

Vayera And He Appeared The Blessing Begins

Torah: Genesis 18:1 - 22:24
Haftarah: 2 Kings 4:1 - 37
Brit Chadashah: Luke 1:26 - 38;
Luke 24:36 - 53
Reading: Aaron - page 169 and Psalm 11
Jewish Hero: Ezekiel
Torah carrier: Isaac

This week's Torah Portion deals with the events surrounding the birth of Isaac as the promise made to Abraham begins to be fulfilled. The Haftarah portion deals with the birth of a son to the barren Shunammite woman and how the prophet restored him to life. The New Testament portion deals with the visit of the angel to Mary to announce the conception of our Messiah and His post resurrection appearance to the apostles to explain how all that had happened was in accordance to what was written about Him in the Scriptures.

Abraham was given some mighty promises which he believed, even though he and his wife were old and no longer physically capable of having children. Our passage opens with the visit of three angels who announce the time frame of her conception. One of the angels speaks for the L-rd and says that the L-rd shall return and visit Sara so that she can conceive.

When Sara overhears what is being promised, she laughs because she knows that she is no longer capable of conception and seals the name of the baby: Yitzhak, which means laughter. After this confirmation, two of the angels proceed towards Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham intercedes on behalf of the righteous core which still exists in this very sinful region. This core is much smaller than the family of Noah and ends up consisting of only three people, Lot and his two daughters.

The passage should be read as a warning to mankind that while G-d is full of mercy and is slow to anger, the only reason our world has not yet shared the fate of Sodom is because of the righteous core which has still got a considerable, though waning, influence in our world. Lot delays his departure but is finally convinced to take refuge in a small village just outside of the region which is to be destroyed.

When it says that his wife looked back, it means that she went back, perhaps because she was from Sodom and may have felt safer taking refuge in the city, rather than facing the fire storm outside, far from any shelter. Lot and his two girls take refuge in a cave and we see that the influence of Sodom survived its destruction, because of the incest which produces two children whose descendents later became the nations of Moab and Ammon. Their action is neither condoned nor condemned, only recorded.

Part of the supernatural upheaval which the fire storm created, may have sparked a famine and Abraham takes refuge in the region of Gaza, which even today is one of the few regions of the Middle East which receives an abundance of rain. It is the last delay before Abraham and Sara conceive the child of promise, but even in his second exile, Abraham is greatly enriched, though none of it matters until the arrival of his son.

Just an historical note. The Philistines of Abraham's time are not the Philistines our people encountered when they came out of Egypt. While the House of Jacob sojourned in the relative safety

of Egypt, a remnant of the Minoan Greek civilization took over the region of the original Philistines, but kept the name of the people they destroyed and assimilated.

The king of the Philistines pays a penalty (a dowry) for mistakenly taking Sara into his harem. She is close to 90 years old, but is still a great beauty. Once back in the Promised Land, Sara conceives and the heir to the promises, Isaac, is born. It is one of the first recorded miraculous births in the Bible and confirms the special status of the children of Abraham, who came into existence because of a miracle.

As he watches his son grow up, Abraham is tested and sets off for the mountains of Moriah, where he has been told to offer his only son as a sacrifice to the L-rd. A lot has been written about why G-d required this act of faith and why Abraham agreed to offer a human sacrifice to G-d. One of the reasons this was required of Abraham was to show him and us that what came about because of the promise of G-d, remained the property of G-d, even if his parents had a hand in his conception.

He Was going to sacrifice his only son and just as his birth was a miracle, Abraham believed that G-d would return his boy to whom through a resurrection, once his blood had been shed as a sacrifice to G-d. Just as the knife hovered over Isaac, an angel stops the sacrifice and a ram is given in the place of Isaac. In our Messiah, we become Isaac and He is the ram who was given in our place.

The blessing begins because Abraham not only believes, but also obeys, with the firm conviction that the L-rd will provide (YHVH Jireh). How convinced are we that the L-rd will be faithful to His promises and can we offer up our obedience to His word with the same conviction that Abraham demonstrated?

We are living in a world which is swiftly becoming a global Sodom and Gomorrah and we know that the L-rd will withhold His righteous judgment until the last members of the righteous core come to faith. Abraham believed G-d, despite the evident impossibility of what was promised to Him and we are called to have this same level and kind of faith in the inevitability of His coming kingdom.

As long as we place our primary trust in the fulfilment of the promises of G-d through His Word, He will continue to use us a testimony to the world. The promises made to Abraham were fulfilled both because of his faith and because of his obedience and despite the impossible obstacles that stood in his way.

These promises are still ongoing, but the requirements of their fulfilment have not changed. They began to be fulfilled in Abraham because of his faithful obedience and our calling requires that we exercise this same faithful obedience, if we want them to be fulfilled through us and not in spite of us. The blessing begins with Abraham and has been generationally fulfilled through the House of Jacob as long as they walked in the steps of Abraham's faithful obedience. Where do you stand when it comes to faith and obedience?

[Sermon: First winter series: The Sky is Falling... and other myths about the return of the L-rd](#)

[Seven Biblical Signs of the End of the world: Sign number two: Worldwide iniquity](#)

[Passage: *and because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold* \(Matt. 24:12\)](#)

One of the key concepts which we will be examining in this series is worldwide iniquity. The events surrounding the return of our Messiah and of the end of the world will not be restricted to one part of the world, but will have to affect the whole world. History is full of examples of civilizations which have arisen and have collapsed under the weight of their iniquity and corruption, but though many different people's worlds have collapsed around them, the final collapse will be worldwide.

A lot has been written about our world becoming a global village, as if the entire planet was becoming one system, economically and culturally. With the advent of mass transportation and the technology of the internet, for the first time since the days Noah our planet is once again an interconnected unit. There are still differences in language and culture and the increasing wealth of our planet is still unevenly distributed, but no part of our world is isolated from the global influences which more and more are pulling every region of our world together.

At any moment over a billion people are online together around the world and with the global standardization of weights and measures, products from any part of the globe can be found for sale worldwide. We also possess enough weapons of mass destruction to kill everyone on the planet several times over and diseases from all parts of the world are travelling to every part of the world.

The global rise of the false science of evolution is also challenging the survival of traditional religions and of traditional morality and what is considered right and wrong is changing quickly. The term lawlessness is related to the word iniquity and refers to the overthrow of moral standards to allow that which was once forbidden to become acceptable as common practice.

When He was talking to His disciples He referred to a global lawlessness as a sign of His return and it is building momentum yearly around our globe. Related to this, the love of the many will grow cold in response to the fire and heat of global iniquity. Love and natural affection and morality will become victims of this global rise of iniquity and will no longer be able to act as restraints to hold back the rise of iniquity.

Instead of breaking the law, lawlessness changes the law to allow criminal behaviour to become acceptable and this is what discourages and stifles love and natural affection. It has happened at various times in human history, but when it starts to happen on a global scale, there is no way for it to bounce back because it has nowhere to hide or to grow, safe from evil influences.

In the days of Noah, the righteous core of mankind was reduced to eight people and the whole world was filled with corruption and evil. It is happening again in our world.

In the days of Lot, the righteous core of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had evaporated and not even the ministry of Lot could turn the tide to prevent the judgment of G-d from consuming that immoral community. In a very real sense, we are prophets of righteousness like Lot and Noah and we are watching in horror as our world is being consumed by lawlessness that we seem powerless to prevent.

There are still people fleeing darkness around the globe, but the stage is being set for iniquity to engulf our world. People will more and more, begin to feel that whatever they feel is the only standard which they need to follow and we need to be careful that the same evil influence does not take root in our midst. We should never have very high expectations of people who do not claim to have faith, but when lawlessness begins to take root in faith communities, there will soon be no one to take a stand against it.

Instead of rising up to speak out and call for people to abandon iniquity, many of those who are watching it creep into faith communities will find their love growing cold as they feel helpless and powerless before this rising onslaught. They will feel more and more unable to do anything about lawlessness and their ability to love will grow cold.

We are not talking about the love of G-d, because that can never grow cold. We are not saying that

parents will suddenly cease to love their offspring or that spouses will no longer cherish each other. The love our passage is speaking about is more about a confidence in the victory of good over evil and that the right shall prevail.

When I hear about terror attacks and the wars and famines which are ravaging Africa and flaring up in places like Syria and Yemen, I feel both helpless and angry because no one seems willing to intervene and put a stop to it. You all know how troubled I am over the rising rates of abortion worldwide and how it worries me that so many of our young people are being caught up the sexual revolution. I am also horrified that the worldwide production of sophisticated weapons is one of the fastest growing and most lucrative industries that every country wants to get involved in.

My love for the lost in this world is not growing cold, but the love of truth and righteousness which draws people to faith is on a steep decline, as the moral temperature of our world keeps dropping. Global materialism is fast becoming the new global spirituality. And the environmental damage which this greed is causing is astounding as we watch forests disappearing and rates of pollution rising dramatically to meet this increasingly insatiable consumer demand.

We have so many new toys and new technologies, but we are creating more problems than we are solving. Our water supplies are infected and our food supply is tainted as the rate diseases like cancer continue to rise.

When you put all of this together, it leaves me cold because so much potential is being squandered and so many innocent people are suffering needlessly. People are being stimulated more, but seem to be feeling less, so they require more and more to get less and less. The rise in mental health concerns is also alarming and we seem to be becoming a society where nearly everyone is doped up on something.

We do not have to look around very hard to see that this tide of lawlessness and iniquity is rising in every part of our globe, just like our Messiah said it would and it is one of the signs of the end of the world and of His return.

I am not being a pessimist who wants things to get worse, because it is happening all on its own. I want to stand up and speak out – and I do, but increasingly righteousness and faith are being marginalized and trivialized, no matter how many voices are crying out against them. I do not want to just retreat and cringe in my little corner as I watch the world collapse around me.

I am still fishing for souls – for light seekers who are part of the righteous which keeps the fiery judgment of G-d from once again destroying our world. I know that we shall keep on losing ground as lawlessness makes global inroads into every society around our world. Our stands on morality will grow increasingly unpopular and subject to more and more negative scrutiny as believers are taken less and less seriously.

Our governments and our schools are sinking into the abyss of lawlessness and things will only get worse and not better. We may win some victories and we should do everything in our power to prevent the enemy from thinking that he has won the global contest for the souls of mankind.

I look at it like this, the ship of our world is sinking faster and faster, but as long as there is access to lifeboats, I will not completely despair as long as there is any hope of rescuing more passengers. They may kick and scream and call us bad names because all they want to do is to party and do what they want without any criticism.

The secularization of our society is almost complete and the same trend is occurring globally as religion of any kind is more and more held up as suspect and increasingly irrelevant. The process is not yet complete, but we are losing ground on every front and many now feel that it is their duty to try and help us come to our senses and backslide into their secular worldview and adopt their evolutionary immorality.

Last week, I spoke about the rising tide of antisemitism that is not yet complete but is rapidly gaining ground. This week I have spoken to you about the rising tide of global iniquity as the hearts of many grow cold. We cannot take any one of the seven signs and say that when we see this happening, the world is going to end. We need to see that these tendencies are becoming global, but they have not yet finished their conquest of the global popular mind.

We need to continue to be a lighthouse even as the storm grows darker and the winds howl louder and louder. And even as the love of many grows colder because of the rise of global iniquity, we need to make sure of two things – even three.

First we need to make sure that our love of the L-rd does not wane and grow cold, just because of what is happening in the world around us. Next we need to make sure that none of the lawlessness which surrounds us is allowed to make inroads into our hearts and lives, even if we suffer for making this stand. Lastly we need to avoid the trap of proclaiming that the end of the world is nearly upon us, when all the signs are not in place.

People have been hearing believers claim that the end of the world is at hand and it has had the same impact of spiritually crying wolf and we are taken less and less seriously. We need to boldly proclaim that His kingdom is coming and that the world will end in G-d's time, but saying that the time is nearly at hand is not the same as saying it could happen at any time. Beware of jumping the gun.

I would like Him to come soon – even at any minute, but I also want the end to hold off until more light seekers come to faith, even if the righteous core from which they come continuous to shrink. The finality of the return should give us both joy and should also scare us because none of us are exempt from the scrutiny of our Messiah when we shall also stand before Him on judgment day. It is not a joke, even if people are now prone to make fun of anyone who talks about it.

Do not let iniquity make any inroads in your life or in our midst. Let us not fall for any versions of: has G-d really said so that we change what the Bible says to suit the demands of modern immorality. As long as we keep our noses clean, we shall not be dragged down into the pit like Lot's wife was.

We also have to be careful not to let our love of the L-rd grow cold because of all the horror and stupidity which is escalating in our world. We remain strangers and pilgrims travelling through this world and no matter how dark it gets, we need to always remember that we are children of light and children of life. When I see the foolishness of the world make inroads into liberal churches and synagogues, I will not despair or retreat.

We are on a mission to seek out light seekers and to show them the way home. Our call is to be both light and salt and to be an influence for good whenever and wherever we are able to. We are called to share our faith whenever the opportunity arises – as long as it does not degenerate into confrontationalism.

We need to understand that the timing of the L-rd is in charge of when He shall return and we need to avoid becoming part of the second guessers. I believe in the coming of the L-rd and His kingdom, but I also believe that all the signs have to be in place for it to occur. So when I say not yet, I'm not coping

out or trying to quench anyone's enthusiasm for the kingdom – I just want to be faithful to His Word and not jump the gun.

Next week, worldwide apostasy.

Shabbat shalom.