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DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

Searching for the ancient authors' meanings of the words found in our Bibles, and follow their journeys through the centuries.

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JEHOVAH-JIREH

*By Sidney Dosh, Jr.**

In Genesis 22:14, we have the phrase *JEHOVAH-JIREH* which appears in many English translations:

(1) *"and Abraham called the name of the place, Jehovah-Jireh; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided' (King James Version [KJV]).*

(2) *"So Abraham called that place the Lord will provide.' On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided" (New International Version [NIV]).*

I must hasten to add that other versions of the KJV do not follow the exact wording of this verse as quoted above. The purpose of displaying the verses as they are is to alert you to the fact that there is a Hebrew phrase that has been left untranslated in the KJV, but translated in the NIV.

The phrase *JEHOVAH-JIREH* which appears only one time in all of Scripture (Gen. 22:24) is a phrase that has often been translated "God provides" or "God will provide." Bibles that are written in Hebrew contain many words or phrases that appear only once in Scripture, as many as 1800 by some counts. This makes a clear meaning of many of these words extremely difficult to determine since there is no basis for comparison in their use. In many cases the translators simply guess at the best possible meaning given the context of the preceding and succeeding sentences. But is this true for the phrase *JEHOVAH-JIREH*? Since these are clearly two Hebrew words, let's take a look at them and see if it is difficult to determine their meaning. The NIV came up with a meaning. Can we confirm that meaning using a few simple tools which are at hand?

The word Jehovah looks like this יהוה (YHWH) when written in Hebrew. This is often transliterated *Yahweh* and is one of the two major and most frequent names of God in the Hebrew text, the other being Elohim -- אלוהים. The name *Yahweh* is often called "the ineffable name of God," which means it is not capable of being expressed by human words. Very early in the Christian church the name was pronounced as we have it now in the KJV: *Jehovah*. Thus the first part of this phrase is pretty much straight forward, and we have little problem accepting or understanding what this word *Jehovah* means.

The second word *Jireh* looks like this **יִרְאֶה** (YRAH) when written in Hebrew. As you can see the translators have translated this "provide." A search of a good Hebrew dictionary will reveal that this word does not mean "provide." If we had not taken time to look up the meaning of the words in this Hebrew phrase, we would not have known if the translators are giving us an accurate translation. The word as we have it in this verse is the 3rd person masculine singular, future tense form of the basic verb "see" and when translated the literal meaning is "[he] will see."

Now we can apply a true literal meaning to the phrase *Jehovah-Jireh*. Based on the analysis that we have gone through the phrase should be translated "God will see." The verb **יִרְאֶה** is one of the most common verbs in the Hebrew language. It has a very straight forward meaning and use, and is seldom subject to any confusion as to meaning. I should be quick to point out that I firmly believe that God is our provider. He created everything, and he graciously gives us the privilege of enjoying His creation. But the fact that God is our provider, a fact that is attested to throughout Scripture, should not necessarily mean that we have to look for ways to prove that by applying meanings that are out of line with the plain meaning of the words. In fact, in doing so we often distort what was written and in the process we may rob the readers of a blessing, a blessing that comes from the text as it was intended.

By making a change in the meaning of these words we have disrupted the flow that has been created by the writer in this chapter. Let me explain. Many times the writers of Scripture were inspired to record words and phrases in a very particular way. Certain words that were the key to passages were often repeated throughout the passage. In this way the reader, particularly a Hebrew reader, would recognize a pattern or a sameness in the repetition of the word-sounds. If we look through the Hebrew words in Genesis 22 we find that the word **יִרְאֶה** appears in various tenses five different times--once in verse 4, once in verse 8, once in verse 13, and twice in verse 14. In addition, there are some scholars that believe that the word *Moriah* -- **מֹרְיָה** (MORYH) is derived from the same root **יִרְאֶה**. It is this type of repetition of words that I am making reference to when I say that to the Hebrew ear a pattern will be recognized.

But what can all of this mean to us? Does it mean that God did not *provide* as the translators suggest in this passage? I am certainly not suggesting that He did not provide. But there may be more to this than just provision. Let us now look at this verse in parallel, showing the Hebrew along with two possible English translations using the word "see" for the Hebrew word **יִרְאֶה**. Then, for comparison I will also include the way that the KJV translates this verse, a translation that is followed by many English Bibles.

If you have access to a Hebrew text with vowel signs, you can see the changes that occur within the structure of the word **יִרְאֶה** (go to the "Bible Study Tools" section of the BHC website to find a Hebrew text). You will note that the vowels change from the first time the word **יִרְאֶה** appears to the second time it appears. In Hebrew a word that has the same consonants often takes on a slightly different

meaning as the vowels change. For example, in this verse the first time **ראה** appears it means "will see." The second time it appears it means "will be seen."

GENESIS 22:14

HEBREW	TRANS. 1	TRANS. 2	KJV
אברהם	Abraham	Abraham	And Abraham
ויקרא	called	called	called
שם -	the name of	the name of	the name of
המקום ההוא	that place	that place	that place
יהוה	Yahweh	Yahweh	Jehovah
יראה	will <u>see</u>	will <u>see</u>	will <u>provide</u>
אשר	<u>so that</u>	<u>so that</u>	<u>as</u>
יאמר	it <u>will be said</u>	it <u>will be said</u>	it <u>is said</u>
היום	<u>today</u>	<u>today</u>	<u>to this day</u>
בהר	<u>on</u> the mountain	<u>in</u> the mountain	<u>in</u> the Mount
יהוה	<u>Yahweh</u>	<u>Yahweh</u>	<u>of the Lord</u>
יראה	will <u>be seen.</u>	will <u>be seen.</u>	will <u>provide.</u>

By returning the translation to that which is in line with the normal meaning of the words, we have not abused the text, nor have we imposed our own standard on the text. The text is now free to speak to each individual reader. And with this translation before us we can explore, not only the style in which words were repeated for emphasis, but we can also explore other possible reasons behind the use of these words in this type of pattern.

Although we don't have space in this newsletter, a more complete study of the entire chapter may prove revealing, particularly the use of the word "place" **מקום** (MKOM) in reference to this particular mountain. Also the inclusion of the name of the mountain, Mount Moriah, is interesting, particularly since no one is really sure where this mountain is located. There is a tradition within later rabbinic Judaism that Mount Moriah is wherever it needs to be. Although it is generally considered to be the site of the Temple, there is no firm information to substantiate that claim. Like Mount Sinai the exact location has never been determined.

Translations that modify the meanings of words, such as we see in this example, have implications that often go unnoticed at a later time. For example, in Judaic

tradition this passage of Scripture provides evidence that God would be seen at some future date in His abode in the Holy of Holies inside the Temple on this very same mountain. In fact, the word that we have examined ראה is also the root word from which we get the word for "instruction" in Hebrew. A further derivative is the word "Torah" the name we often use to identify the Hebrew Bible or in another use the word "law." As a form of instruction the rabbis developed the concept that in this incident on Mount Moriah Abraham demonstrated through his actions an instruction to the generations that would follow that God always sees that which we do not. Furthermore, our obedience to him then permits us to see God as we proceed along the path of life.

It may be that Christian translators were attempting to avoid the idea that this passage was only referring to a particular place and a particular structure, where God would one day dwell. At the same time they appropriated this verse in order to point to another event that occurred on this same mountain, the sacrifice of Jesus. However, the insertion of the word "provide" does not necessarily improve this concept. It would also be appropriate to apply Christian theology regarding this event and "see" that the sacrifice of Jesus was being prophesied in these words, i.e., Jesus, as Lord, will be seen on this mountain.

From either perspective, Christian or Judaic it was not necessary to distort the meaning in order to make the point that at some future date on a mountain God would be seen in a glorious way.

Sid Dosh was an associate and close friend of Jim Myers & Dr. Ike Tennison. He was actively involved in our research for many years and has written a number of articles for our publications over those years. Sid cared about people and he will be missed by many. Sid passed away May 17, 2006. Visit Sid's memorial page on our website at -- <http://www.biblicalheritage.org/Memorials/dosh.htm>

We hope you enjoyed the information in this newsletter.

Matters of belief & faith play important roles in the quality of lives we lead; especially because of their effects on the political and social environments in which we are immersed. One of our primary missions is to provide you with solid factual information about our Bibles and the many heritages associated with them. Join the BHC Google Group (link is on the BHC Home Page) so you will receive future newsletters – FREE. We are happy to be able to share them with as many people as possible, regardless of their economic capacities. Please share our newsletters with as many people as you like – forward emails, make copies, etc. *All we ask is that you include this page with the newsletters.*

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