

*Sacrifice of Isaac*, by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610)

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The *Sacrifice of Isaac* was commissioned for Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, who would later become Pope Urban VIII (1623–44). Caravaggio executed the painting between May 1603 and January 1604. It depicts the moment Abraham, in obedience to God's command, is poised to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22). Caravaggio's version has a physicality that heightens the dramatic effect. With one hand an angel stays Abraham's drawn knife and with the other points to the ram, a divine provision to take Isaac's place. Abraham's left hand pins the writhing Isaac, whose own hands are concealed but apparently bound behind his back. Isaac's expression of terror is juxtaposed with the ram's placid look.