

## The Gospel in Genesis or ...

### Everything I Need to Know I Learned in the First 22 Chapters of Genesis

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What do they say in the real estate world? It's all about Location, Location, Location. Well, here in the Spiritual world it is all Relationship, Relationship, Relationship. Or to put it in Religious jargon, covenant, covenant, covenant. In the first 22 chapters of Genesis, we find 3 covenant relationships established. I have come to see that the first 22 chapters of Genesis provide the groundwork for everything that comes afterward. Essentially the rest of the Scriptures are the commentary on the first 22 chapters.

The Rabbis have broken the first 22 chapters into 4 sections or *Torah* portions. In the first portion, Genesis 1:1 - 6:8, called *B'raysheet*, which means in the beginning, we learn what we need to know about what happened in the beginning. We find the description of how everything in our world came to be, starting with the creation of the heavens and the earth, followed by the creation of every living creature, including our ancestors Adam & Eve.

In Genesis chapter 3, we also read of their fall as they fall for the lies of the adversary, who tells them they can become like God. After the fall, God promises in a covenant with Adam that the seed of the woman will one day overcome the seed of the Adversary (Genesis 3:15). This is played out through the rest of the Bible, as now it comes down to restoration, restoration, restoration – we will find the details as to how the Lord will provide the means to restore the original relationship that existed between Him and his creation. But after the fall, man will descend much further toward the depths of total depravity, with the exception of one man, who is still described as a righteous man, Noah.

In the second section, *Torah* portion *Noach*, or Noah, Genesis 6:9 – 11:32, man has become so evil that the Lord sends a flood to wipe out every living thing, except for Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives. Once the flood waters recede, the Lord promises that he will never send a flood like that upon the Earth again as he establishes a covenant with the earth and with every living thing through Noah. His sends the rainbow as a sign to remind us of the covenant.

Next, a second attempt to be like God comes through a plan by the people to build a tower to reach up to the Heavens, but God confounds the effort, by causing the people to speak different languages as different nations and cultures are established based primarily on different groups of people speaking a common language. Now the Lord will choose a particular people to be an example to the rest of the nations of the benefits, the blessings of being in a covenant relationship with Him.

This comes in the third section. Torah portion *Lech L'cha*, Genesis 12:1 – 17:27, with the call of Abraham. The Lord promises Abraham that He will bless him, that He will bless those who bless him, and He will curse those that curse Him, and in him, all the families of the Earth will be blessed. These promises will go to Abraham's descendants through an heir that the Lord promises to him. Abraham believed in the Lord, believed in the Lord's covenant promise of a son to him, and the Lord credits his belief as righteousness, which we first read about in Genesis 15:6. This is of such importance that it is referenced by Rabbi *Shaul*, the Apostle Paul, the apostle to the gentiles in Rom 4:3 and by *Yaacov*, James, the apostle to the Jews in James 2:23.

We also have seen that the blessing promised to Abraham would be available to both his physical descendants and his spiritual descendants. As we read in Galatians 3:14: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through *Yeshua Ha Mashiach*; that we, all believers, both Jew and gentile, might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

But Abraham is trying to figure out where these promised descendants will come from as Sarah is seemingly long past her child-bearing years. In the process, Abraham complains to the Lord that he is without an heir. And though he has faith, he trusts in his own understanding (or should I say misunderstanding) which will create some serious problems down the road.

Abraham first concludes wrongly that his heir would not be a family member, but must be someone who had been born in his house. When the Lord tells him, the heir will be one who will come from his own loins, he and Sarah conclude wrongly once again that God must have meant for him to have a son through Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, and 9 months later, Ishmael arrives on the scene.

This third section concludes in Genesis 17, with the Lord's instructions to Abraham to circumcise all of his household as the sign of the covenant and, in obedience, Abraham circumcises himself and all the males of his household.

The fourth and final section of these first 22 chapters is *Torah* portion *Vayera*. *Vayera*, means "And he appeared," because at the beginning of Genesis 18, Abraham is sitting at the door of his tent and the Lord appeared to him. In the next verse, we find that there are 3 men standing next to him and he bows down to these men. He offers them rest and some nourishment, and then does what most every other man would do in this situation, runs to his wife and tells her to fix some food.

While they are eating, Sarah overhears from her tent one of them saying that she will bear a son. And Sarah laughs to herself, as according to the delicate phrasing of the KJV, it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. The Lord responds to her skepticism in Genesis 18:14, "Is there any word that is too difficult for the Lord to accomplish?"

Even though man, in this case Abraham and Sarah, seemingly messed up the Lord's plans when they tried to fulfill his promises in their own strength through Hagar, the Lord is still able to find a way to fulfill his promise. We read in 2 Corinthians 1:20, For all the promises of God in Messiah are yes and in Messiah Amen unto the glory of God. Why does God need to remind them and us that he will keep his promises? Because the adversary, Ha Satan is continually trying to convince us that God cannot be trusted to fulfill his covenant promises.

Genesis 19 starts out with the 2 of the men who had been with Abraham, going to Sodom and telling Lot and his family that they must leave because the Lord is about to destroy the place. Lot, his wife and two daughters are told to leave quickly and to make sure that they do not look back.

As we know, Lot's wife did not obey the messengers' instructions and when she looks back, she is turned into a pillar of salt. It doesn't seem like that big a deal to look back at the cities being destroyed, but being disobedient to God's instructions is a big deal. He does not overlook sin, never has and never will.

The sins we commit must be accounted for, but he established the sacrificial system so that we would not have to die because of our sins, our rebellion against His ways. He provided the ultimate sacrifice in the form of his sinless son to pay the penalty for all the sins of all mankind – past, present, and future. If he hadn't provided a means of atonement, then none of us would be here. We all would have already died for our sins.

Getting back to the section, Lot and his daughters flee to the mountains where the girls find the male population to be somewhat lacking. They decide to get their Father drunk so that he can father children for them. The older daughter has a son, whom she names *Moav*, which means from Father. The younger has a son and names him *Ben ami*, which means Ben – son, Ami – my people, son of my people. Both children's descendants, the Moabites and the Ammonites will be the future enemies of the Israelites, and will settle in what is today, Jordan.

In Genesis 21, at the tender age of 100, Abraham finally has a son by Sarah, whom he names *Yitzkhak*, Isaac, which means ? Laughter. Isaac is circumcised, in accordance with the covenant instructions that the Lord gave to Abraham, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of his life. In traditional Judaism today, male babies are circumcised and given their Hebrew names when they are 8 days old in a ceremony called a *b'rit* or a *bris* – most Jewish people use the Ashkenazi pronunciation for this ceremony.

The word *b'rit* or *bris* means... covenant, from a Hebrew root that means to cut. This ceremony marks our people as partakers of the Abrahamic covenant. There is another circumcision talked about in the Scriptures, and it marks a partaker of the New Covenant, a partaker of the *B'rit Chadasha*; and it is the circumcision of the heart, available to both Jews and Gentiles, all who would call upon *Yeshua* as the Messiah.

God's promises of blessing to Abraham were fulfilled in many ways during his lifetime, but they have been fulfilled even further through the sending of his ultimate descendant, *Messiah Yeshua* to this Earth just over 2000 years ago.

And when we accept the gift of God's son, when we accept the blood sacrifice that He offered up on our behalf, when He willingly went to the execution stake for the sins of each one of us, the Lord performs spiritual surgery and our hearts are circumcised. This is the sign of the *B'rit Chadasha*, the New Covenant, or the final covenant renewal of Jeremiah 31.

In the final part of this portion, called the *Akeda*, the binding, Abraham's faith is tested when the Lord instructs him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham is about to slay Isaac in obedience when the *Mal'ach Adonai*, the Messenger of the Lord, calls out to Abraham and Abraham sees that a ram that has been caught in a thicket, and he offers up the ram in Isaac's place.

Many see the events of the *Akeda*, not only predicting, but also providing a picture of, being a type of, the sacrifice of the Messiah. Let's list just a few of the similarities. Both Isaac and Yeshua were miracle births predicted by a Messenger of the Lord. Both are the immediate heirs to the parties of the Abrahamic covenant. Both were offered up by their Fathers in Jerusalem. Both of them being offered up for sacrifice represented one life being offered up in place of another, for Isaac, it was a ram, for us, it was Yeshua according to Isaiah 53:11 and Hebrews 9:28.

I should also mention that the type of covenant that was entered into between the Lord and Abraham was a covenant of that time called a covenant of strong friendship. In this type of covenant, everything that one party owns is available to the other party up to and including either party's most valuable possession. Abraham's commitment to the covenant is tested here when the Lord asks Abraham for his most valuable possession, the son that he has desired for many years, the child of his beloved wife, Sarah. Isaac is also the child through whom the Lord has said he will fulfill the promises to Abraham's descendants, that were given as a part of the covenant. So this request will test Abraham's ability to trust in the Lord's ways instead of his own logical human reasoning.

In this type of covenant, if one party asked for the other's most prized possession, it had to be given over, but the other party could in return ask for the other one's most prized possession as well, so you had to be careful if you were going to test the covenant commitment in this way.

By asking Abraham to give up his son as an offering, God had to be willing to do the same thing and give up his son as an offering. So our understanding of the covenant between God and Abraham enables us to see the Lord's commitment to provide his son as the lamb for the offering to fulfill the covenant.

And while a substitute in the form of a ram caught in the thicket was provided instead of Isaac, Messiah's substitute, Barabbas, son of the Father in name only, Bar (son) abba (father), though guilty was set free and the innocent lamb was offered up on the tree of sacrifice.

The Messenger of the Lord calls to Abraham a second time and the Lord pronounces a blessing upon Abraham and his descendants as we read in vv 16-17 of Genesis 22:

16 I have sworn by myself, says the LORD, that because you have done this thing, because you have not withheld your son, your only son:

17 That in blessing, I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand on the sea shore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies;

By the way, for those of you who are thinking that the Abrahamic covenant is just the Old Testament, for a much earlier time, I would like to bring it up to today. The covenant of Marriage is modeled after a covenant of strong friendship. The marriage covenant is entered into with a shedding of blood, ceremonially in traditional Judaism in the drinking of the wine, and literally, in its physical consummation. In a marriage, everything that belongs to one party becomes available to the other party and it is a lifelong commitment – 'til death do us part.

This is why marriage is under such attack today, both from without and within. It is a modern-day picture of God's faithfulness and the enemy will do anything he can to break it down. And this is one of the primary reasons that the Scriptures tell us in Malachi 2:16 that God hates divorce.

May our marriages be stronger when we realize that we are living out the concept of covenant. The way we treat our covenant partners is much more an indication of our Spiritual walk than what others might see from the outside. If we wear fringes, or *kippot*, or *talitot*, or jewelry that signifies our identity with the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, but we don't treat our spouse with love and respect, then we do not truly understand the covenant. If the Holy Spirit is not leading us to love our spouse in a way that is different from the rest of the world, then this is an area we need to ask the Lord to help us with. If our kids don't see a model for what their marriage and their covenant with the Lord is like, then we need to ask the Lord for his help.

Lord, we ask you to strengthen marriages in our congregation, in our families, amongst our people and amongst all believers. Lord show us how we can do better, and lead us by your Spirit to do so.

In the first 22 chapters of Genesis and throughout the rest of the Scriptures, the Lord gives us a picture of his love and his plan of redemption and restoration, his plan to provide his son *Yeshua* to be the Messiah of Israel, the anointed one, the one the Lord will use to inaugurate the final covenant renewal. He will be born to a young Israeli virgin (Isaiah 7:14) and he will walk this earth and be able to remain sinless.

And when he returns, *Yeshua*, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5) will complete God's plan to fulfill his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob and their descendants. He will be their God and they will be His people (Jeremiah 31:33). He will forgive the iniquity of his people, and he will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:34). He will give Israel final victory over her enemies (Zechariah 14:3-15) and he will judge the nations for all that they have done to his chosen people (Joel 3:2-14). They will drink his cup of fury (Isaiah 51:23). He will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15) and on his garment and on his thigh will be written King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16). He will cast Satan and all his followers into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

There will be a new Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21:1) and Yeshua will sit upon David's throne (Ezekiel 37:25) and rule all the world from a New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). The Lord will once again dwell in the midst of His people (Revelation 21:3). And all who have called upon the name of the Lord in faith (Joel 2:32) will surround his throne and worship him. They will say Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing (Revelation 5:12). And every creature will say Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever (Revelation 5:13).

And Lord we know that this day is drawing nigh, as we look forward to the day when our people will say *Baruch Haba B'shem Adonai*, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (Matthew 23:39). Lord we excitedly await your soon return. And let us all say amen!