

Chayei Sarah **The Life of Sarah** **Abraham's Final Days**

Torah: Genesis 23:1-25:18

Haftarah: I Kings 1:1-31

Brit Chadashah: Matthew 1:1-17

Reading: Betty p. 147 and Psalm 45. Jewish Hero: Midwives. Torah Carrier: Richard NOSH and Quarterly Meeting

As you study the Torah, you are able to put things into perspective and I want to begin my meditation by creating a timeline for some of the events which occurred after the birth of Isaac.

- Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Sarah was 90 and Ishmael was 13.
 - Sarah died when she was 127 years old. Abraham was 137 and Isaac was 37 and Ishmael was 40.
 - Isaac was 40 when he took Rebekah as his wife and Abraham was 140 when he married Keturah. He lived 37 more years and begot 6 more sons, whom he sent away before he died..
 - Abraham was 157 when Jacob was born. Isaac was 60 and Ishmael was 73.
 - Abraham was 175 years old when he died. Isaac was 78 and Ishmael 91. Jacob (and Esau) were 18 years old.
 - Ishmael was 137 when he died, 46 years after his father died. Isaac was 124 and the twins were 64.
 - Isaac was 180 years old when he died. Jacob and Esau were 120.
- Jacob was 98 years old when Joseph was born and 130 years old when he arrived in Egypt and died at the age 147, when Joseph 39 years old and had ruled Egypt for 9 years already.
- Joseph was 30 years old when he became prime minister of Egypt and lived to be 110. He was in power for 80 years. He was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery. So he spent 13 years, first as a house slave and then as a prison superintendent.
 - There are 105 years between the time Abraham received the promise and his death. Isaac lived 102 years after the death of Abraham and Jacob lived 17 more years after the death of Isaac, so there are a total of 366 years between the giving of the promise and the death of Joseph.

This portion deals with the death and burial of Sarah, the arrival of Rebekah, and Abraham's marriage to Keturah, several years before his death. It ends with a brief outline of the twelve sons of Ishmael and his death and burial.

Abraham acquires a burial plot for Sarah and refuses the offer from Ephron the Hittite to receive this land for free. He does not want to join the Hittites or be obligated to them. The phrase: "What is that between you and me" is an expression of annoyance and even though the deal goes through, Abraham has offended Ephron and his descendants will not be counted either among the Hittites or among any of the other nations who currently inhabit the Promised Land. We are called to remain distinct from the world we are travelling through and we must never assimilate or become part of it.

Abraham sends his chief servant, likely Eliezer of Damascus, back to Haran to procure a wife for Isaac. He is not to take a Canaanite wife for Isaac and he is not to take Isaac back to Haran. Isaac is the heir to the promises and the land where he dwells will one day belong to him and to his descendants. Two odd customs appear in this passage.

The first is when Abraham makes his servant swear an oath by placing his hand under Abraham's thigh. This is a euphemism for the groin and clutching the groin was how an oath was sworn in those days. The servant sets out with a considerable caravan and makes a very specific prayer when he arrives at Haran. He wants the woman who offers to water him and his camels to be the one who is designated to be Isaac's wife.

When it turns out that Rebekah is the one who offers to water the caravan, the servant places bracelets on her hands and a golden ring in her nose. Nose piercings were obviously common at that time and we have to be careful not to impose our concepts of what is appropriate on the conduct of the people of that time. These two odd customs may seem strange to us, but that is how people did business at that time.

The servant is invited to Laban's homestead and before he agrees to eat with the family, he repeats his story and Laban and his father Bethuel acknowledge that this journey which the servant took to acquire a wife for Isaac is something the Lord was doing. The family agrees to the match and the servant makes rich presents to Rebekah's mother and to her brother, Laban, who has already assumed leadership of the family.

They want to delay the servant's departure so that the future marriage can be celebrated with the usual days of rejoicing, but the servant wants to depart immediately. The family may have been trying to induce the servant to send for Isaac and Abraham and somehow re-attach them to the family which they had left behind. The family's last effort to stall the departure of Rebekah was to ask her if she wanted to stay for the festivities or leave right away with the servant.

They probably expected her to agree with the delay, but when she agrees to leave right away they bless her and she departs with her nurse and other servants. As the caravan approaches the place where Isaac is camping, before she meets her intended, she covers herself with her veil, which was the custom for brides at that time. The servant recounts the details of the trip and the transaction to Isaac and the groom takes his bride into his mother's tent and she becomes his wife. A ceremony is implied with a time lapse between Rebekah's arrival and her entrance into Sarah's tent, but the marriage of the heir to the promises is described as authentic and legitimate according to the customs of the day.

Isaac is the only monogamous patriarch and his marriage is described as a consolation for him at the loss of his mother. He is at least 37 years old at this time.

The passage ends with a mention of Abraham's third wife, Keturah and the six sons which she bears. They are sent away from the heir and Abraham dies after being married to Keturah for at least 37 years. There is no hostility between Isaac and Ishmael and they gather together to bury their father in the burial plot which he purchased from the Hittites.

The twelve sons of Ishmael are listed in a short biography of Ishmael which also mentions the places where he and his sons dwelt. He is buried among his people, which means that he was not buried with Abraham and Sarah. He and his descendants are mentioned as being on good terms with Isaac and there is no biblical or historical evidence that he or his descendants are the ancestors of the Arab people. Ishmael's sons become leaders of their people and disappear from the pages of the biblical account.

The Haftarah portion deals with the attempted putsch (sudden and often violent takeover) by Adonijah, David's oldest living son, who would be the usual heir apparent. David broke with protocol in designating the eldest son of Bathsheba as his heir and he proceeds with a transfer of power even though he is very weak and close to death.

His choice of heir is mentioned in the New Testament portion, which traces the ancestry of the Messiah from Abraham to Joseph, Mary's husband. Two things should be mentioned about this genealogy which make it unique. The first is the mention of five women, because women are not usually listed in regular genealogies.

Four of them are Gentiles and Joseph is mentioned as the husband of the fifth, Mary. It is his genealogy and it is given so that we would understand that the Messiah has a legitimate claim to be the heir of David's Kingship, as well as being the source of blessing for all nations.

However it is not our Messiah's actual lineage, which is given in Luke 3:23-38. You see the line of Solomon was cursed because of idolatry and oath breaking, but not the line of David. Mary descends from Nathan, one of Solomon's brothers and her abridged genealogy goes right back to Adam. Our Messiah is both the legitimate Son of David and the second Adam.

Mary also has a double lineage and is of the House of Aaron as well as of the House of David. G-d promised to the house of Aaron that there would always be one of them who stood before Him in the priesthood. Our Messiah also fulfills this promise but His priesthood is of a higher order than Aaron's. As our Saviour, He stands before G-d the Father according to the everlasting priesthood of Melchizedek.

Our portion takes the promises made to Abraham one step closer to being fulfilled and the Haftarah portion introduces us to the legitimate descendants in the lineage of David. They have to be descendants of Bathsheba.

The New Testament portion shows the royal genealogy of our Messiah and that He came at G-d's appointed time. We find our Messiah's actual genealogy in Luke, because while Joseph was also of royal lineage, no one from the house of Solomon can inherit the throne of his father David.

Our Messiah inherits his legitimate claim to David's throne through his mother who is of the lineage of Nathan, Solomon's brother. We see even today that G-d's purposes are being fulfilled in spite of the great folly of darkness which is steamrolling through our fading world. How are His purposes doing in your life?

Sermon: How is Your Wardrobe Doing?

Passage: *“This is therefore what I say and declare in the L-rd: you should no longer walk as pagans who walk according to the vanity of their thoughts. Their understanding is darkened and they are alienated from the life of G-d because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. They have lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality and are greedy to practice every kind of impurity. This is not the way you learned in the Messiah. Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him according to the truth which is in Yeshua. You were taught with regard to your*

former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind and to put on the new man, created according to the likeness of G-d in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 5:17-24).

This powerful passage talks about a dynamic form of spiritual vitality which has to choose between two kinds of spiritual wardrobes. The first is the ungodly filthy, wardrobe of the old self which believers are called to put off and not to wear. The second is the godly, renewed wardrobe of the new man which believers are encouraged to put on. How is your wardrobe doing and how well are you wearing it?

Before we came to faith in the Messiah, we had a carnal lifestyle which was given over to our vain, futile minds and which was perpetually lusting after every kind of impurity. We were spiritual zombies, dwelling in the darkness of this present age, with hardened hearts and darkened understanding. Even though we were born with the image of G-d in our conscience, we had become wilfully alienated from the life of G-d and were strangers to the kind of renewal He wants to bring to our hearts and lives.

We had lost our innocence and had adopted the senseless ignorance brought on by the hardening of our hearts. Instead of sensitivity we gave ourselves over to sensuality and instead of developing a desire for the things of G-d, we became greedy to practice every kind of impurity. I think this is a fair description of our darkening, politically correct secular society, both here at home and across the globe. Is your life driven by spiritual sensitivity or by carnal sensuality?

Are you putting off the old self with its corrupt wardrobe of carnal sensuality and are you learning to put on the new man with its righteous wardrobe of holiness? The choice of our spiritual wardrobe is up to us and to the decisions which we make. We have been called out of pagan, carnal darkness and are reminded that we should no longer dwell in it or have anything more to do with it. We are called to change the way we dress and how we conduct our lives.

The choice is ours, but the process of renewal or of darkening comes from one of two sources. It either from G-d when we walk in the light, or from the world when we walk in darkness. We are called to shine as salty light and to change the way we live and the way we dress our souls. At one and the same time we have the old self, which Paul also calls the flesh and the new man, which Paul calls the law of our renewed understanding.

It is not so much that we have the potential of living with a split personality, as much as it is a question of the choices we make and the lifestyle which we adopt. We can either continue to let our hearts be hardened with a greed for every kind of impurity, or we can undress the sensuality of the old self and replace it with sensitivity of the new man. Are you living with sensuality or are you giving yourself over to sensitivity?

Are you living a life which reflects the nature of G-d in righteousness and holiness or are you wallowing in carnal darkness and spiritual ignorance? You see our faith has two sides to it and both sides of this faith must function in harmony. We have the truth which we believe and the obedience which this truth calls us to practice.

James rightly says that if you have faith with no works this kind of faith is dead because even the devil believes. He is not saying that we are in any way saved by our good works. He is saying that we need to demonstrate our faith by the good works which the L-rd has empowered

us to practice. Is this how you are living?

Paul likens this need for a faith which is demonstrated by good works to two kinds of spiritual wardrobes. On the one hand you have the hardened heart which is greedily given over to practice every kind of impurity and is completely alienated from the life of G-d. On the other hand you have the spiritually renewed mind which reflects the righteousness and holiness of G-d and has nothing more to do with the deceitful lusts of its former life.

On the one hand you have spiritual death and decay and on the other hand you have spiritual renewal, full of truth and light. When we come to faith in the L-rd, we change what we believe about the meaning of life and our purpose in it, while we learn to patiently wait for the coming kingdom. But the impact of our entrance into kingdom living needs to go beyond just what we believe. It must radically impact how we live.

It does not matter how much decay and darkness you have in your life when you come to the L-rd, because He is more than capable of turning your darkened sensual heart into one that is renewed and sensitive. The life of G-d is all about truth and righteousness which separates itself from the carnal darkness it was delivered from. True holiness means becoming separate from the darkness of this world in every area of your lives. It may take time, but G-d is able to soften our hardened hearts and shine through all the corruption which our former lives were full of.

We may have been strangers to the life of G-d, but our calling is to let Him renew us and build up the new man in our hearts and lives. It is true that our hearts are full of desires, but He can teach us to exchange one set of desires for another set which reflects the changes which occurred when we came to faith in our blessed Messiah.

Our passage outlines opposites which we have to choose between. We have carnality or holiness. We have sensuality or sensitivity. We have corruption or we have righteousness. We have darkness or we have the truth. We can live lives alienated from the life of G-d or we can put off the rags of our former lives and be dressed in renewal as we stay tuned to the way our holy G-d wants us to live in our blessed Messiah. What are you tuned to?

Our spiritual wardrobe will either be made of the fabric of sensuality with all the hardened corruption of ignorance and alienation or it can be woven from the fabric of sensitivity with all the holiness and righteousness which make up the dynamic holiness of the new man.

Which fabric is your wardrobe made up of and what kind of wardrobe are you weaving into your life? The fabric of the old man may be fashionable in our darkening, carnal world, but it brings with it a hardened ignorance which is alienated from the life of G-d. The fabric of the new man may seem out of place in the world we are travelling through, but wearing it is the only way not to appear naked before the L-rd on the day of judgment.

The writer of Ecclesiastics warns us that G-d will bring every deed into judgment, even those which are buried deep in the carnal sensuality of this fading world. We will either stand before Him clothed in the majestic splendour of the renewed new man or we will watch our lives go up in flames as His judgment burns the disgraceful folly of the corrupt and hardened old man.

You see, how we live in private is just as important as how we live in public and we are called

never to allow anything of the old man to remain part of the wardrobe of the new man. Once we surrender the hardened, corrupt sensuality of the old man, G-d will begin the process of bringing back spiritual life and vitality as we learn to fill our lives with truth, righteousness and holiness.

He uses dressing and undressing to highlight our need to make conscious decisions about how we choose to live, just as we make decisions about what we will wear and how we will dress. We will either give ourselves over to corruption or to truth. Our hearts and lives will either be filled with a dynamic sensitivity to the life of G-d or they will be driven by the insatiable sensuality which wants more and more of our lives, even as it gives less and less satisfaction or fulfillment.

Our blessed Messiah paid the price for the sins of mankind when He died on the cross. When He arose, He offers us the same victory which He won over sin when He walked on the earth. He did not pay the price of sin so that we could sin with impunity and live lives exempt from having to face the consequences of our sinfulness. He died on the cross and rose from the dead so that sin and death would lose their grip on our lives. He wants to show us how to move away from the corrupt and ignorant sensuality which we have learned in the world before we came to faith in Him. He wants to build spiritual sensitivity into our lives.

He wants to renew us and teach us how to live lives attuned to the life of G-d as we wait patiently for the coming Kingdom of our blessed Messiah. He wants us to wear robes of righteousness and to throw off the filthy rags of carnal sensuality and sin. Greater is He that is in us than the one who is in the world. He can teach us to overcome the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, so that the pleasures and riches and cares of this fading world no longer have any hold over us. Does His kingdom have a hold on your life?

How is your wardrobe doing? Is your life driven by spiritual sensitivity or carnal sensuality? Is it time to change what you wear and how you walk? We need to live for spiritual vitality and not wallow in the carnal darkness of this age. Shabbat shalom.