

By Dr. Paul M. van Buren

The Jewish people and the Church are two communities having quite different interpretations of a common text. For Jews, Tanakh is their basic law, their constitution, and also their Rettubah with their God. Christians have and read their Old Testament for a totally different reason: it was from their beginning and remains their ABCs and grammar book from which they learned and continue to speak of Jesus Christ. That explains why they told the story of Jesus from the beginning as the story of Israel. The only Jesus the Church has even known is the one who came wrapped in Israel's Scriptures, and the church has never had the one without the other.

One story from the common text, that of the Binding of Isaac, became foundational for both communities as they took shape in the first century of the common era. Jews saw in Isaac their first martyr, voluntarily offering himself for his heirs and then restored to life by God. That same reading of the story could be the clue to how Peter and his friends first came to speak of Jesus' death as a voluntary sacrifice and of his being raised up by God. Consequently, the Church and the Jewish people are bound together by the Binding of Isaac, which has put us in something of a bind. We could, however, come to see this rather as a bond, were we to recognize together that God's love is able to encompass more than one beloved son, and that the story of the beloved son Jesus confirms rather than replaces the story of the beloved son Isaac.

Dr. Paul M. van Buren  
Professor Emeritus  
Department of Religion  
Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania