

THE BIBLE'S FIRST USE OF WORDS

Some aspects of the Bible are hidden. This aspect is in plain sight - on the surface. There are many occasions in the Bible where the Holy Spirit uses the first use of a word to draw attention to something important, To illustrate this phenomenon – it is truly phenomenal - I will examine the first uses of four different words in the story of Abraham and Isaac climbing Mount Moriah to offer a sacrifice to God: tempt, love, lamb, and obey. They or any variants of them are highlighted in the following text, which reads as follows;

*1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did **tempt** Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. 2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou **lovest**, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. 3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. 4 Then 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 worship, and come again to you, 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac spake 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, My son, God will provide himself a **lamb** for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. 9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an 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 thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a 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 Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. 15 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, 16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: 17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; 18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast **obeyed** my voice. (KJV Genesis 22:1-18)*

a. Tempt

The first use of the word “tempt” or any variants of it appears in verse 1. Here the word “tempt” does not mean “tempt to do evil.” It means “test” or “try.” In most cases it is translated “prove.”

Abraham did not want to slay Isaac, and God was not tempting him to do so. He was testing Abraham to demonstrate just how obedient he would be. He already knew that Abraham would put God's command above Isaac's life, but he wanted us to know that Abraham would do so. Henry Morris uses an interesting analogy. To quote him, "The engineer may know full well that his design will stand the stress and strain to which it is subjected. Nevertheless, the construction specifications will require that it be tested – not to assure the engineer, but to assure the public, that it will stand."¹

b. Love

The first use of the word "love" or any variants of it appears in verse 2. Here the word "lovest" refers to the love of a father for his only son whom he will sacrifice to accomplish God's purposes, the exact situation that God-the-Father will be in when he sends God-the-Son to become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth and then die on the cross at Calvary to atone for the sins of all who will acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior. God-the-Father is the archetype for Abraham-the-father, and God-the-Son or Jesus is the archetype for Isaac-the-son.

The first use of the word "love" is particularly significant when we consider the following:

- ***The word "beloved" occurs three times in the Gospel according to MATTHEW.*** On all three occasions, God is identifying Jesus as his beloved son, who will be sacrificed to serve God's purpose – the redemption of the faithful.
 - It first use occurs in Matthew's description of Jesus' baptism: "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my **beloved** Son, in whom I am well pleased" (KJV Matthew 3:16-17).
 - Its second use occurs when Matthew quotes Isaiah the prophet speaking for God. Isaiah says, "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my **beloved**, in whom my soul is well pleased" (Matthew 12:18).
 - Its third use occurs in Matthew's description of Jesus' transfiguration. When He, Peter, John, and James are up on the Mount, God again identifies Jesus as his Son: "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my **beloved** Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (KJV Matt 17:5).
- ***The word "beloved" occurs twice in the Gospel according to MARK.*** Again on both occasions, God is identifying Jesus as his beloved son, who will be sacrificed to serve God's purpose – the redemption of the faithful.

¹ See Henry Morris's Genesis Record, p.374.

- Its first use occurs in Mark’s description of Jesus’ baptism: “And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my **beloved** Son, in whom I am well pleased” KJV Mark 1:10-11).
 - Its second use occurs in Mark’s description of Jesus’ transfiguration. When He, Peter, John, and James are up on the Mount of Transfiguration, God again identifies Jesus as his Son: “And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my **beloved** Son: hear him” (KJV Mark 9:7).
- **The word “beloved” occurs three times in the Gospel according to LUKE**. Again, on both occasions, God identifies Jesus as his beloved son, who will be sacrificed to serve God’s purpose – the redemption of the faithful.
- Its first use occurs in Luke’s description of Jesus’ baptism: “Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, 22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my **beloved** Son; in thee I am well pleased” (KJV Luke 3:21-22).
 - Its second use occurs in Luke’s description of Jesus’ transfiguration. When He, Peter, John, and James are up on the Mount of Transfiguration, God again identifies Jesus as his Son: “While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. 35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my **beloved** Son: hear him” (KJV Luke 9:34-35).
 - Its third use occurs in Luke’s description of Jesus’s Parable of the Vineyard Owner. After the owner of the vineyard sent two servants to the collect his share of the vineyard’s harvest, only to have them killed, he asked himself, “What shall I do? I will send my **beloved** son; it may be that they will reverence him when they see him” (Luke 20:13).
- Notice that, by this point, the word “beloved” has been used eight times in the first three Gospels, and three of these times are the first use of it in the book where it appears. This brings us to the Gospel of John.
- **The 1st use of the word “love” in any form in the Gospel according to JOHN** occurs when Jesus says, “For God so **loved** the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (KJV John 3:16-17). Notice an important change to the pattern that we observed in Genesis, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where the love of a father for his son is mentioned. Here the love of God for the world – that’s us – is mentioned.

- What we have here is God-the-Father using the first use of a variation on the word “love” ten times to bring attention to the central event of Creation – his sacrifice of his beloved Son on Calvary to mend the broken relationship between himself and his beloved creation, which we know from other scripture means us. Love is the motivating force here, which is not surprising, because I Corinthians 13:13 tells us that “love” is the greatest of God’s gifts and 1 John 4:8 tells us that God himself is the personification of love. In addition, it is significant that love in all these passages is divine love – not human love, such as the love of a husband for his wife, the love of a mother for her child, etc. Human love is tepid and pallid in comparison to divine love, which shines and warms like the noonday sun.

Here is a profound indication of God’s authorship of the Bible. Consider that Genesis 22:2 is located in *Chronicle 6 – The Generations of Terah*. Thus, the six persons who wrote Genesis’s chronicles 0-5 during the 4th and 3rd millenniums BC avoided using the word “love” entirely. Then Isaac, who wrote his chronicle in first half of the 2nd millennium BC, used it first in connection with a father sacrificing his beloved son. Moses then incorporated Isaac’s chronicle in Genesis, which he wrote in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. Then Matthew (the tax collector), Mark (probably the young son of a Jerusalem woman in whose house Christians met for prayer), Luke (a physician), and John (probably a fisherman) wrote their Gospels in the first century AD. What possessed these 12 men, from different backgrounds and professions, writing in different times over nearly 4,000 years (i.e. from Adam’s later years to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple) to either avoid the use of the word “love” altogether or use it first to describe the love of a father for a son whom he intended to sacrifice to God. The only reasonable answer to that question is, the Holy Spirit. The Bible is truly God-breathed.

c. Lamb

Now let’s consider the bulk of the story in verses 3–17.

- Verse 3: Whatever reservations Abraham may have had in his heart, he did not delay in his obeying God’s command. He, Isaac, and two servants left early the next morning to travel to Mount Moriah.
- Verses 4-5: On the third day of travel, with the mountain in sight, Abraham said to the two servants that he and Isaac would “...go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” I understand this phrase to say that both Abraham and Isaac would go and then both Abraham and Isaac would return, indicating that Abraham believed or even knew that God would provide some alternative to his having to slay Isaac. After all, God had promised that Isaac would sire a great nation, and God’s promises were sure.
- Verse 6: Just as Jesus would carry the wooden cross on his back from the place of scourging to Calvary, so Isaac carried the wood on which he would supposedly be sacrificed on the mountain. Notice that the phrase “they went both of them together” appears in the passage twice. They were in close fellowship during the entire trip up the mountain.

- Verse 7: Then Isaac addressed Abraham, “My father,” and Abraham replied, “Here am I, my son.” The author is making sure that we keep the fact that a father and his son are trekking toward a sacrifice in which the father will offer the life of his beloved son to God. Isaac then said, “Behold, the fire and the wood: but where is the **lamb** for a burnt offering?” Isaac must have been getting a little uneasy at this point. He and his father were clearly headed up the mountain to make an offering to God, and they were equipped with the necessary wood and knife, but they lacked a sacrificial victim.
- Verse 8: Abraham replied, “God will provide the **lamb**” and they continued on their journey. Note that, despite his misgivings, Isaac was accompanying Abraham willingly. He trusted and obeyed his father, just as Jesus would trust and obey His father and go to Mount Moriah willingly, saying, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39).
- Verse 9: If Isaac had any misgivings about what was about to happen, they were confirmed at the point that Abraham bound him and laid him on the altar. Yet he did not protest, just as Jesus would not protest His scourging and crucifixion.
- Verse 10: As Abraham picked up the knife which he was about to plunge into his beloved son, can you imagine the thoughts that were going through the minds of both father and son. They must have been in agony.
- Verses 11-12: Then an Angel of the Lord spoke out of heaven. Angel of the Lord and the LORD are interchangeable in the Scriptures. Here was the pre-incarnate LORD Himself speaking, and He said, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.” Now we know the full meaning of the first verse in this story, “God did tempt Abraham.” God wanted to show all of us who would hear or read this story that Abraham’s faith in the LORD was so strong that he would not even balk at slaying his beloved son when commanded to do so by the Lord God Almighty. ²
- Verse 13: The first thing to note here is that God was merciful to Abraham and Isaac. He provided an alternative offering to Isaac. The next thing to note is that a ram is not a lamb. The lamb that God would provide for an offering on Mount Moriah lay almost eighteen centuries in the future. Some people argue with me here. For them, the ram was the lamb to which Abraham was referring above. Consider the following, however.

² Do we have that kind of faith in our LORD? The Lord often tests us to show us – not Him, for he already knows - just how much we trust him. In the moment when I turned my life over to the LORD, I said, “I give you all that I am or will be. I give you all that I have or will have. I will serve you for the rest of my life.” At the time, I had little understanding of what I was saying, and I had no expectation that He would take me at my word. Imagine my consternation when he began taking away from me my money, my home, my clients, etc. and when he began turning away from me my acquaintances, my friends, and finally my family. I learned pretty quickly that the walk with the LORD is not a leisurely stroll around a rose garden. It is a difficult and demanding trek.

- In the Edenic Age, when Adam and Eve sinned and then became ashamed of their nakedness, “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make *coats of skins*, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). These skins were undoubtedly sheepskins, which obviously required that God kill some sheep to provide a covering or atonement for their sin. But Adam, the undoubted author of Genesis’s Chronicle 2, went out of his way to avoid using the word *lamb*.
- In the Antediluvian Age, Cain was a “tiller of the ground” or farmer and Abel was a “keeper of *sheep*” or rancher (Genesis 4:2). When Cain brought the produce of his farm to the Lord as an offering, the Lord was not pleased with his offering. Abel, on the other hand, “...brought the *firstlings of his flock*” to the Lord, and the Lord was pleased with his offering. (Genesis 4: 4). These verses also come from Genesis’s Chronicle 2. Note how Adam again went out of his way to avoid using the word *lamb*.
- In the Postdiluvian Age, when Abraham and Isaac were climbing Mount Moriah to present an offering to the Lord, as we have seen, Isaac asked his father, “...where is the *lamb* for a burnt offering?” and Abraham replied, “...God himself will provide a *lamb* for a burnt offering” (Genesis 22: 7-8). Here is the first use of the word *lamb* in Genesis. It refers to a *lamb* that will be sacrificed to God. But as we have also already seen, God provided a ram, not a lamb. The lamb that God would provide would be his Son – “...the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

We can see that the reference here is to the “**Lamb of God**” by following the train of the use of the word lamb in the Scriptures.

- EGYPT: The first use of the word lamb in Exodus occurs in Chapter 12. The Scriptures record that the Lord directed Moses to instruct Israel as follows: every man should take a “*lamb* without blemish, a male of the first year” (v.5) and, on the fourteenth day of the first month of the year, kill the *lamb* "in the evening" (verse 6)" - that is just after the beginning of the day at 6:00 p.m. - and daub **the lamb's blood** on the lintel and jambs of the door to his house. “And the blood shall be to you a token upon the houses where you are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (verses 11-13). The blood of this lamb would provide a **protective covering for the FAMILY**. The Angel of Death would kill the first born in Egypt but would pass over the Hebrew houses without touching the firstborn therein.
- SINAI: The next use of the word lamb in Exodus occurs in Chapter 29, "...thou shalt offer upon the altar; two **lambs** of the first year day by day continually. The one **lamb** thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other **lamb** thou shalt offer at even (verses 38-39). The blood of these lambs would provide a **protective covering for the NATION**.

- JUDEA: The first use of the word lamb in the New Testament occurs in John 2, "Behold the **Lamb of God**, which taketh away the sin of the world! (verse 29)" Now the blood of the Lamb of God would provide a **protective covering for the WORLD**.

Once again, I would ask the question, what possessed these different men from different backgrounds and professions, writing in different times over nearly 4,000 years to either avoid the use of the word **lamb** altogether or use it to describe the protective covering that its blood would provide, first to an INDIVIDUAL, then to a FAMILY, next to a NATION, and finally to the WORLD. The only reasonable answer to that question is, the Holy Spirit. The Bible is truly God-breathed.

- Verse 14: *Jehovah-Jireh* means "The Lord will provide." The mount of the Lord is Mount Moriah. To Abraham, the Lord provided a ram of sacrifice on Mount Moriah. To the world, the Lord will provide a lamb of sacrifice on Mount Moriah.
- Verse 15: The Angel of the Lord called out to Abraham a second time. Again, this is undoubtedly the Lord Himself speaking.
- Verse 16: Here is something interesting. The Lord swears by his own name, because there is nothing higher than Himself by which to swear. His promise to Abraham is absolute.
- Verse 17: Here God renews his promise that Abraham will sire a great nation, and it will overcome its enemies, as indeed it did when it was faithful to the Lord. When it was not faithful, it suffered defeat, exile, the diaspora, etc., but the Lord has not forgotten Israel and will raise it up when it returns to Him.

d. Obey

The first use of the word "obey" or any variation of it appears in verse 18: Here the Lord explains why all the nations of the earth will be blessed by Abraham's seed. First, the word "seed" here is singular, indicating that He is talking about one person, who must be the Lord himself, who will bring salvation to a multitude of faithful believers like Abraham. Second, the Lord is making this promise "because thou hast **obeyed** my voice." The Lord is stressing the fact that belief and obedience go hand in hand. The Lord expects individuals, families, and nations to honor Him and to obey His commandments. One is not walking with the Lord if he or she is not striving to *obey* the Lord's commandments.
