

11-25-23 To Roeh Israel Abilene – *Akaidah Yitzhak*, part 4
Torah Portion; Staying in Gen 22:1 -19 VaYetze Gen 28:10 - 32:2
Haftarah: Hosea 11:7 – 9
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Luke 22:41-44

The Akaidat Yitzhak part 4

Central question of this message: Can you see Yeshua?

Today's Torah portion is VaYetze, which means "and [Jacob] went out."
Its name comes from the first Hebrew word in the passage (and the first three words in the English translation, below).

Gen 28:10-14

10 Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. 12 He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land

1

10

11

12

13

OT:5551 **קולל** **cullam** (sool-lawm'); from OT:5549; a stair-case:

It can be legitimately translated as “ladder”, and even “staircase.” But when we look at the more ancient root of this word, *solal*, we see that it more precisely means to mound up in a high manner.

OT:5549 לָלַח **calal** (saw-lal'); a primitive root; to mound up (especially a turnpike); figurative, to exalt; reflexively, to oppose (as by a dam):

And since this “mound” is described in the passage as reaching into heaven, then this would indeed be a very high mound. I would describe it as a tower.

It is for this reason that I have chosen in our morning liturgy to change the word “ladder” to “tower.” A high tower is a strong structure. A high ladder wobbles, and is frightening to climb to even moderate heights. That image should not be in our minds at all when we consider this vision. And if angels are ascending and descending on it, It needs to be not only strong and high, but big enough to allow many beings two-way passage at the same time.

But there is something more to this passage that many are unable to see when they are reading in the writings of John, because they simply have not been taught the Hebrew way of thinking and Hebrew idioms.

I want you to see it today. Let's read the story of how Nathaniel came to be one of the disciples, because this illustrates the idea well.

John 1:45-51

45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." [Heb. Yeshua ben Yoseph, m'Natzaret.] 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, **when you were under the fig tree**, I saw you." 49 Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." 50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you **under the fig tree**, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

The Hebrew phrase “under the fig tree” doesn’t actually mean that Nathaniel was sitting under any kind of tree at all. It is a Hebrew idiom which means that Nathaniel was studying Torah. No matter where you are studying Torah, you are “under the fig tree” in the Hebraic idiomatic speech of the time when this was written.

There is some discussion in our ancient writings that the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” which was found in the garden of Eden was a fig tree. Although the modern church has insisted that it be an apple tree. The rationale behind it being a fig tree is that the covering for the people who had suddenly discovered their nakedness, initially was sewn-together fig leaves. There is some discussion that it really wasn’t an actual tree at all, but that it was simply Torah. Certainly, Torah contains the knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong.

Nobody can argue with a straight face that eating actual fruit from an actual tree (regardless of species) can give anyone the knowledge of good and evil. But most certainly as one studies Torah, one will learn precisely what those concepts mean, in some detail.

And once you know the right thing to do - to do good and not evil – then failing to do that is sin. And sin separates us from G-d, and then we die.

James 4:17

17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Rom 5:12-14

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned — 13 for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Rom 6:16-17

16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

So, it seems clear that the Serpent in the Garden, who himself knew the difference between good and evil (and had chosen evil) wished to ensnare all mankind in his sin by causing the two original people to defy G-d's instructions, and to learn the difference between good and evil, but

without the capability of fulfilling the Torah at that time – thus they would die – just as Satan. So, it seems that Satan began to feed the people with that knowledge of Torah, so that in that knowledge, they would fall short, and be rejected by G-d just as Satan had been rejected.

The theme of Torah study being similar to gleaning from a fig tree is discussed in the commentary Bemidbar Rabah, 21.

Therefore (as in Prov. 27:18), “He who tends a fig tree will enjoy its fruit.” And why is the Torah compared to a fig tree? Since [the fruit of] most trees – the olive tree, the grapevine, the date palm – is gathered [all] at once, but the fig tree is gathered a little [at a time]. And so too is the Torah. Today he studies a little and tomorrow he studies much; as it is not taught in a year, nor in two.

And we see that same pattern spoken of in a prophecy of how things in the coming Kingdom shall be.

Zech 3:8-10

8 'Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you — indeed they are men who

are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. 9 'For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,' declares the Lord of hosts, 'and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. 10 'In that day,' declares the Lord of hosts, 'every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree.'"

What does this mean, that everyone shall invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and his fig tree? Remember that the abundance of the land of Israel was demonstrated to the people by two of the spies carrying between them a pole with a single cluster of grapes (Numbers 13:23).

It will be in the time of the Kingdom that the land will be so fertile and productive that there will no longer be any worry about food. This is because the hearts of the people are fully turned toward G-d, and are serving Him with all their best.

Deut 11:13-16

13 "And it shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and

all your soul, 14 that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. 15 And He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied.

And we see a sweet promise of security and abundance for those who will live in Israel in that day.

Isa 62:6-9

6 On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen;
All day and all night they will never keep silent.
You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves;
7 And give Him no rest until He establishes
And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.
8 The Lord has sworn by His right hand and by His strong
arm,
"I will never again give your grain as food for your enemies;
Nor will foreigners drink your new wine, for which you have
labored."
9 But those who garner it will eat it, and praise the Lord;

And those who gather it will drink it in the courts of My sanctuary.

Rather than guard the vineyard from enemies or thieves, the people will invite neighbors to partake of their bounty. Grapevines produce a harvest at the same time, signifying an abundance of blessings coming all at once. And because of the zeal for Torah, there will be the abundance of food.

Studying the Word is like gathering figs. You get a little at a time. Come back often to the same tree, and you can find new ripe figs.

So, with these ideas in mind, let's go back to the story of Nathaniel. So, was Nathaniel studying Torah when his brother came to get him? It seems clear he was, and today we can even know what portion he was studying.

Allow me a bit of license now, to set the scene as I see it unfolding with Nathaniel before and after his call by Philip.

Nathaniel was studying today's parasha, and he was focusing on what it was that Jacob saw upon which angels were ascending and descending. The Hebrew text translated as "going up and down on it" is *olim and*

yordim bo. The last word is legitimately translated as “on it.” But it could also be translated “on him.”

And Nathaniel could see that G-d Himself was closely associated with this particular structure, and was speaking from above it... or maybe from within it, depending on how you wish to translate the Hebrew.

Nathaniel, as a student of Torah, also likely knew that the Rock that produced water for the Hebrew people in the wilderness wanderings, which rolled around with them from place to place, and produced living water, was King Messiah.

I think Nathaniel may well have been trying to understand this “tower” in light of its connection to G-d, and also being the conduit for angels coming and going from this world to the throne in heaven.

I will suggest that this very translational nuance is what Nathaniel was meditating upon. I suggest that he then prayed that he would know the “him” of whom this passage spoke. He must have known that the structure itself was not truly only of earthly material, but was in itself holy.

I suggest that Nathaniel had been wondering whether this “tower” might well be Messiah, and I suspect that Nathaniel was engaged in prayer that in his lifetime he would have the privilege of seeing the Messiah with his own eyes.

I am confident that Nathaniel asked that when he first laid eyes on the Messiah that there be an unmistakable sign given him that this was indeed the One.

And then his brother Philip came to him, saying, “I have found the Messiah!”

When the two men approached Yeshua, Yeshua declared that Nathaniel was indeed a *tzadik* (a righteous one), which is the highest faith-based compliment one can bestow. Nathaniel was taken aback by that high praise (as any true *tzadik* would), and asked how Yeshua knew him.

When Yeshua told him that He had seen him studying Torah before Philip had called to him, this was the sign that proved to Nathaniel that Yeshua was the One. That is why Nathaniel needed no further information, and immediately declared, “Rabbi, You are the Son of G-d. You are the King of Israel.”

But Yeshua wasn't finished. He wanted to offer a little more insight into the passage that Nathaniel was studying.

Yeshua identified the passage, then told Nathaniel that he himself would see even greater things. Yeshua told him that he would also have a vision like that of Jacob, but that Nathaniel would see the angels ascending and descending upon Yeshua, as the Son of Man. Nathaniel would have his question fully answered in his own vision.

Now, with that small teaching from today's parasha, let's continue our study of the *akaidah Yitzhak*.

We already know that Abraham was directed to take his son to a special location to carry out the sacrifice. We know that location today as the Temple Mount.

Let's look again at the passage:

Gen 22:9-10

9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him;
and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and

bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

וַיָּבֹאוּ	אֶל-	הַמָּקוֹם	אֲשֶׁר	אָמַר-	לוֹ	הָאֱלֹהִים	9
And they came	to	the place	which	had told	him of;	God	
<u>935</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>4725</u>	<u>834</u>	<u>559</u>	<u>3807a</u>	<u>430</u>	
וַיִּבֶן	שָׁם	אַבְרָהָם	אֶת-	הַמִּזְבֵּחַ	וַיַּעֲרֹךְ	אֶת-	
and built	there,	Abraham		an altar	and laid in order,		
<u>1129</u>	<u>8033</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>4196</u>	<u>6186</u>	<u>853</u>	
הָעֵצִים	וַיַּעֲקֹר	אֶת-	יִצְחָק	בְּנוֹ	וַיִּשֶׁם	אֹתוֹ	עַל-
the wood	and bound		Isaac	his son,	and laid	him	on
<u>6086</u>	<u>6123</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>3327</u>	<u>1121</u>	<u>7760</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>5921</u>
	לָעֵצִים:	מִמֶּעַל	הַמִּזְבֵּחַ				
	the wood.	upon	the altar				
	<u>6086</u>	<u>4605</u>	<u>4196</u>				

The Altar

Gen 22:9

9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him;
and Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood,
and bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of
the wood.

Who built the altar? The strong young man, or the old man? It is clear that Abraham could have sat under a tree in the shade and rested, but I

don't think that was likely. G-d told Abraham to do this deed, and I believe that Abraham was going to use his last ounce of strength to carry it out, if that were necessary.

So, I believe that when Abraham got to the proper location, he himself began to gather uncut stones to build the altar.

But let's not forget the faith of Yitzhak. It would be a total departure from the "walking in unity" we have already seen thus far for Yitzhak to rest under a tree in the shade while his very old father schlepped rocks to build an altar.

The central point I would like you to see here is that I see a significant degree of cooperation by Yitzhak in building the altar as well. I suspect that Yitzhak did most of the "heavy lifting" in this part of the story, as well.

I would ask you to contemplate how Yeshua likewise built the altar upon which He was to lay down His life for us.

Arranging the Wood

I want to focus now on three Hebrew words in the passage *v'yaarok et haeztim*. They come to us in the English as “laid in order the wood.”

הַעֲצִים	וְ	נִצְּרָה
the wood		and laid in order,
<u>6086</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>6186</u>

The English phrase, “laid in order” is derived from the Hebrew root word *arak*.

OT:6186 נִצְּרָה **`arak** (aw-rak'); a primitive root; to set in a row, i.e. arrange, put in order (in a very wide variety of applications):

It means to carefully arrange, not simply to throw down in random order. The Sages tell us that this was an indication that Abraham was treating this altar as if it were the holy altar of G-d which would later stand on this spot, and not as a private sacrifice on just any altar.

But let's also look at the term translated as “wood.” It is derived from the Hebrew root *etz*, which can mean “tree.”

OT:6086 עֵץ **`ets** (ates); from OT:6095; a tree (from its firmness); hence, wood (plural sticks):

But this Hebrew word is a form of another Hebrew word *atzah*, which can mean to properly make firm or fasten securely.

OT:6095 אֶצֶק **`atsah** (aw-tsaw'); a primitive root;
properly, to fasten (or make firm), i.e. to close
(the eyes):

Go back to the longer Hebrew rendition of the passage, and note the Hebrew word that lies between the idea of laying in order, and the wood.

It is the *aleph-tav*.



You already know that Yeshua identified Himself as the *aleph-tav* in Rev 1:8.

So, given all this, let's see what is there to see.

There are several concepts to be folded together. The first is: of carefully and properly arranging. The next is Yeshua. And the last is being fastened securely (regarding wood).

The wooden cross was carefully and properly fashioned and arranged to carry out its intended function – to be a cause of death for the one upon it.

Yeshua was fastened securely to the wood.

The Binding

The Hebrew word translated into English as “and he bound” is *v’yakod*. It comes from the root word *akad*, which implies being tied, bound, with leather straps.

יִצְחָק	וְ	יָבֹד
Isaac		and bound
<u>3327</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>6123</u>

This gives us the origin of the name this event has been given for generations: “The binding of Isaac”.

You probably also noticed another occurrence of the *aleph-tav* between the binding and Yitzhak. It seems that Yeshua is visible once again associated with this part of the story.

You may ask, “Where did the leather straps come from?” I wasn’t there, but I speculate that those straps were the same ones which were used to bind the wood into a great bundle that then rested upon the shoulder of Yitzhak as he walked to the place of sacrifice.

But if you read carefully all that leads up to this point in the story, you will notice that nowhere was Abraham instructed by G-d to bind Yitzhak.

Why would Yitzhak be bound in the first place? Would it be to overcome his power to resist? Isn't that what we most consider to be the point of "binding" someone?

It is clear that Yitzhak *could* resist. With very little expenditure of power, he could overpower his aged father, who was likely quite tired from climbing this mountain and working to build an altar.

There can be no doubt that at this time, Yitzhak now knows for sure that he is to be the sacrifice. If he did not wish to be bound, he would not be bound.

Our sages have pondered this. They tell us that Yitzhak is still walking "in unity" with his father, even at this time. After Abraham arranges the wood on the altar, they say that Yitzhak lies himself down upon the wood stretches back his neck, and then declares, "Father, the soul is willing, but the flesh is weak.", and urges his father in so many words, "Tie me so that I won't flinch when I see the blade coming down."

Sufficient information had been passed by G-d to Abraham and then to his son Yitzhak, that both of them knew that an animal which was in some way damaged was not fit to be an *olah* sacrifice.

And so since Yitzhak was to be the sacrifice, he knew he must not somehow react to the horror of the situation in a way that would injure himself and render his sacrifice invalid. This speaks of the unity between Yitzhak and Abraham, and the faith of Yitzhak.

The commentary found at Bereshit Rabah 56 suggests how this scene may have unfolded:

When Abraham sought to bind Isaac his son, he said to him: ‘Father, I am a young man, and I am concerned that my body will tremble due to fear of the knife, and I will [thereby] upset you, or perhaps the slaughter will [thereby] be rendered unfit and it will not be counted for you as a valid offering. Therefore, bind me very well.’ Thereupon, “he bound Isaac his son.” Is a person capable of binding a thirty-seven- year-old without his consent?

Do you see how Yitzhak is asking for some help in carrying through with this sacrifice, from outside his own strength? He is turning to his father to provide that extra help at the end.

Did Yeshua ask for help from the Father to carry out His sacrifice?
Let's read of it as Yeshua prayed in the garden of *Gat Shmonim* (place of the olive press).

Luke 22:41-44

41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

We will continue next time as Abraham stretches out his hand to grasp the knife to slay his son.