

Three Days

Wait!! What do you mean?! Sacrifice Isaac? My son? It doesn't make any sense! Why would you want me to kill my son? There must be some mistake! Are you punishing me? Did I insult you somehow? Tell me! Haven't I done everything you asked of me? I have prayed and sacrificed to you countless times, and every time I was serious and earnest. Any misstep in the rituals that I failed to recognize was not done out of maliciousness, I know that, and I know you know that!

Did Isaac do something? Did he offend you somehow? He's just a child! Surely any offense he's made could be forgiven with atonement. Is he evil, and my father's eyes are blind to it? Perhaps he will do something horrible, unforgivable in the future! I know you know if he'll do something, why won't you just tell me that! Just give me a reason why I must end his life!

Why would you have me kill an innocent at all? I can understand sacrificing an animal, they have little potential. They live, they breed, they die, with no art or production to ever offer the world. Their greatest contribution is to aid us in our efforts or comfort us in our distress. Is this the case with Isaac? Is he simpler than I think? Will his life be one of impotence and failure? Even so, his children might be worthy in your eyes. Why not spare Isaac for their sake?

It just doesn't make any sense! Didn't you tell me that my descendants would number the dust on the earth? Didn't you say my descendants would number the stars in the night sky? If I kill Isaac, how will your promise be fulfilled? You said it would be okay to send Ishmael and his mother away, that Isaac would inherit my property. You've made so many promises to me, and now you want to break them all?! And not only that, you want me to be the hand that breaks them?! Is this some kind of joke? Are you trying to humiliate me in front of my family, my tribe, our neighboring tribes? Everyone knows I love and respect you, and that you have shown me favor, and now you want me to do this thing that will embarrass me and my people? This hurts you just as it does me! How will people respect you, want to worship you if you're known to dishonor your promises, and to your most devoted followers besides? You must have made a mistake. I will go to sleep. Come to me in a dream, and tell me to forget your command. Perhaps it was a spontaneous wish, or perhaps you wished for me to humble myself. I am your servant, I will do as you say, you know I will, just please countermand your order.

* Day 1 *

"He didn't come, why didn't he come?"

"Sir?"

"I must go sacrifice to the Lord. Find two men and fetch an ass and supplies for a week-long journey through the mountains. Isaac will be coming too, wake him. Tell the maids to

prepare breakfast and meals for the journey, we must leave at once. I will prepare the firewood for the offering myself.”

Are you mad? Do you resent me for warning you to change your mind? You are the Lord, you don’t make mistakes, I just wish you’d tell me why you want me to do this? Is this not a sin? To kill an innocent? I thought I had gained favor by trying to be righteous, by being the kind of father, leader, you’d be proud of. Aren’t you the Lord who flooded the Earth to kill the sinful? To give the world to Noah and his descendants, the righteous people? Didn’t you just now destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their lack of righteous people? And now you would have me do this horrid thing, something I will regret and make me mad for the rest of my days? I ought to just refuse. I could and should just say no.

“Father! What’s happening?”

“We are going far, to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. Be quick, eat a large breakfast and start packing. We should be gone for no longer than a week.”

If I said no, I think I’d still be a righteous man in your eyes. If I had refused a just cause, a just command, then that would give me cause to fear your retribution. Is it worse to perform an action I know to be immoral, or to refuse a command of the Lord, the creator of all things, favorer of the good, knower of all things; past, present, and future, the seen and hidden? I do believe you know better than I. My limited scope as flesh and blood has proven me wrong before, but you, an omniscient being, can know for certain if the ends would justify the means.

“Everyone ready? Let’s go.”

But why not tell me how the ends would justify the means here, in this case?? Will Isaac’s children be burdened with such humiliations and torture that it would be too difficult to tell me? You have told me that my progeny will be slaves for four hundred years, just how bad will it be? Forced to do unspeakable things, endure shameful experiences, comply with immoral and perverted demands? At first, I thought it would just be to work in the fields, and take on artisan and architectural occupations without being able to keep and enjoy the fruits of their labor, but will it be worse? To be chained and treated like animals, worked hard every waking moment of every day, and beaten when not compliant, maybe even when they are? Traded and scarred by compassionate-less masters? Used, mistreated, raped, amputated, tortured on a daily basis, at the constant whim of a multitude of heathens? Will these pitiful people bear the resemblance of my face, my wife’s face, Isaac’s face on their heads, so that it is understood by all the nations of the world that everyone of our likeness is inferior and undeserving of respect?

Four hundred years is a long time, and it will only get worse over all that time. If they bear children every fifteen to thirty years, that will be about twenty generations. To never know peace, a quiet day for so many lifetimes... it’s too difficult to imagine! Will it be this bad, and you just don’t want to burden me with this knowledge?

But you’ve also told me that my progeny will spread to every nation, and bless these nations. If my descendants of slavery knew this, would they be willing to sacrifice their lives for

the good of the world? Even now I can hear their screams, their cries, their pleas. Can't you? Can you not help them? Why must they suffer? Is it beyond your control? Is their sacrifice truly necessary? Are their lives really so expendable? What kind of pleasure or goodness can these people derive from such a harsh life? Will they become bitter and angry, and challenge your wisdom and nature? They will think that I was a fool for following you, 'Father of the Fools,' they'll call me...

"It's getting dark, shall we set up camp soon, sir?"

"Hmm? Yes, I can see a clearing up ahead, we will stay there for the night."

"Father, I just realized, we forgot to bring a lamb for the sacrifice."

"Don't worry, hopefully we'll come across a village or herder on the way and purchase one."

I realize that you want us to be independent creatures, but why not lend a hand every once in a while, when we, your worshipers, fall into disaster, or when a wolf is in the flock? You say that you blessed me, but I still have fear, for myself and my family. Your silence drives me mad! So silent, all the time, unless you want me to do something out of the ordinary. Go here, go there, impregnate my post-menopausal, ninety year-old wife, kill my miracle son! It's a wonder why I still worship you! You created heaven and earth and everything in between, and then you wiped your hands clean. You're there, but you're not! I'm sorry. I am weary, I should sleep before I say anything further.

* Day 2 *

No dream again? I need to talk to you! There must be some kind of dialogue we can have. Can't you give me a hint as to why you want this? Maybe... is this a test? To see how stupidly I'll comply with your commands? Are you preparing me for an even more difficult command? That's silly, what could be more difficult than to kill your own son? Why would you test me... to see if I'm worthy? You know me, as you know all things. You already know what I'm worthy of, and what I'm not. Then why put me through this? Why put Isaac through this? To show us that you wanted to prevent the slavish torment of so many people, but I refused to comply? Yes! That must be it! You want to make it my decision, to make me the scapegoat. When all of my people ask you why you let them suffer so, you'll be able to tell them that you wanted to prevent it, but I refused your command! NO! I'm not going to let you place the blame on me! You need to take responsibility for what happens in the world! I am just your humble servant.

"What are you waiting for? Let's go! We can eat as we walk!"

Is this what you're afraid of? People cursing your name? Not just any people, but the ones who know you best? The ones you've supposedly blessed, and announced to the world that you love the best? I've won your favor, but not your respect. You approve of the things I do in

your name, but don't dare to raise a hand to help me. You say you'll curse my children's masters after four hundred years, but why so long? Why not after two hundred, or one... why not after ten years? For what reason would you have them suffer for so long?

When Pharaoh and Abimelech took my wife and accidentally did me an injustice, you stepped in, immediately punishing their houses soon after, and did not release them until they atoned for their treatment of me. Can you not do anything to help my enslaved descendants sooner? Why wait so long to incur justice for their sake?

But then, I could be mistaken. My first understanding could be right. Maybe the servitude experience won't be so bad, and I'm getting angry over nothing. It's not like I've needed you so often, with the exception of the Pharaoh and Abimelech, most every challenge I've met you've given me the will and faculties to overcome, without your direct intervention. Perhaps it will be the same for my subjugated progeny; they'll face challenges and will overcome them, only they'll be wearing chains.

I'm still left confused as to why you want me to kill my son. Will his burning flesh bring you some kind of pleasure? His screams of agony? The moment he realizes that I betrayed him? That his Lord betrayed him? The more I think on it, I can see that these are the desires of a demon!

"Let's stop here for a moment, I must rest."

Have you been a demon this entire time? Feeding my ego, my overwhelming desire to be spoken to by the Lord? So you impersonate the most holy to gain my trust and acceptance, only to see how far I'd go to oblige to your demands? Was it you who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah too? Perhaps there were a great number of righteous people, and you wiped them out on a whim?

Do you have no fear of the Lord? To take his name in vain... surely he knows and will punish you! Are you not afraid of your master? For where do you get your power from, if not from him?

"Let us continue!"

Maybe he did not punish you when you destroyed those good people. Maybe you have done a great number of misdeeds, and have avoided justice every time. Are you trying to anger the Lord, to get his attention like a little child misbehaves to get his parents' attention? Do you think that by destroying me, by making me miserable, you will finally succeed? You likely think he favors me by witnessing how strongly I worship him, and by getting us to despise him, you will hurt him somehow? You ought to know, the Lord cannot be touched or harmed, he is invulnerable to all attacks. He knows all, he sees all; he already knows whether or not I'll ever disobey or defy him, it makes no difference to him when I've acted out. Your labors to undermine him mean nothing, it is a fruitless sport you pursue. If he chooses to punish you, it will not be a simple slap on the wrist. He will destroy you entirely, even if it means ceasing the emanation of the entire world.

But perhaps that is what you want, a self-destruction. I imagine that the life of a divine entity would have no end, and so, no eventual divine judgment. But how are you so certain? Just because you have been around since before the flood, since the creation of the world, how do you know it won't just end at any moment, for any reason? Perhaps the Lord gave you the gift of foresight that has not been wrong yet, but does that mean it is completely infallible? Truly, all of your gifts hinge on his caprice, your belief of control is a delusion, permitted only by his grace.

Perhaps your conceit is so great, you actually think that you are the Lord. Perhaps you even have a memory of creating the world, that the heavenly and earthly bodies move and pulse according to your will. You see it, want it, and it happens. But are you truly the connection? Perhaps it is all a great deception, for the Lord to test you! He wants to push you into finding out for yourself if you have the capacity of being a benevolent spirit. You may be gifted with omniscience and unlimited control, but is it impossible that those gifts may fail you? Will this need to happen for you to realize that you are not the great Lord, but a counterfeit?

But I admit, I do not really know your nature, as you do not explain yourself to me at all... most of what I know about you is by my own theory of the nature of the great Lord. But am I correct? Do you possess these values? If not, why are you pretending to be the Lord as I believe him to be? I suppose I have always believed that you only reveal yourself to the worshipers who best understand your nature.

"I believe we are close, but I am weary, my thoughts are becoming confused, and daybreak is approaching, let us set up camp here."

"Father, why are we going so far to sacrifice? Does it really matter where we sacrifice as long as its done?"

"I do not know, I was only told that he would show me where the ritual should take place."

Whether you are the Lord or not, I shall not think of you as anyone but the holiest of holies. Only you know whether you are an imitation. I will trust that if you are, you will behave in accordance to how the great Lord would want you to behave, and I will speak to you as if you were the great Lord. If you are truly omniscient, then you would have known these prayers already, and have considered your position in the world long ago.

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Day 3

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Still you refuse to speak to me through dreams. Can you not comfort me in this time of despair? I may not know your nature, but I am certain you do know mine. As a limited being, I

need assurance and confidence to make my decisions. All I have to rely on is my experience and whatever wisdom I can glean from that experience. You say that you have blessed me, but you have not given me much more wisdom than before you revealed yourself to me. Yet my wisdom fails me now, I am too conflicted!

“Get up! Get up! We haven’t much further to go!

How can I refuse your command? We have made a covenant, and I intend to honor my part. Did I not circumcise myself and Isaac, and everyone in my tribe? You promised the land to my children, but how can my children inherit the land when they don’t exist? Perhaps you were not literal when you spoke of my children by my seed, but of my children, who understand you, Lord. There is the seed that grows the body, and the seed that grows the mind...are you saying that I am the father of the people who knows and worships you, but do not resemble me, physically?

Should I be okay with this? After all, it’s natural that a man wishes to immortalize himself through his offspring, but can I be satisfied by immortalizing myself in the minds of men? Is this a sacrifice anyone would be willing to bear? Bodies are feebler than our minds, but the bodies existing in the present are a testament to their ancestors who were strong enough to survive one ordeal after another.

Is the sacrifice of Isaac conditional to your prophecies? That the nations of the world will be blessed by my ‘descendants’? Is the fate of the beautiful world dependent on the death of my seed?

“We are close now. You two stay behind with the ass, my son and I will go worship and return. Isaac, you carry the sacrificial wood, I’ll take the knife, lit torch, and rope.”

“But father, what about the lamb?”

“Do not worry, the Lord will provide himself a sacrifice.”

I trust you, my Lord. I have faith in your judgment. But please, there must be another way! Maybe...let me castrate him? That will be better than death! He will not be able to have any children that may intercede in your great plan, and I will not be driven out and shamed for killing my son! I do not understand, do you want my ‘mind descendants’ to have a father who took his son’s life, an innocent’s life? How can these people be blessed, when their foundation is built on a sin?

“Do you see that clearing? Place the firewood in the center and spread it out a little.”

I cannot have a full understanding of my purpose, of right and wrong, only my faith that you do. How do I know I didn’t just imagine you? How do I know you ever spoke to me in the first place? You only really told me that I was blessed. As for Sodom and Gomorrah, maybe our negotiations to save the people were imagined after the devastation occurred. Perhaps my mind is failing me.

“Father, how soon will the lamb come? I’d like to return home soon.”

“I don’t know! Sit and contemplate on the Lord. If you speak in your mind and listen hard, very hard, perhaps he will tell you.”

This life, this existence, is just so difficult! There is never any guarantee of true knowledge, happiness, or safety... even my Lord, the just and eternal being, wants to kill us, without giving us the satisfaction of knowing why! Perhaps it would be better to just end it all, and save ourselves from the endless torment.

“Isaac, have you ever bound an animal for the sacrifice before?”

“I’ve seen the sacrifices before, but I’ve never helped with the ceremony before.”

“Come here. First, you make a loop like so at the end of the rope. Then you slip it around the animals forearms. I’ll show you, put your hands together. You see, when you pull the rope here, the loop becomes smaller, too small for the feet, or hands in this case, to slide through. Then, here, lie down. Then you bring the feet up to the bound hands and wrap the rope around the feet so there’s very little distance between the hands and feet. Then you tie it off nice and tight.”

“Father...I don’t like this. Can you take it off? Uggh! Put me down! Not on the wood! Father!”

He’s moving too much to try to slit his jugular. If I try, I could just end up cutting his neck, he’ll be in too much pain. No, with my hand stabilizing his hands and midsection, it would be better to stab the heart. I’ll need a lot of force to drive the blade through the rib to hit it. I can’t think anymore, I just know I’ll be glad when it’s over. The decision has been made, only the action needs to be performed. Is that the rib that the Lord took from Adam to make his companion? The one protecting the heart? I must do this quickly, I cannot stand to see my son suffer so!

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Isaac is in pain, squirming on the wood he had just carefully arranged, his elderly father’s left knee resting on his torso. His father’s face is distorted as if he were in agonizing pain. A tear, then another, sliding wildly down the creases of his cheeks. The old man’s left hand is holding down Isaac’s bound wrists to keep them out of the way, his right trembling and gripping a blade, lifting it just above his head. He pauses a moment to take a deep breath and summon the strength he’ll need to stabilize himself and drive the knife down with enough force to break through the rib. The old man feels an explosive burst of frustration and rage, looks up to the bright heavens, and with all his power, he releases the loudest scream of his life. He looks down with a scowl at Isaac, squints at him through his wet eyes, and with a grunt he forcefully brings down his resolute right hand.