

Middleton Book Proposal

I propose to work (over my sabbatical, beginning in Fall 2016) on a book tentatively entitled *The Silence of Abraham, The Passion of Job*, which would compare Abraham's ominous and silent attempt to sacrifice his son in Genesis 22 (known in Jewish tradition as the Aqedah or "binding" of Isaac) and Job's outspoken challenge to God in response to his sufferings (which God finally affirms as "right" speech, at the end of the book).

The book would thus be organized around the two foci of Genesis 22 (interpreted in the context of the Abraham story in Genesis 12-25) and the book of Job. I'm not sure, at the moment, exactly how this would be further organized into chapters. That would develop organically out of my research.

The book would be framed by the important question of how Christians, who believe and trust in the God of heaven and earth, may respond to suffering. Given that the lament psalms provide model modes of prayer in situations of suffering, the book would challenge traditional Christian interpretations of Genesis 22 and the book of Job. Whereas Abraham's blind obedience in Genesis 22 to God's command to sacrifice his son is typically seen as virtuous, God's response to Job is usually thought to be a divine put-down for his audacity in challenging God's running of the cosmos.

Among the exegetical questions to be addressed in the book are:

- Why does Abraham shift from bold protest prayer (on behalf of Sodom) in Genesis 18 to ominous silence (about the death of his own son) in Genesis 22?
- What is the significance of the phrase "dust and ashes," which occurs in the Bible *only* on the lips of Abraham (in Genesis 18) and Job (in Job 30 and 42)?
- In what sense is the term "God-fearer" applied both to Abraham (in Genesis 22) and to Job (in the first two chapters of the book)?
- Could the book of Job be thought of as a commentary on the Abraham story?
- If so, what are we to understand by this inner-biblical interpretation?
- And what are the implications of the differing responses to suffering of these two "patriarchs" (one Jewish, one gentile) for our understanding of faithful prayer in the face of suffering in the church today?

The book will draw on relevant teaching I have done on Genesis and Job and on academic papers I have presented on Genesis 22 and YHWH's speeches in the book of Job. The outcome would be reflections on an honest, yet trustful, spirituality of suffering for the church.