

11-8-14 To Roeh Israel Abilene – VaYera (and He appeared)  
Torah Portion; Genesis 18:1 – 22:24  
Haftarah: 2 Kings 4:1-37  
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: 1 Cor 3:12-14

## **The Akaidah Yitzhak part 1**

**Central question of this message: Will you be part of G-d's team?**

We are in parasha *VaYera*. The parasha takes its name from the first line of the text, “Now the L-rd appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre.”

Gen 18:1-4

18 Now the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre,  
while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2  
And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men  
were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran  
from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the  
earth, 3 and said, "My lord, if now I have found favor in your  
sight, please do not pass your servant by.

18:1  
 וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֶיךָ מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־  
 And appeared unto him the Lord in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in door  
 7200 413 3068 436 4471 1931 3427 6607

הָאֵהָל בְּחֶם הַיּוֹם:  
 the tent in the heat of the day;  
 168 2527 3117

2  
 וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נִצְבִּים עָלָיו  
 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him:  
 5375 5869 7200 2009 7969 376 5324 5921

וַיֵּרָא וַיָּרָץ וַיִּקְרָאֵם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל  
 when he saw them, and he ran and he called them from door, the tent  
 7200 9999 7323 7125 6607 168

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה:  
 and bowed himself toward the ground,  
 7812 776

3  
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל־  
 And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, not  
 559 113 518 4994 4672 2580 5869 408

נָא תֵעָבֵר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ:  
 I pray thee, pass away, from thy servant:  
 4994 5674 5921 5650

Our sages have suggested that the three “men” who showed simply appeared before Abraham were indeed angels, but somehow, just then, the Almighty also decided to have a conversation with Abraham. They suggest that Abraham delayed his conversation with G-d in order to show hospitality to these visitors, then the conversation continued once they were on their way.

In my view, that analysis is flawed for several reasons. If Abraham knew that G-d were speaking to him, I doubt he would have held his hand up and said, “Wait a minute, King of the Universe, while I make a meal for these three lesser visitors. I’ll hear you later.” Further, we know that as these visitors gave the prophecy regarding the coming birth of Yitzhak, and it is reported that the L-rd was speaking at that time.

And as some of the men continued toward Sodom, Abraham began to bargain with the L-rd regarding how many righteous in that city were sufficient to spare its destruction. And as the bargaining came to a close, “the L-rd departed.” I suggest that He didn’t simply walk away. I suggest his vanished from this realm. He no longer accompanied the two angels who were going to Sodom, as we see in the opening verse of chapter 19.

We know from Exodus 33:20 that no one can see G-d and live. What part of G-d *can* we see? What part can walk as a man among us, eat our food, and speak to us face-to-face? It can only be King Messiah.

So, I believe that we see here an early appearance of Yeshua, who is identified with the four-letter name of G-d. These three simply appeared to Abraham at a small distance (hence the action of Abraham in hurrying to meet them). The language of the passage does not indicate that they

were seen for some time, walking toward Abraham from the far horizon. Rather, they simply “appeared.” And that may have contributed to his reason to petition them that they stay for a bit with him. He had good reason to believe that these beings were not ordinary men.

There are many excellent teachings to be found in this parasha. But I wish to today begin a series on what we find in chapter 22. It a singular event, reported in great detail, that has captured the imagination of the Jewish people and been a topic of deep study for generations. It is regarded as deeply prophetic. It is known as the *Akaidah Yitzhak*, the “Binding of Isaac.”

This is such an important event in the history of the Jewish people, that it is invoked in the minds of Jews merely by saying, “*the akaidah*”.

This event sticks so tightly in the Jewish mind for a number of reasons. One is what seems to be an apparent endorsement of child sacrifice by our G-d. And also, our most ancient sages have considered this passage to be deeply prophetic, and identified Yitzhak as a “type” of the coming Messiah.

There are so many important kingdom lessons in this one section, and each is so important to our people, I want to do it justice. So it is for that reason I will begin today a series of messages on the *akaidah*.

Let's begin with the passage from Genesis 22.

Gen 22:1-2

22 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

### **The "Test"**

As we begin, there are questions that beg for answers. The first is this. "Why would G-d need to 'test' Abraham, since G-d already knows everyone's heart?"

The problem with English-speakers interpreting Hebrew text, even when translated into English, is that we tend to impose our western thought patterns on the text.

For our entire lives, we have been tested. Every class in school was characterized by tests. We needed to prove what we had learned by passing those tests. We were graded by how “right” we got the answers.<sup>1</sup> But that concept of testing – forcing another to give right answers to gain favor of the test administrator – is not at all what the Hebrew text seems to be saying.

The word is translated often as “tested” is the Hebrew word *nissah*. It is made up of the Hebrew letters: *nun*, *samech*, *heh*.

OT:5254 נִסָּה **nacah** (naw-saw'); a primitive root; to test; by implication, to attempt:

The pre-Babylonian pictographic Hebrew form of the word (where each letter carries with it a concept), contains three concepts.

1. *nun* = life
2. *samech* = supported (or supporting)
3. *heh* = revealed.

So, if we put these three concepts together in a sentence which expresses them in the English, what do we have? We have the *revealing* of what it is that *supports* your *life*. Or, “who are you *really*?”

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<sup>1</sup> In my experience, the concept of “right” regarding the answers on tests was defined by what the teacher expected to see as the correct answer, regardless of what the correct answer actually was.

And that idea is completely consistent with what we find in this passage. For we see here that G-d is setting up a circumstance during which Abraham will demonstrate who he *really* is... and what values *really* support his life.

During the easy times, we find it easy to “play at godliness”. But when the trials come, and we are pushed to our limits, it is at those times we discover what we are *really* made of... what values *really* support our lives. The refining fire of trials burn away the dross, leaving gold, silver and precious stones (Zech 13:9, I Cor 3:13).

Those who pretend at godliness have nothing left as the fires of trial burn... but those who have the courage of deep convictions demonstrate their true faith. And in the refiner’s fire they shine like gold and diamonds.

I believe Paul was referring to this very dynamic when he wrote these words to the church at Corinth.

1 Cor 3:12-14

12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold,  
silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work

will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

I think Paul was referring to times of great difficulty as “the day” that will reveal the truth of who we are. In those times of great testing much is revealed, because the trials strip away all the layers of “show” that a life of relative ease has placed there.

Those of us who have refinished furniture can picture clearly what Paul is saying. The process is not unlike removing layers of finish and paint from old, fine furniture. Not until all that patina is removed does the true nature of the underlying wood show forth.

That wood can be beautiful, in which case you wonder why someone painted over it in the first place. Or it can be rather ugly, in which case you wonder why you went to the trouble to strip-away the paint in the first place.

Either way, you really don't know what the true nature of the wood is...until it's stripped clean. And so it is with us. After all the surface coverings are stripped away, the inner truth... the *real* person... is known. We are proved, just as Abraham was proved.

Rabbi Moishe ben Maimon (Maimonides, 1135-1204) has said that G-d had no need for Abraham to prove his love. Rather, the test was meant to establish publicly and permanently just how far the fear and love of G-d must be ready to go. (*Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:24).

This analysis gets pretty close, in my opinion, but there is more. What I see in the “test” of Abraham is an opportunity, arranged by G-d, for Abraham to be confronted with a horrific task which would be impossible for any man to even consider. Would Abraham do this impossible thing? G-d knew that he would. But Abraham wasn’t always so certain, I suspect.

In the end, we know that Abraham did precisely what G-d instructed. And in that lies the more full understanding of the “test.” G-d did not need to find out what Abraham would do. He knew. But Abraham needed to prove to himself... and to prove to us as well... the level of trust he had in G-d.

That is what I believe is part of the reason for Abraham’s proof-test in this passage. It was certainly so that he could have his faith strengthened, but I think more importantly, so that every generation after his would be able to see what true faith looks like. It is not a faith of ease. It is not a faith

at rest. It is a faith in action which steps out to do the impossible, knowing that only G-d can make it happen as He has said.

In the trials of our lives, we will certainly discover this inner truth of who we *really are*, but during that time of proof-testing, *all others around us* discover it at the same time. Such is the essence of the witness we have in this dark world.

So, I would replace the phrase “G-d tested” in the passage with the phrase, “G-d provided Abraham an extremely difficult challenge of faith, so that Abraham would show to himself, and to all those in every generation, the actual depth of his faith.”

## **The Call**

I wish for you to see something else which you may not have fully understood in the beginning of the passage. Notice that G-d called to Abraham by name, and Abraham answered **הִנְנִי**, “here I am.” It is pronounced *hineyni*. This word is the combination of two Hebrew words *hiney* (here) and *ani* (I). In today’s colloquial English, we would say, “Yes, Lord?” What do we see from this?

G-d was going to give Abraham an important set of instructions, and He wished to have Abraham's full attention. So, he called him by name first. Once Abraham responded with "Yes, L-rd?" G-d could now have a focused time with him.

The same pattern is found with G-d's conversation with Moses at the "burning bush" in Exodus 3, with Yacov in Genesis 31:11 and 46:2, with the call of Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:4.

Should G-d "call you by name," He will follow that up with some important instructions or information, but first He will need your full attention.

## **Only Son**

Gen 22:2

And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

|                                             |                                        |                                        |                                          |                                    |                                   |                                                |                              |                                         |              |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------|
| אָהַבְתָּ<br>thou lovest,<br><u>157</u>     | אֲשֶׁר־<br>whom<br><u>834</u>          | יְחִידָךְ<br>thine only<br><u>3173</u> | אֶת־<br>853                              | בְּנֶךָ<br>thy son,<br><u>1121</u> | אֶת־<br>853                       | נָא<br>now<br><u>4994</u>                      | קַח־<br>Take<br><u>3947</u>  | וַיֹּאמֶר<br>And he said,<br><u>559</u> | <sup>2</sup> |
| וְהִעַלְהוּ<br>and offer him<br><u>5927</u> | הַמִּזְבֵּחַ<br>Moriah;<br><u>4179</u> | אֶרֶץ<br>the land of<br><u>776</u>     | אֶל־<br>into<br><u>413</u>               | לָךְ<br>thee<br><u>3807a</u>       | וְלָךְ־<br>and get<br><u>3212</u> | יִצְחָק<br>Isaac,<br><u>3327</u>               | אֶת־<br>853                  | son<br><u>9999</u>                      |              |
| אֵלָיךְ:<br>thee of.<br><u>413</u>          | אֹמֵר<br>I will tell<br><u>559</u>     | אֲשֶׁר<br>which<br><u>834</u>          | הַהָרִים<br>the mountains<br><u>2022</u> | אֶחָד<br>one of<br><u>259</u>      | עַל־<br>upon<br><u>5921</u>       | לְעֹלָה<br>for a burnt offering<br><u>5930</u> | שָׁם<br>there<br><u>8033</u> |                                         |              |

He is told to take his “only son”, Yitzhak, and go to a special place. Notice how the description is made. Son... only son... that you love. That “Give your only son as a sacrifice” description should sound familiar to us.

John 3:16

16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

But I suggest the tie-in to Yeshua is deeper still. As you looked at the Hebrew in Genesis 22:2, you saw something else important. Between the Hebrew words for “your son”, and “your only” you saw the Hebrew word *et*.



You also noticed that this word is not translated in the English versions, because until John encountered the risen Yeshua at Patmos it had no translation. It simply was a Hebraic linguistic device which connects the actor to the thing being acted upon.

But we know the meaning of *et* today. Yeshua declared that He is the “aleph and the tav”<sup>2</sup> (see Rev 1:8). So, we can see that Yeshua appears between “your son” and “only son”.

With Yeshua now peeking out from the passage, let’s look further.

## **The Selection**

Gen 22:3

3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

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<sup>2</sup> It would be absurd to suggest that Yeshua and John, both of whom were native Hebrew speakers, chose to have this important conversation in Greek. It is far more likely that the translators of the later Greek account of what happened chose to use the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, giving the statement a completely different meaning than we see today, once the Hebrew is restored.

Once Abraham heard what G-d required, he didn't delay in accomplishing it.

When you are going on a mission to accomplish something important for G-d, take with you the proper team. Picking the proper team is essential to the mission.

Our sages have suggested that since Abraham was a man of great renown, power and wealth, it was appropriate that he be accompanied by attendants. They say that at least one of these attendants should be vigilant at all times to protect Abraham from an attack. Taking two of them was quite practical, they speculate, because while one of the young men were engaged in necessary bodily relief, the other could still stand guard.

Let's look at the Hebrew.

|             |            |            |               |             |            |
|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
| יִצְחָק     | וְאֵת      | אִתּוֹ     | נְעָרָיו      | שְׁנֵי      | אֹתָם      |
| Isaac       | and        | with him,  | his young men | two of      |            |
| <u>3327</u> | <u>853</u> | <u>854</u> | <u>5288</u>   | <u>8147</u> | <u>853</u> |

The Hebrew word translated as “young men” is *naar*. It carries with it the concept of a young lion, in its root form. It may have been that Abraham saw these two young men as powerful as a young lion, combined with a deep loyalty to him.

OT:5288 נַעַר **na`ar** (nah'-ar); from OT:5287; (concretely) a boy (as active), from the age of infancy to adolescence; by implication, a servant; also (by interch. of sex), a girl (of similar latitude in age):

OT:5287 נָעַם **na`ar** (naw-ar'); a primitive root [probably identical with OT:5286, through the idea of the rustling of mane, which usually accompanies the lion's roar]; to tumble about:

In the end, we don't know precisely what criteria Abraham used to choose the young men he took with him. But it is clear that they were fastidiously loyal to Abraham, and did precisely what he told them to do. These, it seems, are main criteria for choosing a team.

Once you get past the threshold criterion of ability to carry out the mission, loyalty to the leader and dedication to the mission becomes the primary characteristics of a successful mission.

We can see that very same dynamic at work as Yeshua chose His "team" for His earthly work 2000 years ago. Every one of the disciples was chosen for a particular purpose, and under the direction of the Spirit. Even the one who was to betray Him was chosen to do precisely that.

Because He knew early-on He had to become the sacrifice for sins, and a betrayal was going to be central to that mission as well.

For our part today, should the L-rd wish to call you to be part of His team to carry out a special purpose for His kingdom, then know that you are *precisely the right one* to accomplish your individual tasking in that mission. Don't second-guess G-d, and although you may argue against your qualifications for the mission, G-d will ultimately prevail in that argument.

We see in Exodus 4 that Moses argued G-d's selection of him as the team leader.

Ex 4:10-17

10 Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say." 13 But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message

by whomever Thou wilt." 14 Then the anger of the Lord burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 And you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. 16 Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and it shall come about that he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be as God to him. 17 And you shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."

Regardless, did you notice that during the mission, Moses really didn't use Aaron as his spokesman. G-d's accommodation to Moses was, in the end, unnecessary. But it made Moses feel better.

Of course, none of us are really "qualified" for the mission that G-d calls us to accomplish. I can't tell you how many times Alex Yalenga has told me "I am so unqualified and unworthy" when speaking of his work in Africa for the King. When he tells me this, I agree with him, and remind him that G-d doesn't need perfect people nearly as much as he needs available people who can do the work, and who are loyal to the mission.

When G-d calls you to be part of the team, know that your shortcomings are not barriers to your service. They might just be the very things that prove G-d to be greater than our failures.

As a team leader, be prepared that others on the team won't have the same vision as you do regarding some of the details of the mission, or the final goal. That is not a problem, if you have the right team at your side.

### **Separation and Preparation**

Some have speculated that Abraham was anxious to get up and on the way before Sarah had a chance to interrogate him too deeply on where he was going, and what he intended to do there.

Our sages have noticed that Abraham appears to have left his camp before he stopped to split the wood. This, they speculate, was to further avoid Sarah's questioning regarding this trip.

This leads us to an important lesson. When G-d calls you to do something difficult, something which may have never been done before, and something which others close to you will certainly not understand,

separate yourself from those whose motivation is to talk you out of it, regardless of how close to you they are.

The Army knows this principle. When a Special Forces A-team is preparing for a mission, they are put into “isolation” for a time before the mission. They have no contact with anyone outside their chain of command as they get the details of their mission. That will remain true until they deploy, execute the mission, and return. This practice not only avoids “security leaks” which can destroy the mission,<sup>3</sup> but serves to keep the soldiers focused on the mission, without any influence from others.

We see that very dynamic being lived-out in Yeshua’s ministry.

Matt 16:21-23

21 From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." 23 But He turned and said to Peter,

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<sup>3</sup> I personally saw an important mission for which I was selected as part of the team, be scrubbed because of a security leak. The enemy was made aware of the mission by an unsavory American whose name you would know if I were to speak it. Because of that leak, many American POWs were left in Southeast Asia after the war, and died.

"Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

As is true with the Army, is true with your holy “special ops” missions as well. Satan can know your mission, and he will try to use anything, even the well-meaning urgings of your closest friends, to try to turn you from the holy task to which you have been called.

Adequate preparation for the mission is essential. Was there no wood available for the sacrifice at the location that G-d was sending them? Abraham did not know the answer, and he was not going to take that chance.

The characteristics of a good team leader is to make needed preparations for the mission well before it begins. Think it through, and make preparations to deal with obstacles you can foresee before you set out.

As the famous Chinese master tactician Sun Tzu observed, “Every battle is won before it’s ever fought.”

Next week we will continue with the journey.