

MODIFIED FROM ORIGINAL SERMON

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Mountains are **majestic** and **inspire** us. They have symbolic meaning for us—as in, “Climb every mountain.” Some people cannot even imagine living in a place without a mountain **skyline**, and others cannot help but **climb** them.

Yet not all mountain encounters are the same, are they?

- Climbers and skiers often experience **injury** and even **death** on the mountain.
- Early pioneers often saw mountains as **overwhelming obstacles**, that stood in the way of their journey.
- Mountain roads can be **treacherous** and nerve racking...
- and recent volcanic disasters remind us that some mountains can quickly go from **beauty** and **wonder** to a thing of **terror**.

This is certainly true of some of the mountains in the Bible as well...

Mountains hold a significant place in Scripture. The Hebrew people saw **heaven** as being **up**, **hell** being **down**, and the **earth** being in **between**. God repeatedly made Himself available to His people on mountains. So, mountains drew the people for **worship**.

We probably all have a picture in our mind of the terrified faces of the people, when the presence of the **Lord rumbled Mount Sinai** causing it to burn and be covered in smoke as Moses went up to speak to God on their behalf....

However, I want to talk about another Biblical Mountain tonight, called **Mount Moriah**. This mountain likely had its own form of overwhelming dread, at least for one man as he approached this mountain. And that man's name was **Abraham**.

Not long before Abrahams journey to this mountain, the Lord had come to Abraham and instructed him to take his son, his only son, to Mount Moriah and offer him up, to sacrifice this child... this one thing he held most dear.... on an altar on Mount Moriah. For most this would have been an impossible request... Yet.... Abraham was faithful. Abraham trusted. He loaded the donkey with wood, and headed for the region of Moriah.

Can you imagine what a journey that must have been! Abraham knowing what lay ahead, and Isaac completely clueless...and in essence already as good as dead. What do you talk about? How do you act? When you know that the death of your child—at your own hands—lies in your path, how do you say the things that need to be said without giving away the intent of your journey? Quite the journey—a journey with the promise of death as your companion the entire way. Then, after **three days**, Abraham lifted up his eyes and there it was—the mountain—Mount Moriah. The time had come.

Sin requires sacrifice. Blood must be shed to pay the price. Payment must be made to satisfy the debt. Sin has exiled man from God, and the **only way to return from this exile** is to **pay the price demanded**, and the price is blood. So, to satisfy the payment demanded, Abraham prepares to offer up his only son.

Isaac bears the wood upon which he will be sacrificed up the mount, and he wonders and asks, “Where is the lamb for sacrifice?” He knows there must be blood shed to atone for sin. He knows the ritual. He knows, and he wants to know where the sacrifice is. Abraham’s heart must have been ripped from his chest at the question. How do you answer? What do you say? Abraham responds in faith, even as the tears are pushing at his eyes. **“God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son”** (v. 8).

Abraham has faith. Abraham trusts. Abraham knows the Lord will provide the lamb for sacrifice, but is the lamb Isaac? This he does not know, and it is this that makes his feet drag and his spirits sag. Is the sacrifice Isaac? Yet, Abraham builds the altar and arranges the wood and places his only son upon the wood; he raises the knife . . . and the Lord stays his hand! The Lord provides a sacrifice, a ram caught in the thicket. And thus it is said, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided” (v. 14).

So powerful is this account, so intense is the drama, so shocking the faith, so amazing the rescue that tradition has it that the Hebrew people later build the temple on this very hill... This very hill, this mountain will be where God dwells with His people. This mountain is **Mount Zion**! Consider this: The Hebrew people revere this account of Abraham and Isaac so highly that it has its own title and place in their faith. They call it the *Aqedah*, which is the Hebrew word for “binding.” Isaac is the only “bound,” tied-down sacrifice in the Old Testament. All other sacrifices are first killed and then placed upon the altar as their blood is poured and sprinkled. In the rest of the Bible, there is only one more bound and living sacrifice.

“On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided” (v. 14). On this mountain, the sacrifice of the **only-begotten Son** of God will be provided. He, too, is a **bound sacrifice** for He is nailed to the tree to suffer and die. **Sin, our sin, has exiled us from God. Blood is required for payment,** and on the mountain the Lord provides. This sacrifice takes place on another mountain, **Mount Calvary**. Here, Jesus **carries the wood** for His sacrifice, a tree, a cross. And from that tree on that mountain, the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is brought to Mount Zion. Jesus Christ brings His own blood onto Mount Zion, into the temple, through the curtain, and into the Most Holy Place. The temple curtain is ripped in two, and the blood of the Lamb is poured out on the Mercy Seat. The Lord provides the final sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Abraham makes a three-day journey to Mount Moriah prior to the sacrifice of his son; but Jesus' three-day journey follows His sacrifice. For three days, He lies in the tomb. For three days, the grave holds Him. But on that third day, Jesus is lifted up to new life, a glorious resurrection. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God provided His Son, His only Son, as the sacrifice required for sin, and all who believe in Him shall not perish. For God provides everlasting life, on this mountain.

Mount Moriah to Mount Zion—a return from exile. We who have been exiled from the presence of God by our sin have been returned to His presence, restored to His face, reunited on this mountain. On this mountain, God provides His only Son, and He provides the bloody payment for sin. On this mountain, as the curtain is ripped in two, the gates of heaven are thrown open to those who believe and call upon His name. On this mountain, the Lord provides. In Jesus' name. Amen.

TheTorah.com
The Location of Moriah

The story of the Akedah opens with the following command:

קח נָא אֶת בְּנֶךְ אֶת יְחִידֶךָ אֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֶּתְּ אֶת יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ לְךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ מִרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶתֶד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים:

“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 22:2)

Where is this Land of Moriah? Neither this context, nor any other in the Torah offers a clear answer. Verse 19 combined with v. 4 suggests that it is a three-day donkey ride from Beer Sheva, and v. 14 states, quite enigmatically, “And Abraham named that site YHWH-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of YHWH there is vision,”^[2] implying that the place of the *Akedah* became a place of worship. It is hardly surprising, then, that the later communities of Samaritans and Jews believed that Mount Moriah was either Shechem or Jerusalem.

Jerusalem

The Jewish tradition that associates Mount Moriah with Mount Zion in Jerusalem goes way back to the Book of Chronicles, most likely from the fourth century BCE, which states (2 Chron 3:1):

בָּחַל יְשׁוּעָה לְבָנוֹת אֶת בֵּית־יְהוָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם בְּהַר הַמְּוֹרֵה

Solomon began to build the House of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah.

This is the earliest, and only biblical reference that associates the place in Genesis with the Temple Mount.^[3]

Shechem

The Samaritans do not accept Jerusalem as the proper place of worship, nor do they canonize any biblical book other than the Torah. The Samaritan Pentateuch spells the place name as “Moorah (מוראה)” instead of “Moriah (מוריה)”. They thus connect this land of Moorah with the place name “Elon Moorah”^[5] (מורא). This latter place is associated with Shechem in the Bible (12:6); thus, this tradition claims, the *Akedah* took place on the Samaritan holy mountain, Mount Gerizim in Shechem.

Sinai

Despite the tradition found in the Book of Chronicles, some late rabbinic sources suggest, quite surprisingly, that Mount Moriah is Mount Sinai. The suggestion can be found in (Pseudo-)Rashi and *Tosafot* on b. *Taanit* (16a). The Talmud states,

מאי (דברי הימים ב ג, א) הר המוריה פליגי בה ר' לוי בר חמא ור' חנינא חד אמר הר שיצא ממנו הוראה לישראל וחד אמר הר שיצא ממנו מורא לעובדי כוכבים

What is the meaning of “Mount Moriah?” Rabbi Levi bar Chama and Rabbi Chanina disputed this point. One said: “The mount from which teaching (הוראה) went out.” The other said: “The Mountain from which fear went out to the idolaters.” The context suggests that the Talmud is identifying Moriah with Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Pseudo-Rashi^[4] records an alternative interpretation:

שמעתי לישנא אחרינא הר המוריה הר סיני מורא לעובדי כוכבים במתן תורה דכתיב (תהלים עז) ארץ יראה ושקטה:

I heard a different interpretation: “Mount Moriah” – that is Mount Sinai. “Fear to the idolators” – at the giving of the Torah, as it states (Psalms 76:9): “The world heard and was quiet.”

Tosafot note this possibility as well. The interpretation is so strange that the 17th century commentator Maharsha (ad loc.) expresses his bewilderment that (Pseudo-)Rashi and *Tosafot* even suggest it as a possibility.^[5]

It is likely that all of these sources, including Chronicles, are trying to explain a reference that was no longer understood. Along these lines, Nahum Sarna writes (JPS commentary, *ad loc.*),

We are probably dealing with a name so ancient that its original location and meaning were already lost by the time the biblical narrative was committed to writing.

The Meaning of Moriah

Why would the Torah use this enigmatic term? What does Moriah mean? Although an academic scholar might posit that it is simply an old place name of uncertain location, traditional Jewish or Samaritan interpreters have found meaning in connecting Moriah to a particular site.

In his JPS Genesis excursus 16, Nahum Sarna surveys several suggestions for the etymology of the word “*moriah*”:

- The Lofty Country – Septuagint
- The Land of Worship – Aramic Targum / Ramban
- The Land of Vision – Vulgate / Samaritan Targum
- The Land of the Amorites – Peshitta / Rashbam
- The Land that I will show you – *Genesis Rabba* 55:9
- The Place from which fear of the Lord emanates – R. Jannai in *Tanchuma*
- The Place from which teaching issued to the world – b. *Taanit* 16a / *Rab.* 55.9

These multiple creative suggestions highlight the difficulty of assuming that the land of Moriah was meant to reference a particular place. The simple fact of the matter is, we cannot be sure of the actual place meant when the Torah describes Abraham taking his son into the Land of Moriah.