

Radiance Bible Studies
Lesson Six
“Lord Save Me”
The Rule of Breakage

Song Lyrics:

LORD SAVE ME

Words & Music by Keith Lancaster

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The wind was a howling and the waves were high
The Man was a walking on the water but something was
Holding me back, holding me back something was
Holding me back, holding me
In the midst of the darkness we could barely see
A paralyzing fear was falling over me it was
Holding me back, holding me back something was
Holding me back, holding me

He said come out to Me
Step out in faith and see
Come on out to Me
Step out in faith and see

As the Lord drew closer I released my fear I knew that
Close to Him was safer than I was right here, nothing's
Holding me back, holding me back nothing will be
Holding me back, holding me
I stepped into the water with my eyes on Him
But I focused on the waves and the raging wind it started
Holding me back, holding me back, all of it was
Holding me back, holding me

Jesus said come out to Me
Step out in faith and see
Come on out to Me
Step out in faith and see

Lord save me
Lord save me

Life's not easy as the challenges come
But I am still determined not to be undone nothing's
Holding me back, holding me back I pray that nothing's

Holding me back, holding me back
I'll go when he summons I will live by faith
Keep my eyes upon Him as I'm running this race nothing's
Holding me back, holding me back, nothing will be
Holding me back, holding me

He is saying come unto Me
Step out in faith and see
Come on out to Me
Keeping your eyes on Me
Jesus says come out to Me
Step out in faith and see
Why don't you come on out to Me
Keeping your eyes on Me

Lord save me
Lord save me
Lord save me
Lord save me

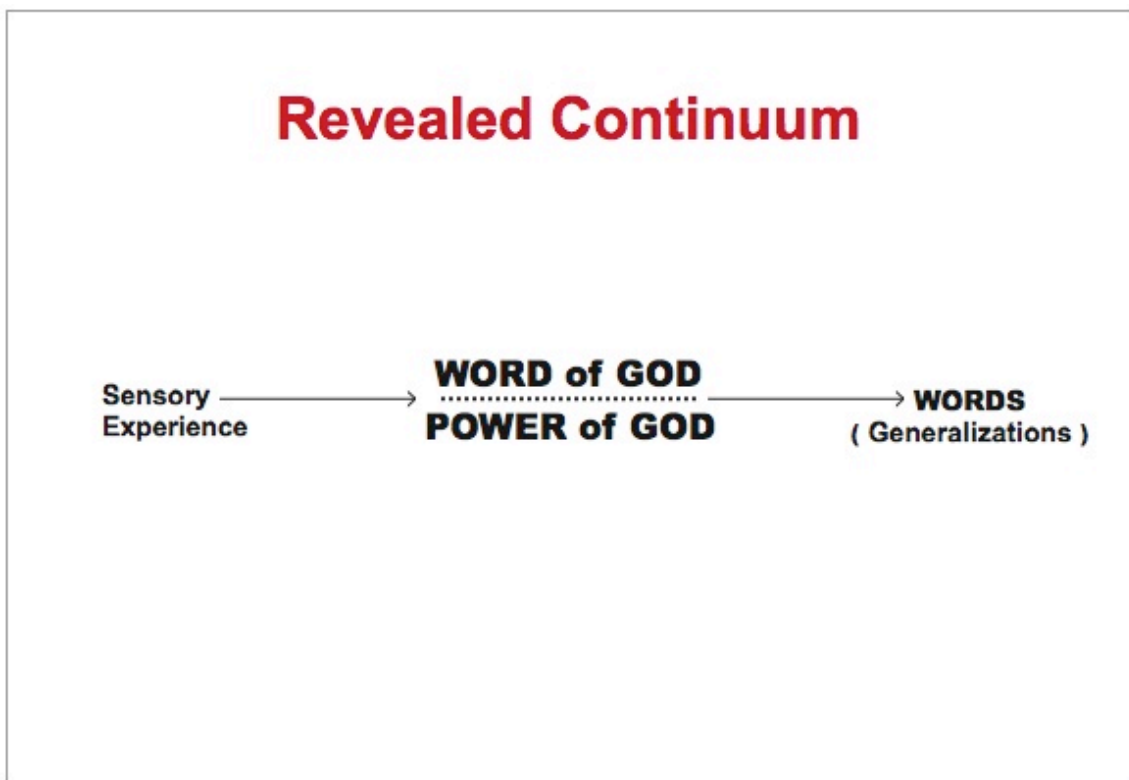
Scripture Source:

Matthew 14:22-36; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:16-24

1. This episode in the lives of the Lord's disciples opens a window to us. In this passage, we see how followers of Christ must handle the cognitive side of our faith. **Jesus is retraining the minds and the language of the disciples.** Surely this is a necessary step in the spiritual development for us all. The lesson we can derive from this study starkly contradicts what human intelligence and human intuition would tell us. **Be prepared for contradiction!** Implicit within the teaching of these scriptures is a perspective on trials and tribulations. Jesus reveals to us that trials are all part of this retraining of mind, heart and language.
2. Matthew's rendition of the episode includes Peter's walk on the water. Matthew 14:28 records Peter's manifestation of faith in Jesus: "Tell me to come to you on the water." A surprising response from the Lord: "'Come.'" He said.' (verse 29.) It is when we get out of the boat that things happen. But if we do not get out of the boat, faith can never form. Jesus is forming the faith of the disciples in these texts.
3. Now that Peter was granted permission to do what no man can do, he must make a decision. To the credit of this soon-to-be apostle, Peter abandons the security of the boat for his lonely walk out to Jesus. He initially must have been transfixed by the Lord as he finds himself in such an unexpected, impossible and amazing circumstance. But circumstances are not static -- they are always changing and

laden with energy. Some circumstances appear to be more dangerous than others, more life threatening. This is common to us all. But that is appearance only. Those who live by faith will transit much beyond the world of appearances and the judgments that are grounded upon them. Peter and the other disciples will have to learn this lesson in order to fulfill their own call to faith in Christ and to fulfill their call to service.

4. Soon, however, faith is supplanted by the sense of danger. The text states, ““But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”” (verse 30.)
5. Jesus responds by telling Peter that his faith – that is, the size of it - was not adequate to cope with his circumstances. This is amply revealed in verse 31: ““Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “*You of little faith,*” he said, “why did you doubt?””
6. Let us examine what happened in this episode in some detail. We can identify what we will refer to as **The Revealed Continuum**: a sequence of things that expresses the faith that Jesus expected from His disciples.



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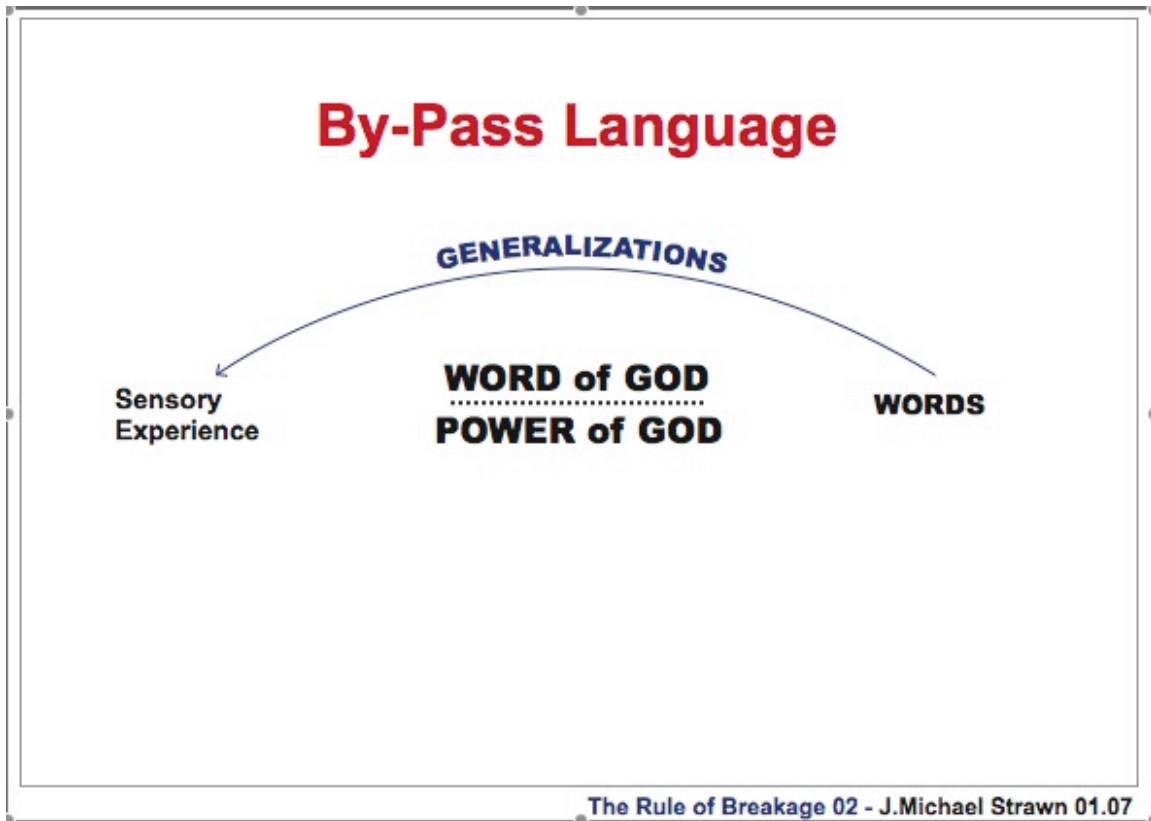
7. This sequence begins with **sensory experience**, that is, the information provided by our five senses. This is an avenue that the Lord has given us, affording us a

form of knowledge about the world outside our own senses. Sensory experience is vital to the conduct of life. It is not a sin; rather, it is a great blessing.

8. It was on the basis of sensory experience that the disciples were able to see Jesus “walking on the lake” (verse 26.) And sensory experience was involved when Peter “saw the wind” (verse 30.) There is no doubt that sensory experience was operational in this situation as it unfolded. Sensory experience is a necessary element of everyday life. We would be much the poorer without it.
9. However, sensory experience must give way to something far superior. Thus, the next thing in this continuum or sequence is **The Word of God and The Power of God**. (There are two factors here, of course, but we shall treat them as a single item.) The disciples “saw” Jesus walking on the lake, something not possible for a mere man to do. They were astonished at the report of sensory experience. They correctly came to the conclusion that such a thing can only come about by divine power and the word of God. This must have prompted Peter’s request to come out to the Lord. The power of God was momentarily superseding Peter’s own sensory experience. “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water” (verse 28.) The disciples thought that it must be a ghost since mortal men cannot walk on the water.
10. The third element in this **revealed continuum** is **Words**. By this we refer to the generalizations that one makes based on the Word and the power of God. So in this fashion Peter initially reasoned that if Jesus, being the Son of God, would allow it, then he-- a mortal man-- could also walk on the water. Peter was correct! This graphic helps to point out some salient truths. Because Peter’s language was built upon the word of God and the power of God he reasoned to a distinct conclusion about what was possible or impossible. Peter linked his language to the word and the power of God. He suspended the routine connection between words and sensory experience! *Such a suspension we call faith!*
11. If Peter had reasoned on the basis of sensory experience, he never would have gotten out of the boat in the first place. His action in this regard is exemplary. Peter correctly believed not in the dictates of his own sensory experience but rather in the demonstrated power and word of Jesus.
12. Thus at first, Peter resisted the temptation to rely on natural perception of the situation. When we do rely on natural perception provided by sensory experience then *the universe shrinks down to the size of -- and merely the size of-- human perceptions of it!* On the other hand, a believer learns to trust in the word of God and the power of God revealed. This kind of faith is reflected in language use. Peter’s use of language at the beginning of the episode is a clear example of what we might call “the fault lines” of faith.
13. When Peter’s words or generalizations were founded upon that which was revealed and not upon sensory experience, he reasoned thus: “If Jesus is God

then I cannot and will not drown in this attempt.” Peter would have decided that he must keep his attention on the Lord and on nothing else. That would have been in keeping with the revealed continuum.

14. **Here then is the RULE OF BREAKAGE.** At this point of faith, Peter broke the unity (or the link or the index) between **sensory experience and language!** The proof that he did this is found in the fact that Peter did get out of the boat and did indeed walk on the water.
15. We call this the rule of breakage precisely because it demands an extraordinary, decisive action on the part of the believer. Unless we separate or break the link between sensory experience and language, our faith cannot and will not stand!
16. However, Peter eventually resorted to what we will call **BY-PASS LANGUAGE.** The graphic below illustrates this action. As Peter saw the wind and the waves, he retreated to our “default posture” -- to a link between his language and sensory experience. He reasoned that no man can walk on the water, and he was a man. Despite the assuring presence of Jesus, Peter again relied on sensory experience. Peter reinstated the unity between sensory experience and his language -- and then he began to sink beneath the waves.



17. This was a mistake! Jesus pulls Peter up and scolds him for “fear” (verse 26) and “little faith” and “doubt”(verse 31.) Evidently, this faith failure is directly related to the By-Pass Language. Peter completely by-passed the word of God and the power of God in order to come to his faithless conclusions. Fear, little faith and doubt are then the hallmarks of this practice.

Peter’s pattern – taking note of his surroundings and then formulating his thinking in accordance with his sensory experience -- is one that recurs often in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Observe:

- In Genesis 3 – Adam and Eve acted on the exact same basis as did Peter. Prompted by the serpent, the first human beings looked at the forbidden fruit and judged its merit on the basis of sensory experience (verses 6-7.) In other words they **did not practice the breakage rule!** Adam and Eve used **by-pass language**. One of the important truths this passage reveals is that the Word of God was in fact given to us to force the breakage rule. One cannot practice the breakage rule and use by-pass language at the same time. In order for Adam and Eve to be faithful to the Lord, they were obligated to break the connection between sensory experience and language. *Question: are we any less obligated?*
- In the Book of Job – The devil employed a strategy against Job that was predicated upon the expected use by Job of the link between sensory experience and language. But Job did not operate on that basis. To the contrary, this wonderful example of pure faith clearly took advantage of the breakage rule.
- Satan believed that Job would reason on the basis of by-pass language. We know this because of Job 1:9-11 and 2:4-5. If Job was thinking only in terms of sensory experience, then when his experience changed Satan expected Job to curse God to His face. This did not happen. Everything that we know about Job tells us that this man depended upon the breakage rule. His language was broken away from sensory experience and was reassigned to the Word and the power of God.
- In Psalm 119 – The writer always speaks of his practice of meditation on the Word of the Lord. The author of this psalm was always retraining his mind and his language; for that is the fruit of meditation. He was living in a time of personal trial and testing. Perhaps the theme of testing is just this: the retraining of the mind. The author was learning to use the breakage rule and connect his language to the word and the reality of God. By his own mouth he did this in all of the trying situations of his life. Here then is the test of faith. In times of trial will we maintain a solid link between our words, thinking and behavior and the Word and the power of God -- or not?

- In Luke 24 – As Cleopas and his friend (verse 18) were making their way to Emmaus, Jesus came to them incognito. These men had seen the Lord crucified and buried and promptly began to question their faith. They reverted to by-pass language. But the newly resurrected Lord said of them that they were “foolish” and “slow of heart” (verse 25) because they did believe “all that the prophets have spoken!” (verse 25.) To believe all that the Old Testament had to say about the Messiah required the use of the breakage rule. This rule had to stand even in the face of sensory experience. One of the marks of little faith, doubt, and fear is lack of use of the breakage rule. In fact, is it not the case that such conditions as fear, discouragement, a sense of hopelessness, and despair are directly related to a reliance upon the link between sensory experience and language?

18. This third graphic projects the response that Peter finally made to the situation. He completely fell subject to this unity or link between sensory experience and language. Peter suddenly believed that he was going to die and disappear beneath the waves. We call this **The Constraining Unity**.

The Constraining Unity (Linkage)

Sensory Experience ←————→ **Language**

19. Peter failed to observe the rule of breakage: Language use must be broken away from dependence upon sensory experience. Because Peter failed in this he began to sink. This is replicated everywhere in Scripture:
- Numbers 13, 14 – The Israelites listened to the bad report of the ten spies. That report was an exact manifestation of by-pass language. Their language was not based on the Word of God nor the power of God. Joshua and Caleb passionately appealed to their fellow Israelites not to believe the report of the spies but to consider the promises of God and all of His covenant promises. Tragically, at Kadesh Barnea the Israelites maintained **the constraining unity**.
 - When the link between sensory experience remains unchallenged and firmly in place, it will constrain what one is capable of believing! In the Exodus experience the people of God had witnessed many things from the Lord and still did not believe.
 - From the world's point of view such a thing as the rule of breakage is considered a mark of "foolishness and "weakness" (1 Corinthians 1:20-31.)
20. Indeed, the preferred use of human reason by the vast majority is to rely without much qualification on the linkage between sensory experience and language. Much of what we consider to be progress takes form by that standard. Usually human beings have accepted as fact the absolute need for this coupling between sensory experience and language. This is the heart of the "scientific method" of determining what is to be believed and thought. We are prone to basing action on this linkage. That includes action at the level of national policy as well as the life of the individual.
21. Human beings routinely think that everything necessary to our existence, well-being and survival grows out of this unity between sensory experience and language. Jesus is demonstrating in Matthew 14 that this is not true.
22. Trials, testing, crises, extreme hardship, chaos, calamity and disaster are the moments when the difference between *the revealed continuum and the unity between sensory experience and language* are likely to emerge.
23. Peter found himself in such a moment. He had the opportunity to look to the invisible reality or to put faith in this link between the sensory and language. He reverted to the constraining unity.
24. Such a unity constrains or effectively puts a cap on what we are able to believe!. Peter was experiencing the power of God at the time as he walked on the water. *He was experiencing the power of God!* In spite of that fact, Peter turned his

attention to his sensory experience. This was a clash between two different kinds of experience.

25. We all have sensory experience. And, we are faced with examples of the power of God in the Scriptures. Our situation is exactly that of Peter on the lake. We can either tie our language to sense experience, or to the Word and power of God. But if we do not employ the rule of breakage, the constraining unity will overtake us. It will even overtake our better intentions. The rule of breakage requires that we break the unity between sensory experience and language, and then order our language according to the revealed continuum.
26. Many of us have been struck by the fact that the Israelites during the Exodus had witnessed the ten plagues (Exodus 7 – 12), the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 13 – 14), water from the rock (Exodus 17), the manna (Exodus 16) and the cloudy pillar and the pillar of fire (Exodus 13). Yet they failed to believe in the Word of God and the power of God. The question is how could such a thing happen?
27. If the constraining unity stays in place, unchallenged, the Bible demonstrates that no matter what we experience from God -- we will not believe it! The Israelites had repeatedly seen the Lord act in history; still, they did not believe and they died in the desert (1 Corinthians 10:5.) Unless the dominance of the constraining unity is broken we cannot grow in faith. *There is a cap put on what we can believe!* As long as the constraining unity remains in place – that is to say unbroken – then it matters little how much Bible we study, we simply will not believe it!
28. There is a way of reading the word of God and looking at the power of God that does not in anyway challenge the primacy of the linkage between sensory experience and language. This explains why spiritual growth is often in short supply and why human behaviors within the kingdom of God often reflect the “values” of the unbelieving world. Such enemies of the faith as the atheists Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) and Sam Harris (*The End of Faith*) stake their entire position on the importance and indispensability of the constraining unity. They assert that all human betterment grows out of the linkage between sensory experience and language: Reliance on common sense is paramount.
29. We as believers are vulnerable to the influence of the world unless the rule of breakage is practiced. The lack of its use enforces a reading of Scripture that limits what we are willing to believe. This is apparent in many passages in the Bible. The net effect of all of this is that *the promises of God are constrained*. In Genesis 12 Abraham lied to the pharaoh about Sarah and again to the King of Gerar (Genesis 20) regarding Sarah’s relationship to him. It is obvious that the constraining unity was still in place; and consequently, Abraham could not find faith in the promises of God to protect him. This sort of thing abounds in many of the greatest exemplars of faith or of faithlessness.

30. Peter met his test on a body of water, in the dark of night, on a small wooden vessel with the wind blowing against it and in the lives of some men who were scheduled to have their faith put to the test.
31. This Scriptural episode allows us to generalize to a remarkable fact of human existence: *The shape of one's discourse is the shape of the universe and all the situations, circumstances, events and states of being within it!*
32. This fact is explanatory, predictive and instructive of human behavior. The shape of, and the conditions of our discourse will project themselves upon the universe as a whole; and into situations and circumstances in particular.
33. *This means that discourse is a function of faith! Either we have faith in sensory experience, or in the Word and the power of God.*
34. Peter's ordeal on the lake that night was directly related to a certain personal condition. In Mark 6:52 the Scripture tells us something about the stature of the faith of the disciples at that time: "They had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened." Just previously, Jesus fed the thousands with five loaves and two fish. But this miracle was not fully comprehended. The reason was that their hearts were hardened. This hardening can be equated with a maintenance of the constraining unity.
35. So when they saw Jesus walking on the lake they found it impossible to believe that it was Him, and not a ghost (Mark 6:49). The constraining unity had put a cap on what they could believe.
36. This passage should encourage us to consider the rule of breakage and its essential nature for the development of faith in Christ. To say the least, the employment of the breakage rule is a challenge to human intelligence. This is not easy to do. Our intuition is too strong to let such a thing pass easily.
37. The first rule of Bible study is to practice the breakage rule. In fact, if the Bible does not exist (at least in part) to drive a discontinuity between sensory experience and language, then how does faith function at all? We do not dispense with sensory experience but it is not allowed to maintain dominance over our thought, speech and behavior.
38. Routinely in human societies, what passes for "explanations" is the result of the constraining unity. If the constraining unity isn't the basis of an explanation, then it is considered "religious" or even "irrational." As a matter of course we tend to insist that explanations must be centered and rooted in the link between language and sensory experience.
39. The world of professional theology has not escaped this problem either. The whole approach to "Bible interpretation" is based upon the constraining unity. If

Scripture is read within the embrace of this constraining unity, the truth of the Word of God will be obscured from discovery.

40. The effect of the constraining unity on the development of faith is more than a slight problem -- it is a bane that will condemn us to limited apprehension of eternal truth and perhaps outright faithlessness. Proof of this resides in the book of James. In James 1:1-8 the writer broaches the subject of “wisdom” (verse 5). It must be the case that the wisdom that James has in mind is that which results from the linkage between the word of God and language. However, this is not how the idea of wisdom is usually comprehended in practice. In chapter 4 verses 13-17, James depicts the problem of the constraining unity and its sterilization of faith.
41. Often in Scripture we take note of people who in real life situations fell under **the pall of irreversibility**. These people, while facing extreme duress, were convinced that their circumstance was completely irreversible. On the other hand, that great paragon of faith Abraham in Genesis 22 when commanded to offer his only begotten son as a sacrifice had seen through the constraining unity and had effected the revealed continuum. At no time during that episode did Abraham tend toward the by-pass language. His example of great faith is the embodiment of the breakage rule. Within the context of this rule of thought, nothing is irreversible.
42. Peter came to the point of facing the requirements of great faith. We must extol his remarkable faith in getting out of the boat. This took great courage to step out on the water for the first time, being only the second human being to do so. It was the breakage rule that allowed this to happen. It was the breakage rule that would have kept Peter above the waterline. But the constraining unity overtook him and he began to sink.

Without the rule of breakage enabled by the presence of the Word of God and His power, the world will swallow us all. Only one thing “holds us back,” as the song says, from triumphant living. It is the bane of constraining unity.

Questions for Discussion

1. This lesson demonstrated how the Word of God and the power of God must supplant and take precedence over direct experience. How does John 20:24-31 also illustrate this principle?
2. Read John 10:38 and explain it using one or more of the graphs from this lesson.
3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were three young men whose story is chronicled in the book of Daniel. Prior to the time that they were saved from the fiery furnace, what

had been their own experience of the power of God? What did they say standing before the furnace door that indicated one or more of the principles introduced in this lesson?

4. Give examples from this past week in which you operated under the constraining unity. What can you do to break this in the coming week?

5. Here are some examples of “by-pass language:”

--That doesn't apply today

--Does it really matter what happened in the Old Testament?

--The demands of our modern world require more complex thinking than we see in the Bible

--That's all very well and good, but....

Supply some “by-pass language” that you have heard or said.

6. Go to Genesis chapter 22 and Romans chapter 4. Give a quote from each passage that illustrates each phrase in bold in the following section:

Abraham, when commanded to offer his only begotten son as a sacrifice had **seen through the constraining unity** and had **effected the revealed continuum**. At no time during that episode did Abraham tend toward the **by-pass language**. His example of great faith is the embodiment of **the breakage rule**. Within the context of this rule of thought, nothing is **irreversible**.