

## **JEHOVAH JIREH: THE LORD OUR PROVIDER**

When we want to get to know God, we usually want to get to know one of His character qualities. We want Him to tell us something about Himself.

Typically, in Scripture, when God reveals Himself to someone, He ties the name Jehovah to another name that reveals something deeper about Him. These names are called compound connections. God uses them to unveil Himself personally, to give people a greater revelation of His character than even the personal name Jehovah implies. God often does this when people are going through difficult situations and He wants to reveal Himself as their source of help.

The first compound connection we'll look at is the name Jehovah Jireh, which means "the Lord will provide." The book of Genesis provides the background for the revelation of this name.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you" (Genesis 22:1-2).

The passage specifically tells us that God tested Abraham in the most devastating way. He asked Abraham to give Him the one thing Abraham loved the most—his son. Isaac was Abraham's dream come true. He was the promised and long-awaited gift from God, and now God was asking for him back.

Keep in mind that Abraham not only loved Isaac, he needed him. God promised to make Abraham a "great nation," and the fulfillment of that promise rested on this one and only son of Abraham and Sarah. If Isaac dies without having any children of his own, then Abraham—already advanced in years—no longer has a line through which God's promise of a future nation can come.

God doesn't seem to be making sense. His request of Abraham appears to contradict His promise.

If you read through the entire passage carefully, you won't find any record of Abraham telling Sarah what God was asking him to do with Isaac, which makes perfect sense. Sarah no doubt would have assumed that Abraham had lost his mind, and she probably would have lost her temper as well. This is the young boy for whom she had waited more than 90 years, and Abraham (who is old enough to be senile) thinks God has told him to go to the mountain and kill the boy. That wouldn't have flown very far in any home I know of, let alone the home of the long-awaited child of promise.

Abraham suddenly finds himself in a mess of contradictions. He's in a theological contradiction because God's instruction goes against the promise of a future nation and the mandate not to kill. He's in an emotional contradiction as his faith now collides with his affections. He's facing a social contradiction because he will never become a "great name" in his community if he kills his son. And he's also in a relational contradiction because sacrificing Isaac would create great conflict in his marriage.

Abraham is up a creek without a paddle. He's in a big-time trial. Trials are adverse circumstances that God introduces or allows in order to identify where we are spiritually and to prepare us for where He wants us to go. If you're alive, you cannot escape life's trials. You are either in a trial now, you've just come out of a trial, or you are getting ready to go into a trial. Trials are unavoidable realities of life.

But even though we all experience them; we also should take comfort in knowing that trials must first pass through God's hands before reaching us. Nothing comes our way without first having received His divine approval. And if He approves it, He must have a divine purpose for it.

Abraham's trial was actually a test. God wanted to know just where Abraham's heart and faith actually stood. No doubt if Abraham had been a football coach, he would have wanted to throw out a red flag on God.

If you aren't familiar with the regulations of the NFL, when a head coach perceives that a referee has made a wrong call, he throws out a red flag. This signals that the referee needs to review the play. Sometimes—especially when we're caught between a rock and a hard place—we want to throw out a red flag on God. We want to stop the game and call for a review because God

appears to have made a wrong call. He must have missed something. He couldn't have known what He was doing because if He did, He wouldn't have called things that way.

I'm sure Abraham had his doubts about what kind of call God had just made. It appeared to favor the opposition in every way. Abraham, the patriarch of his family, was to guide, shepherd, and protect his loved ones. And now God Himself wanted him to do just the opposite. Perhaps Abraham wanted to yell, "God, you missed this one! You blew it. Pull up the replay screen, go under the hood, and review the play because You're obviously wrong."

Regardless of how painful it is to give up the thing you love the most, always know that God has a plan and a purpose in life's trials. Because of that, we can thank Him in the middle of any crisis because we know His ways are perfect.

It's in our trials the name of God is unveiled —Jehovah Jireh. Unfortunately, we often miss the purpose of the test because we become so fixated on the circumstances or the stress.

Abraham was in the midst of a terrible test. He faced a choice between the blessing and the Blessor, and God wanted to see which one he would choose. Isaac had been Abraham's blessing. But God wanted to know which meant more to him—God or Isaac, the giver of the blessing or the blessing itself. Sometimes we can fall so in love with a blessing that it trumps the one who blessed us.

If you have children or grandchildren, I can almost guarantee you've heard them ask, "How many days until Christmas?" For millions of people, Christmas Day is the pinnacle of celebration and gift giving. It's celebrated in many cultures around the world, each one adding its own ethnic traditions, foods, and music.

And at the heart of it all should be the reminder that Jesus came to earth as God's ultimate gift—our Redeemer and Savior. We have the opportunity to have a relationship with a perfect, loving Father who calls us His children. James 1:17 reminds us, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."

But we must remember something about God—a characteristic He shares with every parent. He doesn't want us to love Him only for His gifts. He didn't want Abraham to love him just because of Isaac.

Imagine your kids wanting to be with you only because they knew there would be a big payoff on Christmas Day. You probably wouldn't like that. As a parent, you give to your children because you love them, not so they will love you back.

God is the same way. He loves us; therefore, He gives us good gifts. But He wants us to love Him apart from His gifts. God is not a genie or cosmic bellhop. No, God loves giving from His hand as long as He knows we are really after His heart.

That's exactly what He wanted to know about Abraham. He wanted to know if Abraham would let go of his most valued possession and simply worship God even when it hurt. Which is exactly what Abraham did.

So, Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance (Genesis 22:3-4).

Three days is quite a long drive to church, by the way. But Abraham did it. The passage tells us he didn't even hesitate. "Abraham rose early...and went to the place of which God had told him."

In fact, notice all these verbs: "rose," "saddled," "took," "split," "arose," and "went." They all indicate an immediate response. But also notice what verse 3 doesn't say. It doesn't tell us that Abraham tried to bargain with God. It doesn't say Abraham asked God why. It doesn't say Abraham snuck a lamb in his backpack just in case. It doesn't give us a synopsis of a debate between Abraham and God. No, it just says Abraham got up, got going, and got to doing what God had asked him to do.

Where did Abraham find the faith and strength to follow God so quickly on such a seemingly irrational request? We find the answer to that question in the next verse and again in Hebrews 11.

Once he got to the mountain, he told the two young men who were helping him carry things, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the boy will go over there; and we will worship and return to you” (verse 5).

Notice—he expects that both he and Isaac will return. More revealing still is what the book of Hebrews says about his thinking.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called.” He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham knew that the request to kill Isaac seemed ridiculous and that everything was against him from a human perspective. He also knew that others might think God didn’t know what He was talking about. Yet in the midst of his confusion and pain, he went to worship. He went to church. He trusted that even if he went through with God’s call to sacrifice Isaac, God—who had produced life through two aged and worn-out bodies—could no doubt resurrect Isaac from the dead.

Of course, Abraham had never witnessed a physical resurrection, but he had witnessed a miracle—the supernatural conception and birth of Isaac. It may have been a different problem this time for Abraham, but he knew it was the same God.

In fact, sometimes God will allow you to experience larger problems in life because He wants to unveil a larger portion of Himself to you. People who want to give up on God simply because life’s scenarios don’t make sense could very well be walking away from a new manifestation of God and His name in their lives.

## Isaac on the Altar

God put Abraham in a situation that only God could fix. Abraham couldn't reason his way out of this one. He couldn't strategize his way out. He couldn't leverage his way out. Sometimes God allows you to be in a situation that only He can solve so you can recognize that He is the one who solved it. This is exactly what He did with Abraham.

Abraham and Isaac started to walk to the place on the mountain where God had said to go. Abraham had taken the wood and necessary items for constructing an altar for a burnt offering and placed them on Isaac to carry. Then Isaac asked, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7).

Abraham replied in faith: "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (verse 8). After this, the plot thickens.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now, I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (verses 9-12).

How I would love to have been a bug in the sand just to get a sense of how Isaac must have felt while his father tied him up and laid him on top of the wood. I would love to have seen the expression on Abraham's face. Can't you hear the labored breathing and deep sighs, not only because of the long walk up the mountain but also because of his sheer confusion?

And now we come upon yet another apparent contradiction. God Almighty, the all-knowing one who knows the end from the beginning, the Creator of the universe, says, "Now I know that you fear God." Didn't God know that already, before Abraham lifted the knife or even before Abraham woke up three days earlier and started out on his journey? Didn't God know?

Yes, He did. But in this passage, we get a glimpse into God that's rarely shown elsewhere. God knows all information that can be known. In other words, God knows what was, what is, and what will be. No one can bring up a topic anywhere that God doesn't already fully know about. No data or knowledge of things past, present, or future will catch God unaware. Yet God hasn't necessarily experienced all that He knows.

For example, if I were to say, "God, tell me what it feels like to commit a sin," He couldn't answer that question because He's never done it. Yes, He bore our sin, but He has never committed a sin Himself.

A woman can hear the words "I love you" from her husband, but that's different from experiencing the full meaning of those words. She may already know the words are true, but the experience brings the words alive.

David reflected about God's knowledge. O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thoughts from afar. You examine my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it all (Psalm 139:1-4).

The psalm goes on to talk more about not only God's knowledge but also His omnipresence. In the New Testament, we find Jesus saying, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matthew 11:21). In those words, Jesus was letting them know what could have been had those cities repented.

Yet while God knows everything actual and potential, God doesn't necessarily know everything experientially. So, when the angel of the Lord says to Abraham, "Now I know..." He's not talking about informational knowledge. He is saying to Abraham, "Now I have experienced that you fear Me."

God isn't only a God of knowledge—He's also a God of experience. He enters into our emotions. Why does He seat Himself on the praises of His people, as we read in the book of Psalms? Why doesn't He just sit back, relax, and say, "I know what praise is. All of the

information on praise is available to Me. In fact, I know who is going to praise Me, who is praising Me now, and who has praised Me in the past—and what’s more, I know who means it. I don’t need anyone to praise Me because I already know everything there is to know about praise.”

Yet the Bible tells us that God is enthroned on the praises offered to Him (Psalm 22:3). To be enthroned on something is to be in the midst of it, a participant in it. Something about us praising God brings Him pleasure. He purposefully and willingly participates in the experience.

Why did God become a man? Not only to redeem us from suffering eternal punishment and separation from Him, but also to participate in the human experience. He is now able to sympathize with us because Jesus Christ became a man. The writer of Hebrews tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus can sympathize with us because He has gone through everything a person can go through except for sin.

So, when the angel of the Lord says, “Now I know that you fear God,” it’s not because He lacked any intellectual information, but because He has now experienced the event. He has participated in it.

God enters into that moment in time when He experiences and feels the love that we sing, speak, and think about. And when He does, He unveils His character at a deeper level and reveals His name.

Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided” (Genesis 22:13-14)

Abraham didn’t hear the ram trying to get out of the thicket until he finished obeying God’s command. In fact, while Abraham was going through his trial and climbing up the mountain on one side, God had Abraham’s solution (the ram) coming up the mountain on the other side. And He was going to make a match at precisely the right time.

This same principle can apply to you and me. Often the answer to the trial we're facing is sitting right next to us, but we will never know it until God is ready to reveal it.

As a result of God's providential provision, Abraham named the place Jehovah Jireh—The Lord Will Provide. He discovered something about Jehovah on that day that would change his life forever. If you will also discover it and believe this truth, you will never look at your circumstances the same way again.

But we can easily miss the key to Abraham's provision. Scripture tells us, "Abraham raised his eyes." Jesus tells us in the New Testament, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Abraham was able to keep going until the provision came because he saw Jesus's day—he was able to look spiritually at the Lord in spite of the physical trial he was going through. Because of what Abraham saw, he was able to continue with his radical obedience.

The root word for the name Jireh literally means "to see." Yet when put together, the compound connection means "to provide." Knowing that what he saw in the spiritual realm affected his actions in the physical realm, Abraham recognized the power of sight in calling this place Jehovah Jireh. Somewhere in the combination of those two names is a relationship between God seeing and God providing.

When we look at another form of the word "provide"—"provision"—we can see this link more clearly. To have vision is to see. "Provision" means that something was seen beforehand and thus provided for. The root "vision" ties the provision to what was seen. God's provision for Abraham was based on His vision of what Abraham did. God's vision led to His provision.

So, the question is, what must God see so that He might provide for you when you're caught in a contradiction of life? He needs to see the same things He saw in Abraham, which are found in the words we looked at earlier: "rose," "saddled," "took," "split," "arose," and "went." Abraham didn't delay his obedience. He did what God asked him to do even though he didn't know how God was going to work it out.

Delayed obedience is disobedience. Partial obedience is complete disobedience. In other words, if Abraham had only gone halfway on the trip, he wouldn't have finished the journey. He never would have experienced and known Jehovah Jireh.

We all have our own Isaac. It's that thing you want more than life itself. Your Isaac is that thing you least want to release. The thing you're holding on to the tightest. Are you willing to trust God completely with your own Isaac?

When God saw that He mattered more to Abraham than Isaac did, God intervened and provided for Abraham so that he could keep Isaac. Loving God means acting on what God says—it's not just about singing songs, praying prayers, or hearing sermons. Many of us don't know God as Jehovah Jireh because God is still waiting for us to act on what He said even though we may not understand how it's going to work out.

Whatever it is that you're holding on to so tightly—whether it's your career, family, marriage, health, finances, search for a mate—you have to let that go in order to experience Jehovah Jireh. You need to do what God has instructed you to do about it, even if it doesn't make sense, simply because He has your best interest at heart. And you will see Him provide for you when He sees you put Him above all else.

In fact, when Abraham received Isaac back, he received even more.

Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:15-18).

Isaac was just the beginning of a enormous blessing from God for Abraham. God said because of what He saw, He was now getting ready to open up the windows of heaven and shower Abraham with blessings that would last for generations!

Abraham could have decided to keep Isaac from the start and then perhaps could have lost him some other way—and lost out on everything else as a result. Yet because he was willing to let go of the person who mattered the most to him, he was able to keep Isaac after all and also receive so much more.

God longs to be Jehovah Jireh to you today. But He wants to know and experience that you're willing to obey Him, to seek Him, and not to place anything above Him as more important in your life. When He sees you honor Him the way Abraham did, you will discover the power of Jehovah Jireh in your life.