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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

## IN THE MOUNT OF THE LORD IT SHALL BE SEEN

THE words which form the heading of this article without doubt are familiar to all our readers. They are quoted from Gen. xxii. 14, as the Hebrew is rendered by the Authorized Version. In the Revised Version they are slightly changed: "in the mount of the Lord it shall be provided", and *in margin* we find "he shall be seen".

This difference in rendering may be an indication, even to anyone who does not know Hebrew, that there is some difficulty in the phrase. Now the purpose of this small contribution to our periodical is to suggest a solution of this difficulty, which, I hope, may prove to be satisfying.

The difficulty is, that the Hebrew, which, as it runs in the Masoretic text, literally can only be translated, "in the mount of the Lord it (or, he) shall be seen", leaves us in uncertainty as to the subject of the verb. If we translate "it", the question arises what is meant by this universal and indefinite pronoun? Nobody can answer this question. It would be only natural to borrow the answer from the context; but in that case the only possible answer could be an allusion to the fact that the ram was offered up for a burnt offering instead of Isaac. That was surely what Abraham meant as he called the name of the place *Jehovah-jireh*, which is to say: "Jehovah will see". As the patriarch and his son went together and Isaac spoke unto his father "behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham answered: "My son, God will provide (Hebrew literally, see) himself a lamb for a burnt offering." What he meant by this evasive but not untrue reply has appeared to him in quite a new light: indeed, it is the Lord who sees (i.e. chooses) the burnt offering which is to be brought unto Him, and He, who had made the demand of the burnt offering of Abraham's beloved son, from the beginning had chosen (provided) the ram as His burnt offering. But one can easily see, that the proverbial phrase which the holy writer quotes from later times, cannot mean that the burnt offering

is chosen by the Lord. So we remain in uncertainty as to the tendency of the "it".

Now, if we follow the margin of the Revised Version and translate "he shall be seen", the subject cannot possibly be another than the Lord Himself. This certainly is the meaning of the margin, and some commentators are of the same opinion (e.g. Driver and the British chief-rabbi Hertz). Can we take it for granted that this must be the right explanation? It seems that "the Lord" as subject of the verb meets with still greater difficulty than "it"; for there is no plausible reason why there should be mentioned an appearance of the Lord on the Mount. There was no such appearance on the Mount of Abraham's burnt offering, for the angel of the Lord who called unto him made his voice heard "out of heaven" (Gen. xxii. 11); and we cannot see any other possible reason why there should be said that "the Lord was seen".

So there is no possible means to determine the subject of the verb "to be seen".

Next to this there is another difficulty in the use of the expression "the mount of the Lord". Which is this mount of the Lord? and why is this mount called thus? This again is a question which cannot be answered. It is obvious that the mount where Abraham brought his burnt offering would stand a good chance to be the intended mount; but there is not a single word in the whole context that can explain why this mount should be called so. This has induced several interpreters to remove "the mount of the Lord" from the text. Some of them (e.g. the Roman Catholic Heinisch) perform this by translating "in the mount where the Lord shall be seen". This rendering by no means can be right, because we then have a proverb without a predicate. Others have recourse to a slight alteration of the vowels; instead of the  $\text{רִיבֹן}$  of the Masoretic reading they prefer  $\text{רִיבֵן}$ , and so the words can be translated "on the mount the Lord shall be seen". So the *Septuaginta* with its  $\epsilon\nu\ \tau\hat{\omega}\ \acute{\omicron}\rho\epsilon\iota\ \acute{\kappa}\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \acute{\omega}\phi\theta\eta$ ; and among later commentators, e.g. the German Procksch. The mount which is meant in this case must be a well-known one: *the* mount; which can hardly be another than the mount of the temple; and it is a

favourite opinion among scholars that at any rate an allusion to the mount of the temple is made here. But our text does not favour this opinion. It contains not the slightest allusion to the temple and nobody can understand why the appearance of Yahweh should be combined with the mount of the temple. Now scholars try to bridge over the gap by the supposition, that the name Moriah in Gen. xxii. 2 is the name of the mount whereon, according to 2 Chron. iii. 1 Solomon built the temple, and that Israel's tradition of old should have identified the mount of Abraham's burnt offering, the mount mentioned in the proverbial expression quoted in Gen. xxii. 14, with the mount Moriah, the mount of the temple. But there is no conclusive proof of such a tradition. To be sure, if Israel's tradition really identified the two mounts, the Chronicler would not have neglected to mention the fact that the mount "where the Lord appeared unto David, Solomon's father" was the same where Abraham offered up his burnt offering unto the Lord. Moreover, in assuming the identity of the Moriah from Gen. xxii. 2 with the Moriah from 2 Chron. iii. 1, it is left out of account that the Moriah mentioned in Gen. xxii. 2 is a *land*, whilst the Moriah of which the Chronicler speaks is a *mount*; and there is a great difference between a *land* and a *mount*. As to the name Moriah itself, the opinion is widely spread that its signification is: "place of the apparition of Yahweh"; but I wish to point to the fact that this is not the only interpretation<sup>1</sup>; the name *can* be explained in this way, but not necessarily *must* be explained in this way. In my opinion it is highly probable that we have to do with an ancient name, of which the explanation is hidden in the darkness of antiquity.

The uncertainty of all this is frankly admitted by nobody less than Hermann Gunkel, who in his famous commentary on the Book of Genesis simply declares that the last words of the verse (Gen. xxii. 14) cannot be explained in a satisfactory manner.<sup>2</sup> He therefore appeals to textual criticism, and by means of a conjecture (which by other scholars is esteemed "ingenious", cf. Skinner in "The International Critical Commentary on

<sup>1</sup> For the various interpretations of the name see König, *Die Genesis*, p. 534.

<sup>2</sup> He says: "Die Worte . . . geben im Zusammenhang keinen Sinn," *Genesis* 3, p. 239.

Genesis", p. 331) replaces the name *Jehovah-jireh* by *Jeruel*, and alters the remainder of the verse as follows: "for he (i.e. Abraham) said: to-day, in this mountain, God provideth". I do not wish to yield to Skinner in admiration of Gunkel's "brilliant ingenuity"—but I am very much afraid this ingenuity lacks scientific conviction. Gunkel may be right in his presumption of the incorrectness of the Masoretic reading, but there is no ground whatever to suppose that the original text has suffered such a deterioration as his conjectural criticism assumes. The solution of the problem given by him is too intricate to be true. The real solution must be much more simple.

Now, is there such a simple solution to be found? I don't think it is possible to reach a satisfactory explanation of the words if we stick to the pronunciation given by the Masoretes. According to the way in which they have pointed the text the verb must be *passive*; and this is the principal impediment to a fluent understanding. As Abraham in calling the name of the place uses the *active* of the verb: *Jehovah-jireh*, it is wholly unintelligible why the Biblical narrator should add a remark on a current proverbial saying wherein the same verb is employed in the *passive* form. One might expect that in this proverbial sentence the *active* of the verb would be used all the same. It is only in this way that a close relation between the name given by Abraham and the later proverbial expression is manifest. Well then, what is more simple than replacing the vowels of the passive by those of the active? So we do not read *jera-eh*, as the Masoretes do, but *jireh*, just like in the name given to the place by Abraham, which leads to the translation—in connexion with the before-mentioned reading  $\text{יְהוָה}$ —"on the mount (or, in the mount) the Lord shall see". This reading is found already in the *Vulgate*: "in monte Dominus videbit"; and the same is in the Syriac Version, the *Peshito*. With this reading the proverb exactly corresponds with the name to which it is attached; and the meaning thereof can easily be inferred: just as Abraham, having reached the mount where his trial came to its culminating-point, experienced the truth of the "*Jehovah-jireh*", which he had said unto his son, so every other person, trusting in God, when he has reached *his* mount, has to stand *his* severest test,

will experience likewise that the Lord sees, provideth. Now there is no more the question to be asked : which is the mount ? for in every occurring case the mount is the climax of man's trial ; and when this climax is attained, the Lord will prove that his all-seeing eye provides everything. As the American Baptist Commentary on Genesis (though maintaining the Masoretic reading) remarks, the nearest English equivalent to the proverb is perhaps the familiar saying : "Man's extremity is God's opportunity."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin Goodspeed and D. M. Welton, *The Book of Genesis*, 1909, p. 159.