מקראות גדולות

The

COMMENTATORS' BIBLE

THE RUBIN JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

GENESIS בראשית

With the 1917 and 1985 English translations of
the Jewish Publication Society TANAKH, *the questions of Abarbanel,*
the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, and Kimhi,
and selections from the Masorah and from the commentaries of
Bekhor Shor, Hizkuni, Gersonides, Abarbanel, and Sforno

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The Jewish Publication Society • Philadelphia
2018 • 5778

NJPS at Beer-sheba, and invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. 34And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time.

OJPS tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. 34And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days.

שֶׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא־שָׁם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֵל עוֹלָם׃
34 וַיָּגָר אַבְרָהָם בְּאֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים יָמִים
רַבִּים׃ פ

שביעי

כב וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

22 Some time afterward, God put

RASHI word really refers to an inn (which of course would have all kinds of fruit in it). One can "plant" a tent, of course (see Dan. 11:45). **And invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.** By means of that "tamarisk" the name of the Holy One was invoked. After guests had eaten and drunk, Abraham would say to them, "Give thanks to the One from whose bounty you have eaten. You thought what you ate was mine, but it really came from the One who spoke and the world was created." [L]

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is it necessary to tell us that this story occurred "afterward" (v. 1), or more precisely "after these things" (OJPS)?

22 And it came to pass after these

RASHBAM 22:1 Some time afterward. The Hebrew expression does indeed mean "after what was described in the preceding chapter." Thus, in Genesis 14 Abraham killed the kings, and "some time later" the Holy One told him, "Fear not, Abram" (15:1). In our own chapter, "Abraham was

IBN EZRA 22:1 God put Abraham to the test. Some say that *nisa* here is the equivalent of its homonym, נשא instead of נסה: "God *uplifted* Abraham." But everything about the story refutes them. It means exactly what it says. Now, philosophers say

34 A long time. Longer than he lived at Hebron. He spent 25 years at Hebron and 26 here. He was 75 when he left Haran, the same year he "came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron" (13:18). For we do not find him "dwelling" anywhere before he "dwelt" there. Everywhere else, he was a guest, camping for a while and then traveling on: "Abram *passed through* the land" (12:6), "*moved on* to the hill country" (12:8), and "went down to Egypt to *sojourn* there" (12:10). He spent just three months in Egypt before Pharaoh threw him out, at which point "he proceeded by stages" (13:3) until finally he "moved his tent, and came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron" (13:18). He remained there until Sodom was annihilated, at which point he "journeyed from there" (20:1)—out of shame about Lot—and came to the land of the Philistines. He was 99 years old then, for the angels who came to him in ch. 18 came on the third day following his circumcision. So it was the 25th year since he had left Haran. The "long time" of our verse must imply a longer time than the previous one, for the text does not come to confuse us, but to enlighten us. If this stay had been two years or more longer, the text would have said so explicitly; it must therefore have been no more than one year longer, that is, 26 years. Immediately afterward, Abraham returned to Hebron. The binding of Isaac, related in the next chapter, took place 12 years later. All this is based on Seder Olam.

22:1 Some time afterward. Literally, "after these words." Some of the Sages say: After the words of Satan, who accused, "At all these feasts that Abraham has held, he has not offered a single bull or a single ram before You." The Holy One replied, "Would he have

[L] Rashi's comments are based on the rabbinic notion, which he cites in his Talmud commentary, that the Hebrew word *eshel* ("tamarisk") is really an acronym for *achilah, shetiyah, leviyah* ("eating, drinking, escorting on the way"). Some sources replace *leviyah* with *linah* ("spending the night") in this expression.

KIMHI there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. After all that had happened to him, he summoned his family and "called" (OJPS) on them to hold fast to belief in the Holy One and in none other.

34 And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time. He had a pact with Abimelech and was afraid of no one. In general, Philistia was a land of plenty, as we see from the story of the Shunammite woman, who lived there for seven years on account of a famine in Israel. [J]

22:1 Some time afterward. After he had "resided in the land of the Philistines a long time" (21:34) and then gone to Beer-sheba to live for a while. **God put Abraham to the test.** It is very hard to relate the idea of testing to God, who "probes the heart and searches the

[J] See 2 Kings 8.

NAHMANIDES time. Or the verse may be using *olam* the way it is used in rabbinic Hebrew: "God of *the world*." Abraham was "calling there" (see OJPS) to make known to all humanity the mystery of the Power that controls time and space as a whole, which is done through "the name of the LORD," the mighty One, who has divine power over them all. Maimonides says in the *Guide* that the expression "Everlasting God" alludes to God's having already existed since infinitely far back in the past. Abraham was announcing that He had preceded time. But Onkelos does understand Abraham to be merely "invoking" the name, that is, praying.

22:1 God put Abraham to the test. This business of testing, in my view, is based on the fact that human beings have absolute free will to do as they wish. When someone can do something if he wants to but does not have to if he does not want to, anything he is asked

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 34 Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time. Despite the fact that he did not want to settle down there, since it was not in Canaan. Eventually he found a good place, close to that land, in Canaan—at Beer-sheba, which was the best place for receiving the divine overflow (Gersonides).

Chapter 22

This incident is so central to the welfare of Israel that we recount it in our prayers every day. So it demands much deeper scrutiny than other stories. I have studied the other commentators, and (in the words of Ruth 2:2) "I will go to the fields and glean among the ears." But the basic purpose of this incident was to redeem us from the sin of Adam, the pursuit of lust and the other appetites. From this time forward, Isaac and his descendants would no longer be constrained by their physical desires, but would be ruled by the intellect alone. We were all part of this sacrifice. The Holy One wished to choose us to serve Him, but that could not happen until the poison that the serpent injected into Eve was removed from us. As R. Simeon b. Lakish says, Satan is the evil impulse and the evil impulse is the angel of death—and it is well known that Satan was the serpent involved in the sin of Adam (Abarbanel).

1 Some time afterward. After Abraham had become a great prince, with whom kings made treaties (Bekhor Shor). Just

וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

NJPS Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered,

OJPS things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: "Abraham"; and

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What was the purpose of this incident? It was clearly not for the Holy One's sake, since He knows all hidden secrets; nor for Abraham's, since God's knowledge does not depend on external actions; nor for Isaac's, since due to the nature of those who engendered him he was already perfect and needed no improvement (and in any case it was Abraham whom God "tested"); nor for the rest of the world to know something, since it took place in such a secluded spot (and v. 12 says, "now *I* know"). So what can possibly have been the purpose of this strange incident? ✦ Why are we told that "God put Abraham to the test"? According to our tradition, God tested Abraham 10 times, but this statement is made nowhere else.

RASHI held any of these feasts but for his son? Yet if I were to tell him, 'Sacrifice your son before Me,' he would not resist." Others say: After the words of Ishmael, who was bragging to Isaac that he had been circumcised at age 13 without protest. Said Isaac, "You're trying to frighten me with cutting a single one of your organs? If the Holy One were to tell me, 'Sacrifice yourself

RASHBAM told" about Milcah's children "some time later" (v. 20), that is, after the birth of Isaac described in ch. 21. In the book of Esther, it was only "some time after" Mordecai uncovered the assassination plot and saved King Ahasuerus that "King Ahasuerus promoted Haman" (Esther 3:1). Haman, of course, wanted to kill Mordecai, but (he having saved the king) it was Haman who was hanged instead. Our story too occurred "some time after" the covenant between Abimelech and Abraham (which extended to their sons and grandsons) in the previous chapter. In 21:30, Abraham gives seven ewes to Abimelech, which enraged the Holy One. For Philistia is part of the land of Israel, where the Holy One commanded, "you shall not let a soul remain alive" (Deut. 20:16). Joshua eventually cast lots to distribute the districts of "the five lords of the Philistines" (Josh. 13:13). That is why **God put Abraham to the test.** That is, He "tried" Abraham, putting him through a grueling, painful experience. "You are so proud of the son I gave you that you made a covenant between your sons and theirs? Now offer him up as a burnt offering and let's see what good all your covenant-making does you." A better translation might be "God contended with Abraham." Compare the use of this verb in Exod. 17:7, Ps. 26:2, and Job 4:2.

After coming up with this explanation, I found precisely the same reason given in Midrash Samuel: "You gave him seven ewes? I swear that his descendants will make war seven times on your descendants, and beat them every time." Another reading: "I swear that his descendants will kill seven of the most righteous of your descendants." And here they are: Samson, Hophni and Phinehas, and Saul and his three sons. **[F]** Another reading: "I swear that his descendants will destroy seven sacred locales." And they are: the Tent of Meeting, and those at Gilgal, Nob, Gibeon, Shiloh, and Jerusalem (twice). Another reading: "The Ark

[F] See Judges 16, 1 Samuel 4, and 1 Samuel 31, respectively.

KIMHI mind" (Jer. 17:10) **[K]** and knew that Abraham would obey His command. It cannot have been intended to publicize Abraham's deed to the rest of the world, since no one was there but him and his son. (If he had told the story, would anyone have believed it?) The truth is that its purpose was to show Abraham's complete love to the future generations who would believe in the Torah written by our master Moses at God's dictation. They too would learn to love God with all their heart and with all their soul. Abraham loved Isaac more than his own life. For he was old, and if he were to die, it would be a natural death, at a ripe old age. But his son was still a boy, who did not yet have a wife and children of his own and had not yet had a chance to enjoy the world. But when God told him to offer Isaac up, all his love and affection was as nothing in his eyes. He did not question Him or challenge Him. In truth, the story was passed down in Abraham's family even before the Torah was written. For Isaac told Jacob what had happened, and Jacob told his sons. Once the Torah was written for the descendants of Jacob, the story was publicized throughout the world, where there were those who believed and those who did not. But today, some years after the end of idol worship, most of the world believes in the Torah of Moses and the stories in it. They dispute with us only about the commandments, calling them metaphorical. Since most of the world believes in this great story, it bears witness that our father Abraham loved God with a complete and

[K] Our texts of Kimhi's comment differ slightly, but it seems clear that this is the verse he is citing.

NAHMANIDES to do can be called a test from his perspective. The Tester, however, is simply commanding him to turn the potential into the actual, so that he can be rewarded for his good deed and not merely for good intentions. But you must understand that "the LORD examines the righteous man" (Ps. 11:5) when He knows quite well that the righteous man will do His will. He gives him a command that will put him to the test and prove his

IBN EZRA that there are two different kinds of knowledge—knowledge of the future before it comes into being and knowledge of what is already in existence. This explains how God could "test" Abraham (and see also "now I know" of v. 12). Saadia said putting Abraham to the test here meant displaying his righteousness to all humanity; he also understands "now I know" of v. 12 as if it meant "now I have made known." Didn't he realize that when Abraham bound Isaac not even Abraham's two servants were present? Others say "offer him" of v. 2 really means "bring him up the mountain," and claim that would be sufficient for him to be considered a burnt offering, since the Hebrew word for that literally means "an offering that goes up." But somehow Abraham did not understand the hidden meaning of this prophecy and hastened to slaughter him—at which point the Holy One told him, "That is not what I meant!" Still others think that Abraham was told, "Demonstrate that you are bringing him up the mountain," as Jeremiah was told to "give [the Rechabites] wine to drink" (Jer. 35:2) even though he knew they would not drink it. These geniuses had to come up with explanations of this kind because they were sure the Holy One could not issue a command and then say, "Don't do it." They have forgotten that originally it was the first-born who were selected for divine service, and then a year later they were replaced by the Levites. **[K]** Since the text says in plain Hebrew that "God put Abraham to the test," that puts paid to all these arguments. God tested him in order for him to receive a reward. As for "now I know," see my comment on "if not, I will take note" (18:21). I intend to explain more of this mystery in my comment to "I have singled you out by name" (Exod. 33:12), with

[K] See Numbers 3.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS when Abraham thought his troubles were over (Abarbanel). **God put Abraham to the test.** This was to forestall Satan or anyone else who might say to God (as Satan did in Job 1:9–10), "Does Abraham not have good reason to fear God? Why, it is You who have fenced him round, him and his household and all that he has." He is even making treaties with kings! (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "God had held up Abraham as a banner," giving him the best of everything (Abarbanel). Remember that the purpose of man's existence is to resemble his Creator as much as possible. As we know from 1:26, man was created "in our image, after our likeness" (Sforno). **"Abraham."** Saying it just once, not twice as in v. 11; this conversation was a calm one (Abarbanel).

NJPS "Here I am." [2]And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that

OJPS he said: "Here am I." [2]And He said: "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will

אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃ 2 וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא
אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־
יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ
שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does God command, "Take your son" (v. 2), but turn the order into a request with "please," the Hebrew word left untranslated by NJPS? ✦ Why call him "your son, your favored one . . . whom you love" (as the Hebrew word order has it) instead of simply Isaac? As it is, the text has left an opening for the Muslims to claim that it was Ishmael who was bound. ✦ Why say "go you" (compare OJPS), using the same language as in 12:1? It certainly cannot be interpreted here to mean "go for your own good and profit"! ✦ Why was Abraham commanded to do this on Mount Moriah rather than at home or at least in his own city? ✦ Since God tells him specifically to "offer him there as a burnt offering," how can the Sages claim that "they have built shrines to burn their sons and daughters in fire—which I never commanded, which never came to My mind" (Jer. 7:31) refers to Isaac? ✦ Why does God say "on one of the heights that I will point out to you" without telling him which one?

RASHI before Me,' I would not resist." **Here I am.** This is how the pious reply to a divine summons. It expresses humility and readiness to serve.

2 Take. The *na* missing in NJPS (see "take now" of OJPS) is actually a word that means "please." "Please stand by Me in this test, so that people will not say, 'The earlier tests did not really challenge him.'" **Your son.** "But I have two sons." **Your favored one.** Rather, your "only" one (OJPS). Abraham responded, "Each is the only son of his mother." **Isaac, whom you love.** The Hebrew reads, "whom you love—Isaac" (compare OJPS). Abraham responded to the first phrase, "I love both my sons." Finally the Holy One said straight out: "Isaac." And why did He not say this immediately? In order not to give Abraham a sudden shock that might unsettle his reason; in order to involve Abraham emotionally in the importance of the commandment; and to give him reward for each phrase of the commandment individually. **The land of Moriah.** Jerusalem: "Then Solomon began to build the House of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah" (2 Chron. 3:1). The Sages link the name to the fact that "teaching" (*hora'ah*) went forth from that site to all Israel; Onkelos links it to the myrrh (*mor*) that was used in the incense service. **And offer him there.** He did not say "slaughter him" but merely (as the Hebrew literally says) "bring him up there." **As a burnt offering.** Again, the Hebrew says nothing about "burnt," merely that he is to be offered "up." The Holy One did not want Abraham to slaughter him, merely to bring him up the mountain as an offering. Once he brought him up the mountain, He told him to bring him back down. **On one of the heights that I will point out to you.** The Holy One keeps the righteous in the dark for a while before enlightening them, in order to grant them greater

RASHBAM of the LORD remained in the territory of the Philistines seven months" (1 Sam. 6:1).

2 The land of Moriah. Another name for "the land of Amoriah," the land of the Amorites. The letter א is frequently omitted, e.g., "No Arab shall *pitch his tent* there" (Isa. 13:20); see also Exod. 10:21.

IBN EZRA the help of God, who knows the hidden things.

2 One of the heights. The one on which the Temple was built: "Solomon built the House on Mount Moriah." **[L]** It is not a high mountain. That is where "the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (2 Sam. 24:18) was.

[L] Ibn Ezra's quotation, as we have it, combines the beginning of 1 Kings 6:14 with "Mount Moriah" of 2 Chron. 3:1.

KIMHI perfect love, which everyone ought to learn from him. **He said to him.** As v. 3 makes clear, He said this to him in a dream.

2 Go to the land of Moriah. Jerusalem and its region were called Moriah, which is why the mountain on which the threshing floor of Araunah was located was called Mount Moriah. But the text does not tell us why Moriah was called by that name. **On one of the heights that I will point out to you.** This too was meant to demonstrate Abraham's love of God. Again he does not question or challenge Him. It was to be done there to show Abraham the place where in the future the Temple, with its sacrificial altar, would be built, and to inaugurate

NAHMANIDES righteousness. But He never examines the wicked (who would not obey) in this way. So all the tests described in the Torah are really for the benefit of the one being tested.

2 Take your son, your favored one. Literally, your "only" one (OJPS): the only son of the mistress of the household and the only one through whom "offspring shall be continued" (21:12) for Abraham. **Isaac, whom you love.** This whole command is framed in such a way as to make it seem something grand. **Go to the land of Moriah.** Rashi's comment would seem to demand that this is "the land that *will be* the land of Moriah," or at least that it already had that name because of what lay in its future. Genesis Rabbah does indeed quote "I will betake me to the mount of myrrh [*mor*]" (Song 4:6) with reference to this mountain. But Onkelos's mention of the temple service can hardly be about myrrh. That is just one of the spices used in just one of the aspects of the temple service. If Onkelos wanted to hint at an allusion to myrrh he could certainly have said "the land of incense." He quite clearly meant "the land where they would serve God." He had the same thing in mind as did Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, which says: "He pointed at the altar and told Abraham, 'This is the altar where Adam brought his offerings, where Cain and Abel brought their offerings, and where Noah and his sons brought their offerings.' For 'Abraham built the altar' [v. 9, OJPS]. Not '*an* altar,' but '*the* altar'—the altar where the ancestors brought their offerings." And he derived the name Moriah from *mora*, "fear," because they feared God there, and worshiped Him. But the correct understanding of the straightforward sense is that, as the Sages said, it comes from "the mount of myrrh [*mor*]" of Song 4:6 because "myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon" (Prov. 7:17) are found on that mountain. (Rabbinic literature assures us that cinnamon grew in the land of Israel and that goats and

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 Your favored one.** Rather, your "only" one (see OJPS); Ishmael had been cast out and was gone (Abarbanel). **Offer him there as a burnt offering.** Rather, "offer him up as an offering." The Holy One was deliberately being obscure, but once Abraham had taken Isaac up the mountain, he had completely fulfilled this commandment (Bekhor Shor). He said, "Sovereign of the Universe! Can there be a burnt offering without a priest?" The Holy One replied, "I have made you a priest already! 'The LORD has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek"' [Ps. 110:4]" (Hizkuni). The purpose was to have Abraham educate Isaac about the proper way to serve God; the nature of the test was to have Abraham find the command to sacrifice his son so difficult that he would realize it could be understood differently. If he found the command easy to fulfill, he would not try to figure out some other meaning (Gersonides). The Holy One deliberately spoke ambiguously; He wanted Abraham to misunderstand and attempt to slaughter Isaac (Abarbanel). **On one of the heights that I will point out to you.** Rather, "which I will tell you" (compare

NJPS I will point out to you." [3]So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him. [4]On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. [5]Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."

אֵלֶיךָ׃ 3 וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ
אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ וְאֶת
יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיְבַקַּע עֲצֵי עֹלָה וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ
אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים׃
4 בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו
וַיַּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרָחֹק׃ 5 וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־
הַחֲמוֹר וַאֲנִי וְהַנַּעַר נֵלְכָה עַד־כֹּה
וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֲלֵיכֶם׃

RASHI reward: "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you" (12:1). The same happened to Jonah: "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it what I tell you" (Jon. 3:2).

3 Early next morning. He performed the commandment with alacrity. **Abraham saddled his ass.** He himself, not commanding one of his servants to do it. Love overturns protocol. **Two of his servants.** Ishmael and Eliezer. An important man should not travel without at least two attendants, so that if one must turn aside to answer the call of nature he still has another with him. **He split the wood.** More precisely, he "chopped" the wood. Notice the unusual Aramaic verb Onkelos uses here.

4 On the third day. Why did He delay and not simply tell him immediately where the place was? So that people should not say, "He addled him so that he could not think straight. If Abraham had had a chance to think about it, he would never have done it." **Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.** He saw a cloud wrapped around the top of the mountain.

5 Up there. The Hebrew phrase *ad koh* implies "just a little further in the same direction." Compare "yonder" of OJPS. But the

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must the Torah tell us pointless things like "Abraham saddled his ass" (v. 3)? Do we really care whether Abraham did this himself or had someone do it for him, or about any of the other such details that we are given?

OJPS tell thee of." [3]And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. [4]On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. [5]And Abraham said unto his young men: "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come back to you."

IBN EZRA **3 He split the wood for the burnt offering.** And loaded it on the ass.

4 On the third day. After leaving Beersheba.

5 We will return to you. Some ask how Abraham could have possibly said this; others say he intended to bring Isaac's bones back with him. But Abraham was simply saying this to them so they would not

KIMHI the place with a most precious and beloved life. For even though the act was not completed and he was not slaughtered, God accepted the offering as if it had been made.

3 Early next morning. He did not tell Sarah, fearing she might do herself some harm out of her love for Isaac. **Two of his servants.** The two who regularly went along with him to attend him. **He split the wood for the burnt offering.** The young men thought the wood was to cook with when they stopped for the night, in case they should not find wood there. **He set out for the place of which God had told him.** The land of Moriah. He did not yet know which particular mountain he was going to.

4 On the third day Abraham looked up. Literally, "On the third day *and* Abraham looked up." This is standard syntax in Biblical Hebrew. But it is possible to explain the text as saying, "he got to the place [compare OJPS to v. 3] . . . on the third day, and Abraham lifted up his eyes." **And saw the place from afar.** Now that he was in the land of Moriah, he could see the place, though he still did not know which mountain was the one.

5 You stay here with the ass. A midrash says: He saw a pillar of fire on the mountain. "Isaac," he said, "do you see anything on any of the mountains?" Isaac replied, "I see something like a fire." Abraham said to Ishmael and Eliezer, "Do you see anything on any of the

NAHMANIDES gazelles grazed on it.) But it may have had that name as a way of praising the land of Israel. **[O]** Now here it is the land that is called Moriah; in 2 Chron. 3:1, it is the mountain alone that is called Moriah. Perhaps the place **[P]** was named after the mountain, meaning that Abraham knew the land he was going to but not which particular mountain. The reason he was told to offer Isaac on that particular mountain is that this was "the mountain God desired as His dwelling" (Ps. 68:17), and so He wanted the merit of the Binding to be connected forever with the sacrifices that would be offered there in the future. This is why Abraham called it "Adonai-yireh" (v. 14)—"the Lord will see." Moreover, Abraham's righteousness was so great that the Holy One wished to put him to some trouble and to delay for three days. Had he done it at once, his action would have been hurried and rushed, but after a three-day journey it would clearly have been done in a state of calm consideration. As R. Akiva puts it in Genesis Rabbah, "No one would be able to say, 'He got him so confused that he didn't know what he was doing.'"

3 He split the wood for the burnt offering. Out of his eagerness to prepare for the commandment, in case they did not find wood for the offering where it was needed. So he carried it on the three-day journey. Or Abraham may have followed the Torah law that wood in which a worm is found cannot be used for a sacrificial offering. So he brought wood from home that he knew could be used.

4 Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. He saw a cloud wrapped around the top of the mountain, which fulfilled "that I will point out to you" (v. 2). But the straightforward sense may simply be that "the place" he saw was the land of Moriah, which he recognized.

[O] Some versions of Nahmanides' comment say "in praise of [the People of] Israel." **[P]** Our texts say "the city."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OJPS). Since in v. 3 Abraham "set out for the place of which God had told him," He clearly did tell him where to go. That is how, in v. 4, Abraham "saw the place from afar" (Bekhor Shor).

3 Early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants. He did not summon them or tell them to pack, he just took them. He did not want to arouse suspicion. For the same reason, he took only his own ass and none of the others, which would have been missed (Abarbanel).

5 You stay here with the ass. He did not want to take them along lest they prevent him from slaughtering his son (Bekhor Shor). He

NJPS [6]Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. [7]Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" [8]And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

[9]They arrived at the place of which God

OJPS [6]And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; and they went both of them together. [7]And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: "My father." And he said: "Here am I, my son." And he said: "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" [8]And Abraham said: "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

[9]And they came to the place which God

[6]וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֲצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיָּשֶׂם
עַל־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־
הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו׃ [7]וַיֹּאמֶר
יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ
וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה׃ [8]וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה
בְּנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו׃
[9]וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told twice that "the two walked off together" (vv. 6 and 8)? ✦ What led the Sages to make the implausible claim that this was the same ass that Moses rode, and that eventually the King Messiah himself will ride on? ✦ Why does Abraham take "the wood for the burnt offering" with him, knowing as he does that there are plenty of trees on Mount Moriah? ✦ Why does Isaac say, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering" (v. 7)? Mightn't the firestone and the wood be for some other purpose? And couldn't they acquire a sheep on the way? ✦ Why doesn't Isaac mention the knife? ✦ Why didn't Isaac ask his question as soon as they left home? ✦ When Isaac asks, "Where is the sheep?" why doesn't Abraham tell him the truth?

RASHI midrash notes an allusion to what the Holy One had told him: "So [*koh*] shall your offspring be" (15:5). Abraham thought, "Let's see what becomes of this '*koh*.'" **We will return to you.** He prophesied that in fact both of them would return.

6 The knife. The unusual Hebrew word used here comes from the root that means "to eat." This is a regular Biblical Hebrew metaphor: "My sword *devours* flesh" (Deut. 32:42). And of course a knife actually is used to prepare flesh for eating through kosher slaughter. Another reading: the knife here is called an "eater" because the Jews "consume" the reward for Abraham's willingness to use it. **The two walked off together.** Abraham, who knew that he was going to slaughter his son, walked along of his own free will, as happily as Isaac, who had no idea what was about to happen.

RASHBAM **6 The knife.** The unusual Hebrew word used here comes from the root that means "to eat." This is a regular Biblical Hebrew metaphor: "My sword *devours* flesh" (Deut. 32:42).

IBN EZRA leave before he came back, and so Isaac would not realize what was happening and run away.

9 He bound his son Isaac. Our Sages say Isaac was 37 years old when he was bound, and if this is our tradition we accept it. But logic says this cannot be correct. If it were so, Isaac's righteousness should also be emphasized here. His reward ought to have been double that of his father, for willingly offering himself for slaughter. But there is not the slightest thing in the text about

8 God will see to the sheep. He will provide the sheep. **For His burnt offering, my son.** And if there is no sheep, His burnt offering will be my son. **And the two of them walked on together.** Now Isaac too understood that he was going to be slaughtered. Yet he still walked on as willingly as his father.

9 He bound his son Isaac. He bound his hands and feet behind him. Tying the hands and feet together in this way is the technical

KIMHI mountains?" They replied, "No." He said, "Since you and the ass both see nothing, you stay here with the ass." But the midrash reads it not as *im ha-ḥamor*, "with the ass," but as *am ha-ḥamor*, "ass-people." **We will worship.** Now the servants understood that the firestone and the knife were because he intended to offer sacrifice. Most people who went somewhere to worship did bring a sacrifice, as we are told of Samuel's father Elkanah, who "used to go up from his town every year to worship and to offer sacrifice" (1 Sam. 1:3).

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He did not take the ass, because he did not want the servants to think they were going far. Nor would there be anyone to look after the ass while they were doing the deed. And of course he did not want to bring the ass to such a holy place.

8 God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son. He answered ambiguously. "My son" might be addressing Isaac, or it might be in apposition to "His burnt offering." Isaac understood it the second way, which is why the text continues: **And the two of them walked on together.** They were of one mind about it. The son lovingly acquiesced in offering his life to God as a sacrifice.

9 They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Mount Moriah. When they arrived there, He told him so and showed it to him in a prophetic vision. The midrash that He showed him a pillar of fire (or a cloud wrapped around the top of the mountain)

NAHMANIDES **9 They arrived at the place of which God had told him.** "Now, this is Mount Moriah." He told him, "This is the mountain I told you about."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS did not want to tell them what was happening because he himself was not yet sure how things would turn out (Gersonides).

7 Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering? We learn that Abraham regularly offered sacrifice, and that Isaac had seen him doing so (Gersonides). He did not ask about the knife, since people carry swords and knives for protection (Abarbanel).

8 God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son. Abraham knew that "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you" (21:12), but he was still afraid that Isaac might be slaughtered. He thought, "He might already have slept with a woman and produced a son or daughter." Isaac was already 37 years old, remember (Hizkuni). Rather, "May God see to the sheep for His burnt offering, son." It was a prayer (Gersonides). **And the two of them walked on together.** If Isaac was now fully aware of what was to happen, why does only Abraham get the credit? Because Isaac would have only a few moments of pain and fear, while Abraham would live unceasingly with it, before, during, and after the event for the rest of his life. But the text would certainly have told us if Isaac had known he was to be slaughtered, and would have praised him. In fact, he had no idea what Abraham was planning (Abarbanel).

9 Abraham built an altar there. Isaac did not help build it. His father kept him safely out of harm's way so that Satan could not

NJPS had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10]And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. [11]Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am." [12]And he said, "Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld

OJPS had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. [10]And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. [11]And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said: "Abraham, Abraham." And he said: "Here am I." [12]And he said: "Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man, seeing thou hast not withheld thy

הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת־הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים׃
10 וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־
הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת לִשְׁחֹט אֶת־בְּנוֹ׃ 11 וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו
מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם׀
אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃ 12 וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־
תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנַּעַר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ
מְאוּמָה כִּי׀ עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים
אַתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ

RASHI definition of "binding." That is why the "streaked" goats of 30:35 are literally called "bound." They had a strip of white at the ankles, as if identifying the location in which their legs would be bound.

11 Abraham! Abraham! Repeating the name affectionately.

12 Do not raise your hand against the boy. To slaughter him. "You mean I've come here for no reason? Let me make a tiny wound on him and draw a bit of blood." **Or do anything to him.** Do not do the slightest thing (*me'umah*) to him. Do not make the slightest blemish (*mum*). **For now I know.** Said R. Abba: Abraham told him, "Let me think out loud before You. The other day You told me, 'It is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you' [21:12]. Then You said, 'Take your son' [v. 2]. Now You tell me, 'Do not raise your hand against the boy'!" The Holy One said to him, "'I will not violate My covenant, or change what I have uttered' [Ps. 89:35]. I told you, 'Take,' and I would not change what I have uttered. I did not tell you to slaughter him, just to take him 'up' the mountain. So 'now I know' what to reply to Satan and to the other nations who wonder why I love you so much. I have a ready answer now, for they can all see **that you fear God.**"

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is it "God" who issues the command of v. 2 but only "an angel" (v. 11) who tells Abraham not to do it? ✦ How could Abraham suddenly be told, "Do not raise your hand against the boy" (v. 12)? "God is not man to be capricious, or mortal to change His mind" (Num. 23:19)! ✦ If God's command in v. 2 was really, as one might take the Hebrew, to "offer him up as an offering" but not to slaughter him, how could Abraham have made such a mistake? Do prophets misunderstand their instructions? That would cast all religion into profound doubt. ✦ How could Abraham "do anything to him" without raising his hand against him? ✦ How is it possible for the text to say, "for now I know," as if previously God did *not* know? ✦ The verb phrase literally says, "now I knew." How is this contradiction to be reconciled? ✦ Didn't this action really show that Abraham *loved* God, not that he feared Him? ✦ What precisely did Abraham do that showed his fear of God? Hadn't he demonstrated his fear of God long ago? ✦ Why is the Holy One always referred to as "God" before Abraham picks up the knife, but afterward as "the LORD"? (V. 12 is not an exception: to "fear God" is an idiom.)

RASHBAM **12 For now I know that you fear God.** Now I see, and it is publicized to all the world, that you fear God.

IBN EZRA Isaac. Others say he was 5 years old, which is likewise impossible—he carried "the wood for the burnt offering" (v. 6). The most plausible scenario is that he was close to 13 years old, and that his father forced him, unwillingly, to be bound. The fact that his father concealed what was happening from him proves this: "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son" (v. 8). If he had said, "You are the burnt offering," he might have run away.

11 Abraham! Abraham! Twice, as if in haste.

KIMHI that I mentioned in my comments to v. 5 takes showing him this as the equivalent of telling him. **He laid out the wood.** On top of the fire, to set it alight. **He bound his son Isaac.** He bound him hand and foot so he could not kick. Even though Isaac was offering himself willingly to be bound and sacrificed, he was afraid the desire to resist might overcome him. So he told his father to tie him good and tight.

10 And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. One slaughters the sacrifice on the altar first, after which the fire consumes it.

11 Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven. That is, he heard the voice but saw nothing.

12 Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. The repetition was to ensure that there would be no misunderstanding. **For now I know.** The verb in this conjugation never means "to make known." I believe the meaning here is the same as in "I have singled you out by name" (as NJPS translates Exod. 33:17). What it means is that the particular has returned to the whole. That is enough to explain it to those who understand. It ought not be clarified any more than this. **That you fear God.** This was a fear that was really love. For it was not a physical fear but a spiritual one, a fear that his soul would perish from the World to Come.

NAHMANIDES **12 Now I know that you fear God.** Abraham's fear of God had previously been potential and had not been actualized. Now it was made known by this great deed, his merit was displayed in full, and he would have "a full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel" (Ruth 2:12). What the passage is saying is that it was God who tested Abraham by commanding him to bind his son and an angel of the Lord who prevented him and gave him the promise of blessing. This will be explained in my comment to 48:15.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS arrange an accident that would blemish him, making him unfit for sacrifice (Hizkuni). He had to rebuild the old altar, which had fallen into ruin (Abarbanel). **He laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.** Isaac thought Abraham was showing him what to do. It was not until Abraham picked up the knife that Isaac realized that Abraham was serious (Abarbanel).

11 Abraham! Abraham! Repeating the name as one does when calling urgently; we do the same in French (Hizkuni). Clearly prophecy) if he was upset or depressed (Gersonides).

12 Do not raise your hand against the boy. You have already fulfilled the commandment. You were told to offer him "up," and you have done so by bringing him up above the tree line (Bekhor Shor). **Now I know.** Up until now I made as if I did not know (Bekhor Shor). I, the angel, know that God was justified in exalting you over us angels (Sforno). **Since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.** Rather, "You have not withheld your son, your favored one. [You fear God more, and are of higher rank,] *than* Me" (Sforno).

NJPS your son, your favored one, from Me." [13]When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. [14]And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, "On the mount of the LORD there is vision."

OJPS son, thine only son, from Me." [13]And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. [14]And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-jireh; as it is said to this day: "In the mount where the LORD is seen."

מִמֶּנִּי׃ 13 וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא
וְהִנֵּה־אַיִל אַחַר* נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבַךְ בְּקַרְנָיו
וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאַיִל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ
לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ׃ 14 וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־
הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֵאָמֵר
הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יֵרָאֶה׃

13. ע בנוסח אחר "אחד"

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What made Abraham think he was supposed to offer up the ram (v. 13) as a replacement for his son? Presumably this ram had an owner, so Abraham would be offering up a stolen sacrifice. ✦ Where does Abraham come off announcing that "the Lord will see," which is what "Adonai-yireh" (v. 14) literally means? ✦ Why is that site not actually called "Adonai-yireh," neither in 2 Chron. 3:1 (where it is called "Mount Moriah") nor anywhere else?

RASHI **13 His eye fell upon a ram.** Made ready for precisely this purpose during the six days of creation. **Caught in the thicket.** NJPS omits an important word, translated "behind him" by OJPS. But the Hebrew says simply, "after." Abraham saw this ram caught in the thicket only *after* the angel told him, "Do not raise your hand against the boy" (v. 12). Onkelos makes this point explicit in his translation. "Thicket" simply means "branches." It was caught by its horns because it was running toward Abraham when Satan entangled it in the underbrush in order to stop it. **And offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.** Once we are told that Abraham "offered it up," what does "in place of his son" add? That at each step of the procedure he would pray, "May this offering be accepted before You as if it were my own son who had been slaughtered, as if it were his blood being thrown on the altar, as if his hide were flayed, as if it was his hide being turned into smoke and ash." So this sacrifice was literally made "instead [see OJPS] of his son."

14 Adonai-yireh. Literally, "the Lord will see." Onkelos clarifies the straightforward sense of the expression: "The Lord will see that this place is chosen for Him to rest His Presence upon it, so that sacrifices can be offered there." **Whence the present saying.** Rather, "it will be said in the days of future generations, 'The Lord appears to His people on this mountain.'" "To this day" of OJPS is literally "today," referring in this case to future days, like the common biblical phrase in which the Hebrew literally does say "to this day." All the generations to come that read this verse (or the others where the similar expression is used) will say "today," meaning their own times. But a midrash reads our verse differently: May the Lord see this binding as a reason to forgive Israel every year and to save them from punishment, so that "on this day" in all future generations "it will be said, '**On the mount of the LORD there is** visible'" the dust of Isaac, heaped on the altar to provide permanent atonement.

KIMHI **13 Abraham looked up.** Hoping to see some animal fit for sacrifice, near or far, that he might offer instead of his son. **His eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns.** It was a miracle from God, on Abraham's behalf, that this ram strayed so far from the rest of the flock without the shepherd noticing. If Abraham had found the shepherd he would of course have paid for the ram; he would not have offered it up to the Lord without paying for it.

14 Adonai-yireh. "The Lord will see," a reference to "God will see to the sheep" (v. 8). **Whence the present saying, "On the mount of the LORD there is vision."** Rather, Abraham is saying, "This day [compare OJPS] will be said of, spoken of, when the Lord appears on this mountain." When the altar and the Temple are built here, this day on which I offered up my son Isaac will be told of." For he was told prophetically why that mountain had been chosen: His descendants would one day bring sacrificial offerings there.

RASHBAM **13 When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns.** NJPS has omitted the word translated "behind him" by OJPS, which really means "afterward." Here is the correct interpretation of the verse: Abraham looked up, and his eye fell on a ram passing by, after which he saw that the ram, in passing, had been caught in the thicket by its horns. He thought, "This angel who was sent to me by the Holy One must certainly have arranged to have this ram substitute for my son. That is why it got caught—so I could catch it and sacrifice it." The Hebrew word, ordinarily a preposition as in vv. 1 and 20, is found elsewhere as an adverb, the way it is used in our verse: "*Afterward* Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh" (Exod. 5:1); see also Ps. 68:26 and Eccles. 12:2.

14 Whence the present saying. Present and future. **On the mount of the LORD there is vision.** Rather, "on the mountain where the LORD appears"—where the Holy One appeared to Abraham.

IBN EZRA **13 Caught in the thicket.** NJPS omits a word: "*after* it was caught in the thicket." (If "caught" is a participle rather than a perfect, the meaning is not really different: "after it was being caught." There are many such cases.) Some say *aḥar* means that "Abraham looked up *afterward*," but it would have to say *aḥar-ken* or *aḥarei-ken* for it to mean that. The word *aḥar* by itself is not used that way.

14 Whence the present saying, "On the mount of the LORD there is vision." See my introductory comments to Deuteronomy 1.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 Abraham went and took the ram.** He would not have taken it, fearing that it belonged to someone else, but once he saw it get caught in the thicket, he realized that was a sign that he should take it (Bekhor Shor). All these details are meant to convince us of the truth of the story (Gersonides). **And offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.** It was a replacement, not an offering of thanksgiving for the Holy One's having saved his son (Abarbanel).

14 Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh. Literally, "the Lord will see." The Lord will see to it that people believe I have obeyed His command. I know that people are saying, "'On the mount of the Lord it is seen'—We'll see when they get to the mountain whether Abraham will actually slaughter his son." When they see him coming home with me, they'll say that I "committed a criminal offense, and denied God above" (Job 31:28). They will not believe that God Himself arranged it. But the Holy One will see that I did not rebel against His word, and He will be my witness (Hizkuni). The Hebrew does not mean that he named the place, but that he "called the name" (OJPS) at that place. He prayed that everyone would realize his intention to slaughter his son had been made null and void. That is why v. 15 tells us he was answered "a second time" (Abarbanel). **On the mount of the LORD there is vision.** Rather, "it will be seen" that I built an altar, proving my intent. But both of these verbs may in fact be future forms indicating a past tense (as sometimes happens): "The Lord saw" that I said "God will see to the sheep" (v. 8), and He fulfilled his servant's word (Abarbanel).