

Why is this Story in the Torah? A Close Reading of the Binding of Isaac



MAROM מרומ



Author Marom team	Read time 10 - 30 min	Level 1	Amount of people 1-4 recommended
-----------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------	--

A Close Reading of the Binding of Isaac

Instructions

Take a seat, either by yourself or with a few friends. Grab a cup of tea, lemonade, or a beer. Dive into the text and see where your thoughts and discussion take you.

Let's get inspired

The reading of the Torah is a major piece of the Rosh Hashanah service. On the first day of the holiday, we read from the Torah about the birth of Isaac, and on the second day about the binding of Isaac. This focus on Isaac is not necessarily about Isaac as an individual, but rather about a major motif of the day-- the story of the almost-sacrifice. The binding of Isaac inspires a wide range of emotions and interpretations. The story is considered one of the pinnacles of the Biblical narrative, eschewing colorful descriptions and details regarding background, setting, thoughts and feeling. Economical with words, the text hints at all of these things through its simple and terse style, and with its silence. The sages composed many midrashim, exegetical texts, in order to fill in the gaps of the story. The binding of Isaac is a central subject of prayers and liturgical poetry: "Recall [in our favor, for our benefit] the one who binded, recall the one who was bound." The story is a subject of note in various disciplines of art, including drawings, sculptures, and literature, maintaining a significant role even in contemporary compositions. The story of the binding of Isaac is rich with material for contemplating worship of the Divine, morality, love of children, sacrifice, devotion, and much more. The fact that we deal with this story on Rosh Hashanah is itself material for contemplation.

A Close Reading of the Binding of Isaac



Personal study:

Study tasks:

Read the story of the binding of Isaac as if you have never seen it before. While reading, try to forget everything you know about the story, and focus only on the plain meaning of the text and the emotions that the text inspires within you. Read slowly and aloud, and imagine the events. How do the characters look? What expressions are on their faces? What tones of voice do you hear? What do the surroundings look like? What is the weather? What else is present? What do the various characters feel?

Genesis 22

Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, “Abraham,” and he answered, “Here I am.”

And He said, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.”

Genesis 22

So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.

Then Abraham said to his servants, “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.

Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he answered, “Yes, my son.” And he said, “Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”

And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together.

They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Genesis 22

And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son.

Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.”

And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.”

When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.

And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the LORD there is vision.”

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, “By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,

I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.

All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.”

Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.



MAROM מרומ

THANKS TO:



for their support.