis xxii with Isaiah xlii may be found in the replacement of ἐκλεκτός by ἀγαπητός in the quotation of the first Song of the Servant in Matthew xii. 18.

To sum up, the Akedah theme, bound, as in Judaism, to the Servant motif, belongs to the oldest pre-Markan stratum of the Christian *kerygma*.<sup>2</sup> It is reasonable, therefore to wonder whether Jesus himself was conscious of his destiny as being the fulfilment of Isaac's sacrifice. In virtue of what has been written of the inherent connection between the Akedah and the Suffering Servant (and also of the Passover lamb), it would be enough to show that, according to genuine Gospel testimony, Jesus personally applied to himself one or other of these themes.

As far as the figure of the Suffering Servant is concerned, many commentators believe that this can, in fact, be proved. J. JEREMIAS, after a detailed analysis of the texts,<sup>3</sup> asserts that Jesus not only believed himself to be the Servant but let himself be known as such, not to all, but to whom he chose:

Only to his disciples did he unveil the mystery that he viewed the fulfilment of Isa. 53 as his God appointed task.<sup>4</sup>

If this is accepted, it would follow that the introduction of the Akedah motif into Christianity was due, not to St. Paul, but to Jesus of Nazareth.

### *The Akedah and the Fourth Gospel*

Compared with the Synoptics, the Johannine account of the baptism of Jesus has two distinguishing characteristics: the heavenly voice is replaced by the testimony of John the Baptist, and the "beloved Son" by the "Lamb of God".

<sup>1</sup> *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, London, 1958, p. 180. Instead of Gen. xxii. 12, read xxii. 18. Cf. also p. 228. B. LINDARS, *New Testament Apologetic*, London, 1961, pp. 139, 146, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> It will be necessary to re-examine the account of the Transfiguration (Mk. ix. 2-8, Mt. xvii. 1-8), where the same heavenly words are recorded. It should be remembered that in the targumic version of the Akedah, "the heavens were let down and descended and Isaac saw their perfection". In the Gospel account of the Transfiguration, Jesus establishes a bond between His transfiguration and His resurrection from the dead.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ZIMMERLI-JEREMIAS, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-104.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104. Cf. also C. R. NORTH, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah*, London, 1948, pp. 218-219.

Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world (Jn. i. 29).<sup>1</sup>

As is well known, John i. 29 is a real *crux* for students of the Fourth Gospel. Professor DODD, in his book *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, suggests that the "Lamb of God" is symbolized by one of the following:

- 1) the lamb of sin-offering;
- 2) the Passover lamb;
- 3) the lamb of Isaiah liii, i.e. the Suffering Servant;
- 4) the ram which is the leader of the flock (Enoch lxxxix. 46), i.e. the Royal Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

A fifth possibility, viz., the lamb of perpetual sacrifice, is also considered by some commentators.<sup>3</sup>

None of these hypotheses is generally accepted, and apparently serious objections are raised against each of them.<sup>4</sup> For many, the most plausible interpretation is that of the Passover lamb, firstly because John xix. 36 identifies Christ with it, and secondly, because this evangelist alters the chronology of the Passion so that the death of Jesus may coincide with the slaughtering of the Passover sacrifice. Nevertheless, the main objection still stands; namely, that the Passover lamb was not considered an expiatory sacrifice. As Professor DODD explains:

Although there may have been an expiatory element in the primitive rite underlying the Passover, no such idea was connected with it in historical times. It is therefore unlikely that readers could be expected to catch an allusion to the Passover here, in the absence of any clear indication in the context, or indeed in the Gospel at large.<sup>5</sup>

Since neither the Passover lamb, nor any of the other alternatives, appears satisfactorily to interpret the concept "Lamb of God", the present generally accepted opinion, of which Professor C. K. BARRETT is a recent exponent, recognizes in the term an amalgamation of Old Testament ideas due to the evangelist's desire to testify "that the death of Christ was a new and better sacrifice".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the relationship "lamb" – "son" in Aramaic, see above, p. 93, n. 5.

<sup>2</sup> C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1953, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. BULTMANN, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Göttingen, 1950 (11th edition), pp. 66 f; R. H. LIGHTFOOT, *St. John's Gospel*, Oxford, 1956, p. 96; C. K. BARRETT, *The Gospel according to St. John*, London, 1955, p. 147, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. H. DODD, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-8.

<sup>5</sup> C. H. DODD, *op. cit.*, p. 234. Cf. also C. K. BARRETT, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 147.



Inserted into its proper setting, however, John i. 29 ceases to be a *crux*. For the Palestinian Jew, all lamb sacrifice, and especially the Passover lamb and the Tamid offering, was a memorial of the Akedah with its effects of deliverance, forgiveness of sin and messianic salvation. Once more, A. RICHARDSON appears to be on the right path when he writes:

There is one more Old Testament text (which Dodd does not mention in connection with his discussion of the Lamb of God) which doubtless was present in the Fourth Evangelist's mind when he made the Baptist speak of Christ as the Lamb of God, viz., Gen. 22. 8: "God will provide himself (Heb. "see for Himself") the lamb for the burnt offering". Jewish thought increasingly came to hold that the covenant-relationship with God was founded upon Abraham's offering of Isaac: St. John is asserting that the new relationship of God and man in Christ (the new covenant) is based upon the fulfilment of the promise contained in Gen. 22. 8, that God would provide the Lamb which would make atonement for universal sin.<sup>1</sup>

The Fourth Gospel consciously emphasizes the two traditional expressions – Passover lamb and Suffering Servant – of the one fundamental reality; namely, the sacrifice of the new Isaac, the "son of God".<sup>2</sup> But the fullest Johannine expression of the Christian Akedah appears in John iii. 16:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son in order that whoever believes in him should not perish but should have eternal life.<sup>3</sup>

#### *The Akedah and the Eucharist*

Although it is not the purpose of the present study to trace all the Akedah references in the New Testament, it would certainly be a mistake to overlook the Eucharistic words of Jesus in this context.

Two fundamental aspects of Eucharistic theology in the New Testament are presupposed here: a) that the Last Supper was a ritual anticipation of the sacrificial death of Jesus, whose blood was to be poured out for the forgiveness of sin; b) that it was Jesus, not Paul, who ordered that the same rite should be repeated:

<sup>1</sup> *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, p. 228. B. LINDARS, *New Testament Apologetic*, London, 1961, pp. 139, 146, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> In the light of the present enquiry, the reading  $\delta \text{ υ} \iota \acute{o} \varsigma$  in the place of  $\delta \text{ εκλεκτός}$  in i. 34, seems undoubtedly to be the original term.

<sup>3</sup> C. K. BARRETT (*op. cit.*, p. 180) recognizes here a possible allusion to *Gen.* xxii. 2, 16.

dition, God's remembrance was not only sought yearly, in Nisan, but day by day in a perpetual sacrifice of lambs invoking His forgiveness, mercy, and love. The frequent celebration of the Eucharistic meal may, therefore, be understood as the introduction into Christianity of this other element of the Akedah theology: the perpetual remembrance of the one perfect Sacrifice until the Kingdom comes.

Although it would be inexact to hold that the Eucharistic doctrine of the New Testament, together with the whole Christian doctrine of Redemption, is nothing but a Christian version of the Jewish Akedah theology, it is nevertheless true that in the formulation of this doctrine the targumic representation of the Binding of Isaac has played an essential role.

Indeed, without the help of Jewish exegesis it is impossible to perceive any Christian teaching in its true perspective.