

When All Else Fails, Read the Instructions

A Message on Scripture Portions for *Torah* Portion *Vayera*

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Scripture Portions: Torah – Genesis 18:1 - 22:24; Haftarah – 2 Kings 4:1-37;

New Covenant – Hebrews 11:17-19

Last week, we saw that the Lord established a covenant with Abraham as He promised future blessings for Abraham and his descendants. Abraham and Sarah decided that God needed their help to be faithful to His promise of a child, and Abraham ended up with a son by Sarah's handmaid *Hagar*, whose descendants continue to plague the Jewish people to this day.

This week's portion is called *Vayera*, which means "And He appeared." At the beginning of the portion, Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent and we read in Genesis 18:1, *Vaiyayra aylav Adonai*, "and the Lord appeared to him." Then it says that there were three men standing next to Abraham and he bowed down to these men. He offered them rest under a tree and some food and then did what many men would do today in this situation, he ran to his wife and told her to fix some food.

While the men were eating, Sarah overheard one of them saying that she would bear a son and she laughed to herself, as according to the delicate phrasing of the King James Version, "it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women." The Lord responded 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 according to their own reasoning by Abraham having a child by *Hagar*, the Lord will yet fulfill His promise to give Sarah a child of her own. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says that all the promises of God in Messiah are yes and in Messiah Amen unto the glory of God.

Why does God need to remind us of this? Because the adversary, *Ha Satan*, is continually trying to convince us that God cannot be trusted to fulfill His covenant promises. And so, we continue

our ongoing series on learning to trust the Lord. I say that because we as believers must continually choose whether we will trust in the Lord or whether we will take matters into our own hands. Noah continued to trust in the Lord as he built the ark. Abraham trusted in the Lord as he left the familiar world of Haran to venture into the unknown to which the Lord had called him. We have many examples like these in Scripture and yet we doubt. Why? Because that is one of the primary missions of God's adversary, *Ha Satan* – to cause us as believers to doubt the promises of our Creator to us and to the Jewish people. He also wants to cause the Jewish people, the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to doubt His faithfulness to them.

Genesis chapter 19 starts out with two of the men who had been with Abraham, going to Sodom to tell Lot and his family that the Lord is about to destroy the place. They are told to leave quickly and to not look back.

And as we know, Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. It doesn't seem like that big of a deal to look back at the cities being destroyed, but being disobedient to God's instructions can certainly be a very big deal, as was the case here. The Hebrew word that means instruction is *Torah*. Frequently God's instructions are given to us for our own good. We must choose whether we feel we can trust in Him, or whether we will do the opposite of what we read in Proverbs 3:5, which tells us to trust in the Lord with all our heart. We tend to trust in ourselves. Lot's wife trusted in her own thinking as she chose to rebel against the Lord's instructions, and paid the consequence for her disobedience, or we can call it sin. And we know that the Lord does not overlook sin, He never has and He never will.

But He has provided the means of atonement – the sacrificial system. By His grace, a blemish-free animal is able to take on the punishment that the people deserved for their sins. This pointed to the ultimate sacrifice to be provided when God's Son, Who was without sin, Who would become our blemish-free sacrifice, who would pay the penalty through His death for all the sins of all mankind – past, present, and future.

But wait, there's more. Not only are we able to have our sins forgiven, but we look forward to a glorious future that awaits us as one day, the New Jerusalem will come down out of Heaven, and we will spend the rest of eternity dwelling in the presence of a Holy and Righteous God. But our

ability to be in His presence depends on our sins being removed from our account. And that is just what He has done.

According to Colossians 2:14, “He wiped away the bill of charges against us. Because of the regulations, it stood as a testimony against us; but He removed it by nailing it to the execution stake.”

Getting back to the *Torah* portion, Lot and his daughters fled to the mountains where the girls found the male population to be somewhat lacking. They decided to get their father drunk so that he could father children for them. The older daughter had a son, whom she named *Moav*, which means “from father.” The younger daughter had a son and named him *Ben ami*, which means *Ben* – son, *Ami* – my people, “son of my people.” Both children’s descendants, the Moabites and the Ammonites would become the future enemies of the Israelites, and will settle in what would today be parts of Jordan.

In Genesis 21, at the tender age of 100, Abraham finally had a son by Sarah, whom he named *Yitzkhak*, Isaac, which means? Laughter. Isaac was circumcised, in accordance with the covenant instructions that the Lord gave to Abraham, on the 8th 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*.

This ceremony marks our people as partakers of the Abrahamic covenant. But there is another circumcision talked about in the Scriptures, and it marks a partaker of the New Covenant -- it is the circumcision of the heart, first spoken of where? In the *Torah*! Deuteronomy 10:16 says when our hearts are circumcised, we will no longer be stiff-necked, bound by our stubborn fleshly self-centeredness. Deuteronomy 30:6 says our hearts need to be circumcised so that we can love the Lord with all of our heart and all of our being. According to Jeremiah 31:33, the New Covenant results in God’s *Torah* being written on our hearts. It doesn’t matter whether you are Jewish or not, if you want *Yeshua* to be your Messiah, if you want his sacrifice to provide your atonement, your heart can be circumcised by entering into the New Covenant through *Yeshua* the Messiah. Actually, that is the only way any of our sins are forgiven.

In the final part of this portion, called the *Akeda*, the binding, Abraham's faith was tested when the Lord instructed him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. Notice, the covenant was subjected to testing. We must keep the covenant terms. We can't just say we have a covenant and then live any way we want. And what are the covenant terms? The terms of the New Covenant are found in God's *Torah*, which is written on our hearts, as I just mentioned.

The testing of the Abrahamic covenant is specifically addressed in our New Covenant portion for this week – Hebrews 11:17-19. We are told of the faith, the trusting, of Abraham as he prepared to offer up Isaac. Isaac is described as Abraham's only son, because he was the child of promise and the child of Abraham by Sarah. Though Abraham had a number of sons, Hebrews 11:18 tells us Abraham's seed will come through Isaac, quoting Genesis 21:12. His seed are the ones through whom the Lord will fulfill the promises that He made to Abraham.

In Heb. 11:19, we are told that Abraham had concluded that God was able to raise the dead... even though we find no accounts of resurrection in the Scriptures up to this point. Unless...we realize that God took Sarah, who was both barren and past child bearing age, dead if you will, in terms of producing a child, and yet her womb comes back to life. If God asked Abraham to offer up this child, then Abraham believed that God would raise him from the dead because he knew the Lord would keep his promise that it was through Isaac that Abraham's numerous descendants would be counted. Abraham believed in this promise and it was imputed to him as righteousness as we saw last week in Genesis 15:5-6.

As Abraham was about to slay Isaac in obedience, the Messenger of the Lord called out to Abraham and Abraham saw that a ram had been caught in a thicket, and he offered 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 their sacrifices involved a substitute, 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 have also mentioned in the past that the contract that was entered into between the Lord and Abraham was a treaty of that time called a covenant of strong friendship. In this type of covenant, everything that one party owned became 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 the line of blessing, the child of his beloved wife, Sarah.

But when you chose to test the covenant in this way, you had better be careful because 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 first one's most prized possession as well. So 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 as it says in Genesis 22:8 that God himself will provide... His Son as the lamb for the offering as He demonstrated His commitment to the covenant.

The Messenger of the Lord called to Abraham a second time and the Lord pronounced a blessing upon Abraham and his descendants, as we read in Genesis 22:16-17, "I have sworn by Myself, says the LORD, that because you have done this, because you haven't withheld your son, your only son, 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 why we should be treating our spouses as the Lord has treated us.

He doesn't bless us to get something in return, He blesses us because He loves us. We are supposed to respond not because we want something from the Lord, but because we demonstrate our understanding of His *khesed*, His unconditional love for us, as we attempt to unconditionally love Him back and to show our love towards one another in the same way.

The traditional *Haftarah* for this *Torah* portion is 2 Kings 4. The Rabbis have connected this portion because of several similarities to the *Torah* portion. Abraham and Lot welcomed guests in the *Torah* portion, and in the *Haftarah*, a Shunamite woman welcomed Elisha as her guest, going so far as to build a room for him on her roof. In both the *Torah* and the *Haftarah*, a messenger of God came to a barren woman and told her that she would soon give birth. Both messages were skeptically received, but both women ended up giving birth to sons.

Finally, both the *Torah* portion and the *Haftarah* close with stories of sons who miraculously survived what would otherwise have been a deadly experience. Isaac was offered up by his father on top of Mount Moriah, but was saved at the last minute by a messenger of the Lord and a strategically-placed ram. The Shunamite woman's son died, but was resurrected by the Lord through the prophet Elisha.

The *Haftarah* actually contains 3 miracles. One of them concerns a widow who was about to have a creditor take her two children as slaves to repay her husband's debt. When she told Elisha that she had nothing to offer the creditor, except a single flask of oil, he told her to obtain containers from all of her neighbors and she was miraculously able to fill all of the containers with oil from the flask. When she finally ran out of containers, the flask was found to be empty. Then the widow was able to sell the oil, pay her debt and keep her children. I see in this event a type of Messiah repaying our debt. My wife also pointed out when we were discussing this that the amount of oil was equal to the amount of faith. There was exactly as much oil as would fill the containers that the sons had obtained.

The second miracle that we find in our *Haftarah* portion is an event similar to that of Sarah conceiving Isaac. A Shunamite woman is described as being with a husband who is old, and they have never been able to have children.

Elisha wanted to show his appreciation to her and told her *la'omayd hazeh ca'ayt khaiya* in the Hebrew, literally meaning “at this appointed time according to the time of life,” she will be holding a son. The woman’s response to Elisha was, “Man of God, don’t lie to your servant.” Like Sarah, she did not seem to believe it was possible for her to have a child. But sure enough, at this appointed time according to the time of life, she conceived and gave birth to a son.

But when the child was older and out with his father in the field, he started having severe head pains. He was brought to his mother and died in her lap. She placed him on Elisha’s bed and then found Elisha on Mount Carmel, where she blamed him for allowing her miraculous son to die. Elisha told his assistant to run ahead and lay his staff on the boy’s face, but nothing happened. When Elisha got there, he went into the room and began praying to the Lord. He stretched himself out on top of the child and soon he started to feel the child’s skin begin to warm. He walked around the house and then went back up and stretched himself over the child again. And then the third miracle of the *Haftarah* portion occurred. The child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

This is one of several resurrections we find in the Hebrew Scriptures. Despite what many of our Jewish people believe, resurrection is not a Christian concept. It is God supernaturally overcoming the barrier of death, just as was the case for *Yeshua*. God raised him from the dead – he was seen by many before he ascended to heaven to intercede for us at God’s right hand.

And then one day, according to Zechariah 14, He will return as Messiah, son of David, to deliver our Jewish people as they are on the verge of being wiped out by their enemies. Until that appointed time, we seek to better understand how to live out His truths, to obey the instructions that He has written on our hearts as a testimony to the world and to the Jewish people of the faithfulness of God. He can use us to demonstrate that His principles, His truths still apply today just as they did in the time of Abraham.

I have discussed God's covenant commitment to Abraham, but under the New Covenant, anyone can enter into a covenant relationship with the God of Abraham. We can partake of the *B'rit Chadashah*, the New Covenant, as God writes His *Torah* on our hearts, and we can live according to His truths. But we must address the issue of sin, and God himself has provided the way, *Yeshua* the way.

In partaking of the New Covenant, you will become a Spiritual child of Abraham and an heir of the promises that God made to him. God will perform spiritual surgery and your heart will be circumcised. You may have made some mistakes in your past and the adversary would have you believe you are not worthy of God's love, but we are all in the same boat, we all fall short of His standard of righteousness. Salvation is not based on what we do, but on what *Yeshua* has done, He is the blemish-free lamb whose blood sacrifice brings forgiveness for our sins. If you feel the Lord speaking to your heart at this appointed time in your life to accept *Yeshua* as your Messiah, I would like to ask you to be obedient to what God is saying to you.

Maybe you have just come to understand that your marriage relationship reflects your understanding of God's covenant and that you need to treat your spouse in a way that reflects this. Maybe you have realized that you have allowed your flesh or the adversary to do things that are tending to destroy rather than build up your marriage. As I have said in the past, if you are not growing closer together, then you are growing further apart. And this truth can be applied to any relationship. It will get better as you partake selflessly rather than based on what you get from it.

Or maybe you have doubted God's promises for your life or for his people. You now want to repent and trust in him with all your heart, and not lean on your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge him, so that he can direct your paths. We're not talking about blind faith, but about who you are going to put your trust in, the creator of the universe or your own fallen human reasoning.

Lord, I pray that you would guide each one of us by your Spirit to turn over to you areas in our lives where we are not walking in victory, areas that are not pleasing to you and I pray that you would help us to live lives that would reflect your love and bring glory to you, and we ask these things in Yeshua's name, amen.