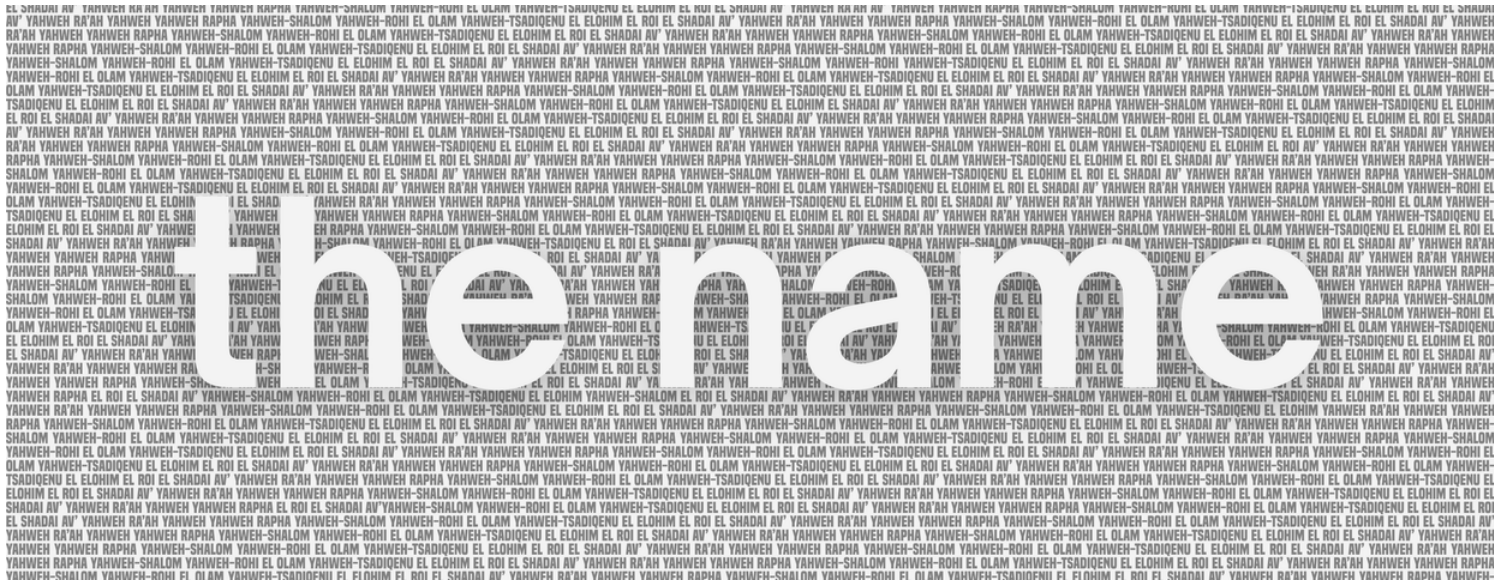




PART 4: YAHWEH YIREH

By Robert MacDonald

Genesis 22:1-18

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¹ Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

² Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

⁸ Abraham answered, “God himself will provide [Yireh] the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

¹² “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide [Yahweh Yireh]. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided [Bahar Yahweh Year’eh].”

¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” – Genesis 22:1-18

I. A Disturbing Story

If this story makes you feel uneasy, you’re not alone. This story has puzzled and disturbed readers for literal thousands of years. And I think it’s actually meant to make us feel uneasy. So, let’s look at the most disturbing aspect of this story:

Human Sacrifice

People have been disturbed by the implications of human sacrifice. In the ancient world, human sacrifice wasn’t unheard of. In some cultures, sacrificing a human being, usually an infant or child, was the ultimate way of twisting the arm of a god. Showing them how serious you were, getting the best benefits from that god or goddess.

As we read in the history of Israel, there was a type of sacrifice called a “Molech” that is expressly forbidden by God, where people would offer their own children as sacrifices to gain some boon from a false deity. And throughout the Bible, this type of sacrifice is viewed as the very pinnacle of evil – it’s almost a catch-all symbol for Israel’s very worst behaviours.

Just a few chapters earlier, we read that Abraham is deeply disturbed about the destruction of a city full of people he doesn’t even know.¹ But when he’s asked to kill his own son, he just gets up, the next day and heads out to do it?

Many have read this story and questioned why God would put Abraham through something like this. We could imagine the sort of psychological torture this would be for both Abraham and Isaac.

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II. Fanaticism or Faith?

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This story ² is a central narrative in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. And the question of what exactly we take away from this story has been the subject of debate for thousands of years.

Some view it as a text calling for a sort of fanatical religious dedication, some view it as an example of divine cruelty. Some have even speculated that the test is a sort of payback for how Abraham has treated Hagar and Ishmael.

In the book of Judges, we find a tragic story where a leader in Israel named Jephthah tries to prove his devotion to Yahweh: ³⁰ *And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, ³¹ whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."*

- Judges 11:30-31

And we read on in the story, Jephthah wins the battle and returns home... *"who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. ³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break."* - Judges 11:34b-35

We are supposed to be horrified by this. In fact, in Leviticus 5, we have a whole protocol for what to do if you make a stupid promise. You don't need to follow through. We are supposed to see Jephthah as a tragic moron.

Abraham's Faith

And that's what separates him from Abraham. Abraham's faith isn't blind fanaticism. It's relational trust. It's been forged and tested.

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Over time, Abraham has seen with his own eyes that God is trustworthy. It's sort of like when you have a good relationship with a coworker. You've been working together for years, and when you throw a task their way, you don't need to think about it or check in. They've got it. Their trustworthiness has been proven.³

III. What does Abraham Know?

**a. God has already made promises about Isaac...
promises that require him to be alive**

We read in Genesis 17:19

¹⁹ Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

b. Abraham's lack of hesitation

Second, Abraham is not exactly hesitant in this story. In verse three we see that he gets up early the next morning. Where's the tossing and turning? Where's the wrestling?

A few chapters earlier in Genesis, Abraham pleads with God to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He goes back and forth with God until he's confident that God is actually enacting justice. Where is Abraham's back and forth here?

c. "We will come back to you"

Third, in verse 5, Abraham says to his servants: "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then **we will come back to you.**" Genesis 22:5

d. Isaac carrying the woodpile

Detail number four: check out the first half of verse 6: Abraham **took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac**, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. Genesis 22:6

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When we first read the story, we might assume that Isaac is passive and helpless. But what if Isaac is too strong to be tied up against his will? There's a long history of Jewish and Christian readers wondering about Isaac's actual age, with some rabbis speculating that he's in his 30s.

e. "God himself will provide the lamb"

Fifth, when Isaac asks about where the sacrificial lamb is, Abraham responds says *"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering."*

Something More than a Test

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death. - Hebrews 11:17-19

But in the whole story of scripture, Abraham's actions are not just a test of his character. In passing God's strange test, Abraham is actually acting out events that will take place over a thousand years later in these same mountains.

We think this is a story about Abraham proving himself to God. But in the grand story of scripture, this passage is about God proving Himself to us.

IV. "Yireh": Seeing Our Provision

Yireh's Ambiguous Meaning

¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide [**Yahweh Yireh**]. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided [**Behar Yahweh Yera'eh**]." - Genesis 22:14

Yireh and ye-ar-eh – two versions of the verb "Ra'ah" – to see. The same verb behind El-Roi – "the God who Sees me", that we talked about last week. Throughout the story, Yahweh "seeing" has this sense of "seeing to it." Making sure provision is made; that's why it's often translated "the Lord will provide."

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But the Hebrew verb at the end of verse 14 is a bit ambiguous. It could mean that the Lord will see to it, or it could mean that the Lord is seen.⁴ And there are strong arguments for both meanings.

Here's how one Jewish translation puts it:

“And Avraham called the name of that place Adonay-yir’e: as it is said to this day, In the mount the Lord will appear.” (Koren Jerusalem Bible)⁵

a. Seeing Yahweh on Mount Moriah

Moriah is the mountain range where Jerusalem gets built. The same Jerusalem where Jesus is tried and crucified.

God won't let Abraham complete the test.

But God takes this test Himself. God proves his faithfulness to us on this mountain. When God the Son is bound on the mountains of Moriah, the knife is not spared. This time, God provides a sacrifice not just to save Isaac, but to save us all.

When John the Baptist first sees Jesus, he says: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”
– John 1:29b

b. Seeing Yahweh in the Faithful Son

And remember how we noted that Isaac carries the wood up the mountain. How he seems to be an active participant in this great prophetic action, bound without resistance.

¹⁷ *The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life –only to take it up again.* ¹⁸ *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”* – John 10:17-18

c. Seeing Yahweh in the Resurrection

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And think back to when Abraham tells his servants: “we will come back to you.”

His confidence that Isaac will return, somehow. And when Jesus goes up on to those same mountains to die, He doesn’t stay there. He comes back to life, and back to us. He stands as firstborn of the dead, proving to us that the same God who dies for us has defeated death, and that we will one day stand, as Jesus did, resurrected.

Jesus came back, and he stays with us. He says: *And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”
Matthew 28:20b

d. Seeing Yahweh as our Provision

Yahweh Yireh. Yahweh is seen, and Yahweh sees to it.

Do you see how in Jesus, both of those ideas sort of wrap around each other? Yahweh provides, and when we look at what He provides and how He does it, we see the very heart of God Himself. He is seen.

What kind of God is this who exacts the highest price from himself? What kind of God carries the wood for His own execution? Not just the provider, but the provision. God will provide the sacrifice. God will provide Himself.

³¹ *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*
– Romans 8:31–32

³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,* ³⁹ *neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* – Romans 8:38–39

the name



Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on the story in **Genesis 22:1-18**. How do you imagine the emotions and mood of this story? What happens when you read this story as a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus?
2. Read **Romans 8:31-39**. Reflect on why Paul is “convinced” that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Are you as convinced as Paul? Why or why not? How can reflecting on the cross help us to move forward in our walk of faith?
3. How can you taste and see that God is good? What does a step of trust look like in your life today?

Prayer

Take some time to prayerfully reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus. Ask God to continue to show you his deep love for you and all His creation. Ask God to help you notice the ways He provides for your deepest needs.

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- ¹ Gen 18:16-33
- ² called the Akedah in Judaism
- ³ Or the Sedin twins no-look passing to each other. Using their twin magic.
- ⁴ Both active and passive forms of this verb use the same Hebrew letters, and older translations of this passage like the LXX read “will be seen” or “there is sight.”
- ⁵ See <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.22.14> for a list of Jewish translations. A majority of Jewish translations render the last phrase “the Lord will be seen” or “there is vision”, while a majority of Christian translations opt for “the Lord will provide”. This largely reflects the distinct role that this story represents in Christianity and Judaism. For Christians, the story primarily foretells God’s provision of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, while for Jews, the story foretells the site of the temple in Jerusalem.

REFERENCES