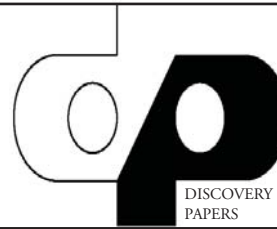


YAHWEH-JIREH: THE LORD PROVIDES

SERIES: NAMES OF GOD



Catalog No. 090614
Genesis 22:1-14
1st Message
JudyHerminghaus
June 14, 2009

This has been a stressful season in our country. Last October I was in Thailand on a mission trip when we saw our stock market plunge. It was surprising to me to turn on the television in the evenings and see all the international news stations reporting on the economic crisis as it affected markets around the world. Since that time we have gone on to see our housing values drop considerably, our job market shrink (many of us have lost our jobs or been threatened with losing them), and our 401Ks diminish, some to nearly half their value. The longer this continues, I notice, the more difficult it is for me not to be worried about what it all means. Will God provide for us if all of this fails us?

But I also hold a picture in my mind from that time in Thailand of a woman walking through the dark streets of the sex trade district, looking so out of place. She was tall and white, and she dressed like the school administrator she once was. She meandered down the dark streets, smiling and talking to the young prostitutes on the street, and then slipped through the doors of the sex bars where the real action takes place. She sat in the dark, drinking a bottle of water, chatting with the bored working girls; looking for a way to make contact, to provide a way of escape for those willing to leave this life behind. She was imitating her Father. She was being to these young women what God had been to her: her Provider and her Savior, who brought new life out of death.

In the next three weeks we are going to study three compound names of God which were revealed as His people encountered God providing for them, healing them, and doing battle on their behalf. Names in the ancient world held far more significance than names do in ours. Names were thought to reveal the attributes or character of a person.¹ As God's names were progressively revealed to His people, they were getting to know Him in a deeper and more personal way. Just as I remember seeing Bonita, the woman missionary in the streets of Thailand, acting in the place of Jesus, these scenes from Israel's history leave an indelible picture of the character of God and how He works in His people's lives to bless and sustain them. This week we are going to hear the well known story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. It is from this story, in Genesis 22, that we learn a new name for God: Yahweh-Jireh, which means The LORD Will Provide. We begin with Genesis 22, verses 1 and 2:

Some time later God (Elohim) tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son,

Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

What a shocking command! It is even more shocking in light of the story of Abraham and his long wait for a child. Abraham was 100 years old and his wife 99 when Isaac was born. Isaac was a miracle baby direct from the hand of God. They had waited 25 years for God's promise of this child to come to fruition, and had even named him "laughter," because they had laughed when God promised them this child in their old age. As he grew up his named proved appropriate because he brought such joy into their lives. All their hopes and dreams were in this son; for God had promised Abraham that through Isaac Abraham's descendants would be so numerous that they would be like the stars in the heavens (Genesis 15:5) and that great nations would come from him (Genesis 18). So how could these promises come true if Abraham killed this promised son? What a dilemma Abraham is faced with here.

We learn in the first verse of Genesis 22 that this is a test for Abraham which came sometime after Isaac's weaning ceremony in Chapter 21, possibly making Isaac 14 years old or so at the time of this test.² The ancient historian Josephus says that Isaac was even older. He says he was 25 at this time. Either way it is apparent that Isaac is not a young boy, but a young man now, and well on his way to fulfilling the promise that he would be the father of many nations. Then suddenly comes this command: "Now, take your son, your only son whom you love, and sacrifice him..."

Isn't this how crises of faith come upon us? They seem so sudden, so out of the blue, and yet they are not surprising to God at all. I was shocked when the stock market plunged and our housing market bubble popped, but nothing is out of God's sovereign view. In fact, our text says God brought this test to Abraham. It is clear that God understands how much Abraham loves his son. He knows that this is the only son Abraham will ever be able to have and yet He asks him to give Isaac up. How can it be? Is God "mean"?

When I was in a college Philosophy class, oh so long ago, I read this passage of Scripture for the first time. I wasn't a follower of Jesus then. This story absolutely stunned me. I remember leaving the classroom to go out on the balcony and ponder the implications of this story—right in the middle of class—I was that moved. How could God ask a man to sacrifice his son? Why would God ask him to do such a thing? Why would a father do as God asked in

this situation? It seemed to me all the other philosophers I was studying were saying something reasonable; something I could figure out. But not this story. This story was an offense. Yet, somehow I could see God in it. After pondering it for some time, I thought a God that I could figure out easily was probably no God at all. This God did not fit nicely into any boxes as I would prefer. If I could easily fit Him into a nice comfortable box, would He be God at all?

“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go...” The narrator’s repetition of “son” which begins here and continues throughout this passage is probably a good representation of what is going on in Abraham’s mind. “Son, son, Isaac, whom I love—go—take—sacrifice.” How must Abraham have felt? Would he do as God asked?

God asks hard things from His people in Scripture, and from us as well. He demands our allegiance, not to the things He gives us, but to Him. Although this test is unique to Abraham for a specific purpose in God’s salvation history, still we are presented in our own lives with tests which challenge our faith and challenge us to consider where we put our allegiance. Do we love God or the gifts of God more? Is Abraham’s heart attached to Isaac or to God Himself? This is the question that Abraham’s test is asking Abraham, and by extension, us. So, is God “mean”? Does He want us to fail?

Taking a look at the Hebrew word for test, *nissi*, will help us answer that question. The word test here means to prove another worthy.³ This test for Abraham is not to make him stumble and fall, but rather to prove that Abraham’s faith is real and genuine and worthy of being the seed on which God will build His people, a holy nation, that will be God’s possession forever (Romans 4). This test of Abraham is to demonstrate the mature faith that God knows is present in him. Although Abraham did not know this test was coming, his trust in God was ready when it did come. For God’s timing is perfect. Therefore, God is not “mean” when He tests us, but purposeful. He is going to show Abraham, and succeeding generations, that Abraham’s faith is genuine. We learn from this that we too can be tested and stand in faith.

When we are hard pressed on every side by things which seem overwhelming to us, 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “... God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, ...but will provide the way of escape...that you may be able to endure it.” In order to stand firm there must be some resistance, just as strengthening exercises build our physical bodies. An unchallenged faith is not a strong faith. Even if our true adversary, the devil, tries to tempt us to make us fall, as 1 Peter 5:8 and James 1:13-15 say he will, the apostle John writes in 1 John 4:4, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” John is saying that for those of us who believe, the Holy Spirit of God lives in us and will make us stand against the powers, which seek to destroy our faith.

We planted a tree in our front yard where it is watered regularly by our sprinklers. It has rapidly grown very tall. But I have since learned that this is not a great idea, because trees with ready sources of water develop very shallow root systems and in the end they cannot support the weight of their full upper branches—they topple over in harsh storms. It is actually better for trees to go through times when water is less plentiful so their roots go deep and are able to support their branches later during bad weather.

Abraham’s challenge then and ours today is will we trust God every day with our lives? “Give us this day our daily bread” from the Lord’s prayer is a request that God will provide for our needs. We need His provision daily, but it goes beyond what we will eat to our spiritual and emotional needs as well. Abraham is given a hard test here, but it is how he has lived his daily life which will determine his ability to stand or fall.

Our tests aren’t so easy either. Will we love God more than the gifts of God? Will we hope and trust in Him when our 401Ks plummet? When our test scores are not good enough to please our parents or ourselves? When our career is all of a sudden lost to unemployment? When illness comes into our lives? All of these events afford us the opportunity to exercise our faith muscles. If we will choose to trust in God we will discover, as Hudson Taylor wrote long ago, “not that we have great faith, but that we have faith in a great God.” Let me repeat that phrase: it is not that we have great faith, but that we have faith in a great God. As we trust in and obey God, He works on our behalf and we get to see some marvelous things. We get to see Him provide for us in unexpected ways.

Right on the heels of returning from the mission trip to Thailand (actually the day after I got home), our family was faced with an unexpected crisis. I was on such a spiritual high coming home from Thailand where I had seen God work so powerfully. Then suddenly, I was brought down about as low when we heard that a member of our family had been arrested. We thought, “Oh, that must have been a traffic ticket gone bad or something like that.” But no, the charges were criminal in nature and serious! How bizarre. I knew our loved one did not do anything criminal on purpose, but it was also hard to imagine charges which were false in nature coming to such a point. But they had and that made it all the more frightening. I was studying this passage the week that this occurred—that is the beauty of being in God’s word regularly. I came to this name of God and realized that I was in one of these faith-testing moments. Do I panic or pray? I actually did both. However, prayer took the day, especially over the months that this went on. Why? Because I had great faith? No, because I have a great God. There was nothing I could do at all to be of any help in this problem. I had to totally depend on God. And I saw God work to provide for our needs through a feisty defense attorney and the finances that made us able to mount a defense. I saw both as God’s provision for us at this time. As we prayed and asked God for help over the months, I was able to testify that my faith went deeper and my confidence in God grew stronger. I

saw Him provide in ways that I would not have thought possible, until finally the case was dismissed. God's provision is experienced every day by us in ways that we take for granted, but when we have a circumstance like this we have a choice to concentrate on the bad circumstance, or try to see God working in it and through it. Life will not be free of trials. That is not living in this world as a child of God. Life will be full of trials and seeing God with you in them is exercising faith.

Abraham Obeys God

We continue in the story of Abraham with verses 3 through 10 of Genesis 22:

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 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."

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, 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?"

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

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. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

Abraham could have been despondent about this circumstance in his life. Earlier in his story, he had bargained with God over his nephew Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He had lied when traveling with his beautiful wife through the Promised Land and said she was his sister, putting God's promise of a seed from Abraham in jeopardy. He did that twice. But here, Abraham does not hesitate (you see, God's timing is perfect—Abraham's faith was ready for this test). "Early" the next morning he begins his preparations for this most difficult journey. For three days, they travel to the mountain where the sacrifice was to take place. Three days is a long time to consider what is going to happen up on that mountain. He could have decided he heard God wrong and that He really didn't tell him to do this thing (wishful thinking). He could have reasoned that the Hebrew God did not allow child sacrifice after all so He must not have meant what He said

(reasonable thinking). But there is no indication of any internal quibbling with God's command, only a kind of sad poignancy in the text where we hear the words "son, son, son," repeated over and over, and Abraham moves forward to carry out God's command. This is Abraham's faith thinking.

In verse 5 when Abraham leaves the servants behind he says, "...we will go and worship and come back to you." Abraham gives us a hint of what he is thinking. He is going to worship and return with Isaac. Somehow, Abraham has reasoned by faith that Isaac was coming back with him. He leaves the servants behind because they would no doubt have stopped him in offering Isaac on the altar, much like Peter tried to stop Jesus from going to the cross in the garden of Gethsemane. Abraham did intend to go all the way and sacrifice his son. And he believed Isaac would come back. He certainly did not know how God would do it, but God had brought life out of the dead womb of his wife Sarah, so Abraham knew God could do the impossible. Abraham's faith in God had grown over the years, just as ours is able to grow stronger over the years too.

So, Abraham puts the wood on Isaac's back and proceeds up the mountain. The father's heartbreak at hearing Isaac's words in verse 7 always gets to me: "My Father!...Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answers in verse 8, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." This intimate exchange, father to son, leaves no doubt about the emotions Abraham must have felt as he proceeded in faith to do this hard thing. When Abraham says God will provide for Himself the lamb, he is acknowledging the truth that God had already provided Isaac to a man and woman that could never have had a child without God's provision. If he were to be the "lamb" in this case then so be it—God still provided, and if God provides something else then so be that. Abraham will obey God. Abraham worships God, not the gifts of God. It is settled. Abraham's faith is worthy of the great promises God has bestowed on him.

Abraham uses the word "provides" here, which has at its Hebrew root ra-ah, meaning to see; here translated to provide. What it means theologically is that when God sees a thing He acts; when He acts it is to provide for His people. God is not a distant far-off deity who sees a thing and does not act to save, restore, and rescue. When God sees, He meets the need of His people. But sometimes God does not act how or when we wish He would. That is because we don't know what we need or how to provide for our needs.

Psalm 139:23-24 says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way." We do not know our hearts, but God does. He provides challenges, tests, trials, and blessings as we need them, as a good Father who loves His child will do. Abraham trusts his Father so he is able to sacrifice what is most dear to him.

In verses 9 and 10 of Genesis 22, Abraham lifts his hand

to do so...and Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us how he was able to do this remarkable thing: "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

Abraham's trust in God gave him insight into resurrection possibilities that had not been revealed as yet but were only seen through the eyes of faith.

There is a character in C.S. Lewis' book *The Great Divorce* that has remained with me over the years, probably because I am a mother and my children are very important to me. In Lewis' book, the characters living in hell are offered a bus ride to heaven. Once on heaven's shores they journey up a mountain to the gates of the heavenly city. But most of these folks from hell bring hell with them. They will not let go of their moral failings or their demanding ways so they cannot experience the joy of heaven. The mother ghost in Lewis' tale wants nothing more from heaven than to see her son Michael. She has no interest in God, only in seeing her son. Her demanding attitude and obsession with her son bars her way up the heavenly mountain. She fights with her spiritual guide, saying, "Michael is Mine." Her love for her son has turned into a need for possession which is unhealthy for both. God will not allow it. Here at PBC, Paul Taylor has been teaching us in our study of Jeremiah that sometimes we have to give up even good things for the better thing that is found in our relationship with God.

Yahweh Intervenes

In Genesis 22, verses 11 through 14, we read:

But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

"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."

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. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

What Abraham discovered deep in his soul about God through this experience was expressed in a new name he gave to the God who met him in that place. Because Abraham stepped out in faith to do a very radical thing, he saw God in his life in a way that most of us will never know. He reveals his now deepened understanding of God by giving God this compound name: The LORD Will Provide (in Hebrew, *Yahweh-Jireh*). What special grace is given to Abraham, that the angel of Yahweh stays his hand!

In Exodus 6 we read, "I am the YHWH LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, YHWH LORD, I did not make Myself known to them."

The Name

God's personal divine name, YHWH, was not revealed to His people until Moses was called to deliver them from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 3:15-17). The name comes from the Hebrew verb *havah*, which means "to be," and in Exodus 3 appears as "I AM." Most scholars see in this name self-existence, and the eternal nature of God. When you see in your Bibles the word LORD in capital letters, it is in the place of God's personal name. His name was thought too holy to pronounce aloud by ancient Hebrews, so when they came to His name in their texts they said aloud "Adonai," which means Lord, in place of His divine name. That is how it has come to us as LORD in our Bibles today. However, LORD is not a personal name. It is a title and means sovereign, master. It doesn't communicate the personal nature of the relationship between God and His people which lies behind the giving of this name and the usage of it in Scripture. It is God's covenant name which is given to His covenant people. This name is the most common name for God in the Bible, appearing over 6,800 times. When attached to another word it memorializes a specific event in the lives of God's people where God is revealing to them how He works on their behalf. When you read this Abraham story, you are to remember that Yahweh provides for His people, including you.

Yahweh Provides the Lamb: Jesus

The Abraham story in Genesis 22 foreshadows God the Father's sacrifice of His son at Calvary. Abraham's willing sacrifice of his son, his only son, whom he loves, is a type of Yahweh's willingness to sacrifice His son, His only son, whom He loves, as a sacrifice for our sins. The ram caught in the thicket is a type of Christ. This is what John understood when he saw Jesus walking toward him at the Jordan River and cried out, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Isaac's quiet submissive obedience to Abraham is like Christ's own quiet submission to His Father's will when He goes to the cross. As Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, so Jesus carried His own cross to Calvary. The place of sacrifice, Mount Moriah, is the same place where Solomon built the Hebrew temple in Jerusalem. When Abraham says in faith that God will provide the lamb for the sacrifice, it pointed to Jesus, the one who came as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of all who believe in Him. What God did not demand of Abraham, He demanded of Himself. Not Isaac, but Jesus, was to die in the land of Moriah (the Temple Mount in Jerusalem). And as Abraham received Isaac back from the dead figuratively, God the Father received Jesus back from the dead literally, through His resurrection. In all of this, Yahweh-Jireh provided that which we could not provide for ourselves.

John 3:16 tells us why: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God sacrificed His son so that we might live, because He loved us. He wants to be in relationship with us. There was no cheap grace in this sacrifice. If we thought this test was bad for Abraham, then imagine what it was like for God when He had to carry through with this saving sacrifice. What more could Yahweh-Jireh have provided? What more did He have to give?

I have four applications I would like to suggest to you from this passage. First and primary: Come to Jesus. If you have not trusted Him to forgive your sins and give you new life then do not put it off for a “better” time. Death comes to us all, but it almost always comes as a surprise. This past week our family lost our beloved father and grandfather. He was very old and we knew it would come, but when it did, we were all so saddened and so surprised at what the world was like without him. At his funeral, I quoted Jesus himself, from John 11:25-26: “I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.’ Do you believe this?’ Do you believe this? That is Jesus’ question, not mine. Remember, it is not how great your faith is, but how great a God He is who draws you to come. Come to Jesus. Ask Him to save you from your sins and to be Lord of your life.

Second, are there figurative “Isaacs” in your life that you must place on the altar?

Third, what might God be calling you to step out and do in radical faith?

Fourth, how have you seen God provide for you? Memorialize this. Worship God in prayer and thanksgiving for it.

Let me close with Psalm 103:1-5:

“Praise the LORD, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits-
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

NOTES

¹ Spangler, Ann. *Praying the Names of God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

² Waltke, Bruce. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

³ *Ibid.*, 304