

PARSHAS VAYERA

by Gedalia Litke

The topic of Akeidas Yitzchok is introduced with the words 'Achar Had'vorim Ha'elah' ("After these events..."). 22:1. This introductory clause connects the Akeida topically to something which occurred previously. What is it that the Torah is connecting to the Akeida?

Rashi, acknowledging that there is no apparent thematic connection to the previous psukim, instead quotes the midrash about Yitzchok 'inviting' the Akeida due to being instigated by Yishmael's taunt (that Yishmael underwent bris milah at the advanced age of 13 years while Yitzchok was an unaware 8 day old baby, and Yitzchok in response proclaiming his willingness to give his entire being to HaShem). The dvorim/events are really dvorim/words of the Yishmael, instigating this whole episode. In the alternative, it is the words of the Satan, to the effect that Avrohom has never really brought a proper korban to HaShem, which instigate, but in either case the previous psukim do not play a connective role in the Akeida.

Other meforshim do find a thematic connection. The most commonly quoted thematic connection is that Akeidas Yitzchok follows on the heels of everything that Avrohom had achieved in his life, so now it is time for a topping-off event to offer him a great challenge and, accordingly, the opportunity for great reward; Avrohom will be given the opportunity to demonstrate through actions the level of love and fear of HaShem he has in his heart (see Ramban and Sforno). The challenge focuses on his son, Yitzchok, because it is this son who Avrohom most desired and cherished; the challenge and potential reward would be greatest if it involved sacrificing this son. (See Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh.)

Yesterday I was shown a very different thematic explanation which, given historical and modern-day events in Eretz Yisroel, is particularly fascinating. The Rashbam, whose pshat is always very rooted in the literal flow of the psukim, explains that in the previous psukim Avrohom had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, the king of Plishtim (modern-day Gaza). This treaty specifically protected Avimelech's progeny (21:23, l'nini u'l'nechdi) and bound Avrohom's progeny (see Sforno). The Rashbam says that HaShem was angry with Avrohom for making this long-term treaty with the king of Plishtim, as it covers an area that is part of Eretz Yisroel and, during the eventual kibush ha'aretz, is subject to the mitzva of 'lo s'chayeh kol neshoma' ('wipe them out entirely'). In reaction to Avrohom's peace treaty, which was inappropriately made binding on Avrohom's children over a 'no peace treaty' area of Eretz Yisroel, HaShem says, so to speak, "You have become a bit presumptive about this son of yours, now go and sacrifice him and let's see what becomes of this treaty."

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