

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father
justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son
on the altar? (NASB)

1. This verse is a question posed by James and it begins with the phrase, “Was not Abraham our father ...? This indicates that James, who is a Jew, certifies that Abraham is the progenitor of the Jewish race.
2. Abraham started out as a Gentile whose name was Abram, the Hebrew proper noun, **אַבְרָם ('avram)**: “exalted father,” which is used in Genesis 12:1
3. The Lord changed Abram’s name in Genesis 17:1 to **אַבְרָהָם ('avraham)**: “father of a multitude.” In the context of that chapter, the Lord institutes the ritual of circumcision. It was an outward, physical confirmation of the promise to Abraham that “you will be the father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:4).
4. In between these two verses we have the confirmation of Abraham’s salvation in:

Genesis 15:6 Then he had believed in the Lord;
and it was credited to his account for righteousness.

5. His salvation occurred previous to this verse. His salvation occurred in his hometown of Ur after which he was commanded to leave the area and move to Canaan, documented in Genesis 12.
6. The pastor of the Jerusalem church is James, who is a Jew. His parents are Joseph and Mary; both are descendants of David of the tribe of Judah. James is teaching a congregation made up of Jews, therefore, he can correctly proclaim to them that Abraham is “our father.”
7. James has advanced in his epistle to James 2:21, where he uses Abraham as a superb example of justification by works. It’s a good example because what Abraham did was not possible until he was 120 years old.
8. How old was Abram when he left Haran? He was married to Sarai according to Genesis 12:4 when he was seventy-five years old. Forty-five years had passed before he was commanded to sacrifice his only legitimately born son, Isaac.
9. Abraham did not carry out the commandment to sacrifice Isaac on the spot. No, he was ordered to travel to a specific location to perform the task. His instructions were to leave Beersheba and travel to Mount Moriah where the deed was to be executed. Here is some information on the road Abraham traveled:



A north-south road handled mostly local Palestinian traffic rather than international commerce. It began at Beersheba and reached the central ridge of West Palestine at Hebron; it continued through Jerusalem.

11. The approximate distance between Beersheba and Jerusalem was about 45 miles. Donkeys could travel as much as twenty miles a day, about 15 if carrying a load. So it was on the third day when these men arrived at Mount Moriah.
12. Abraham had a three-day journey to consider the task ahead of him. On the first day he could have turned back, but he kept going. Same on the second day, but no turning back. Then on the third day he could see Mount Moriah, the site of the sacrifice. He continued his progress toward the objective.
13. Once at the foot of the mount, he dismounted and told his servants to wait with the donkey and said, “we will worship and return to you” (Genesis 22:5).
14. The word “worship” is the verb שָׁחָה (*shachah*). Its root meaning is, “to bow down.” Abraham did not do this physically, but mentally. He was bowing down mentally for three days running. What he was actually doing was concentrating on the Word of God as the working object of his faith.
15. This application of worship is taught by Jesus Christ in this New English Translation of:

John 4:23 “But a time [**an hour**] is coming—and now is here—when the true worshipers will worship [**predictive future active indicative of προσκυνέω (*proskunéō*): referring to the Church Age**] the Father in Spirit [**the filling of the Holy Spirit**] and truth [**doctrines learned from Scripture**], for the Father seeks such people to be His worshipers.

v. 24 God is a Spirit, and the people who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth.”
(NET)

16. The principle to which the Lord refers is the new dispensation in which true worship is performed under the enabling power of the Holy Spirit Who teaches truth from the Word of God to the souls of positive-volition believers.
17. When a believer grows in grace by acquiring knowledge from imperative moods and passages that direct him to submit to certain behavior patterns, he is obligated to apply them in his personal life.



18. When executed, it is the result of his faith submitting to biblical principles followed by overt action. This is true worship. Without going through this process, activities that are referred to as worship are not.
19. Here are some examples of activities that should be motivated by resident doctrine but instead are “works without faith responding to human viewpoint: (1) pious expressions or posture, (2) observing the Eucharist, (3) singing hymns, (4) handing out tracts, (5) giving money, (6) constructing Jimmy Carter houses in the third world, or (7) winning a Sword drill.
20. True worship is the application of the Word of God to life and circumstances. The single most important issue in the Christian way of life is learning Scripture, retaining it in the soul’s stream of consciousness, and then, in the status of true worship, applying it to life and circumstances.
21. Genesis 15:6 is a report of Abram’s justification by faith in Messiah. James 2:21 is Abraham’s justification by works whose working object for his faith is the Abrahamic Covenant.
22. The doctrinal rational for Abraham was complete trust in the integrity of God. God has promised him a great nation under the Abrahamic Covenant. He had promised him a son when he and his wife, Sarah, were both sterile. He had seen his son, Isaac, grow to maturity now old enough to extend the family’s chart pedigree which he would later do with his marriage to Rebekah and the births of Jacob and Esau.
23. Therefore, the commandment to sacrifice his son was something he had the courage to do based on divine promises already made to him. Abraham believed that in order for the promises to be fulfilled, God would bring Isaac back to life by resuscitation.
24. Therefore, Abraham was not carrying out a ritual for the sake of doing a ritual. No father, without certain, confirmable guarantees, would harm his son by just blindly “following orders.”
25. Abraham has acquired power in his soul through the inculcation of doctrine, had seen God’s faithfulness toward him, and trusted His veracity was trustworthy beyond question.
26. Therefore, on Mount Moriah, Abraham was justified by works whose working object was directed toward the integrity of God and His promise.
27. What James is confirming, by distinguishing the differences between the two major events in Abraham’s life, is that there are two certifications of a man’s faith.



28. In Genesis 15:6, Abraham was justified by faith when the working object for his faith was the Integrity of God and His Messiah. In Genesis 22:1–10, Abraham was justified by works by preparing to sacrifice his son because the working object of his faith was the Abrahamic Covenant.
29. In order to please God, the believer must come to understand that divine good is the production of works accomplished by means of recall and application of the Word of God.
30. Therefore, two principles emerge: (1) A believer's "works," or production of divine good, are not the result of doing something he assumes is the "right thing to do." (2) The working object of one's "works" must find its catalyst and certification in the Word of God under the filling, recall, and application ministries of the Holy Spirit.
31. With this background, let's start the exegesis of verse 21. It begins with the phrase, "Was not Abraham, our father, justified?" The verb is the aorist passive indicative of **δικαιόω (dikaiōō)**: "to vindicate, declare just, pronounce righteous, and stand approved, to be accepted."
32. The verb is in the aorist tense and, in this case, is culminative:

The Culminative Aorist. The aorist is employed in this meaning when it is wished to view an event in its entirety, but to regard it from the viewpoint of its existing results. Here we usually find verbs which signify effort or process, the aorist denoting the attainment of the end of such effort or process.¹

33. Abraham maxed out in doctrine when he led Isaac up Mount Moriah and then went about the business of preparing him for sacrifice. We see his determination to fulfill the mission in:

Genesis 22:10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

34. This is when the Lord called a halt. At the point of holding the knife, he was justified by works. The works included all Abraham had done from the day he was saved until the moment he was ready to slice Isaac's carotid artery.
35. He had acquired a tremendous amount of doctrine over the years and this was the ultimate test to determine if Abraham had the doctrine necessary to take on the title, mentioned by James, of "our father."
36. The "work" was accomplished by what preceded it, the accumulation of doctrine in his soul and the faith to rely on it unreservedly. That doctrine was the working object behind his willingness to slit his son's throat.

¹ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillian Co., 1955), 196–97.



37. This resulted in Abraham's justification by works which emphasizes the culminative aorist of the verb *dikaióō*: "justification." The passive voice indicates that Abraham received justification based on his application of doctrine to his circumstances. The indicative mood certifies as a fact that the events on Mount Moriah occurred historically.
38. The principles we are to consider apply to our submission to the Word of God as the working objects of our works. First of all, Bible study must be preceded by rebound, confession alone to God alone of any unconfessed sins.
39. Then concentration must follow during one's inculcation of divine thought from the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Positive volition must occur for the information to become *epígnōsis* in the *kardía*. Retention in the stream of consciousness makes the information available for recall.
40. Doctrine in the stream of consciousness is the inventory of divine thought that is potentially the working object for one's faith for application. When doctrine is used in application then divine good occurs.
41. God honors His Word wherever it is found including its presence in your soul and your application of it as the working object for your works.
42. It is the utilization of this system and its efficiency in time that becomes the determining factor in whether or not a Church-Age believer receives escrow blessings at the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ.
43. This production is the end result of learning the Word of God and having personal faith in its veracity. The production is indicated by the preposition **ἐκ (ek)**: "out from the source of," followed by the plural noun, **ἔργον (érgon)**: "works."
44. Abraham had spent three days under maximum pressure. He was told that he would be the father of multitudes. For this prophecy to come to fruition, he must be made fertile again. This occurred and the result was Isaac. For multitudes to be the end result, then Isaac, too, must procreate.
45. Now Abraham is ordered to take a three-day road trip to Mount Moriah and sacrifice Isaac on an altar of wood. Human viewpoint, absent resident doctrine, causes major doubt and reversion in the soul of anyone not armed with irrefutable promises to the contrary.
46. What source of power allowed Abraham to place his trust in God's integrity—His righteousness, justice, and omniscience—for him to keep advancing toward Mount Moriah?

