



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

17 Cheshvan, 5781 (07/11/20) First Winter Series: Secondhand Knowledge or Biblical Truth J. M. Terrett

Vayera	And He Appeared	G-d Gets the Ball Rolling
Torah:	Genesis 18:1-22:24	
Haftarah:	I Kings 4:1-37	
Brit Chadashah:	Luke 1:26-38; 24:36-53	

I enjoyed preparing this portion because it is a transition from the initial giving of the promises to the process of seeing them being gradually fulfilled. Sometime after the circumcision of every male in Abraham's camp, he experienced one of the first theophanies recorded in the Bible. In the Bible, a theophany is an appearance of G-d usually as an angel in human form. The angel functions as a viewing screen through which G-d speaks so His listener is not consumed by His lethal presence.

When G-d appeared to Abraham in a fire which consumed the sacrifices, smoke covered Abraham to protect him from being consumed along with the sacrifices. Was G-d's presence in the Garden of Eden also an angelic theophany? Deut. 29:29. In our portion, three men arrive to visit Abraham, he immediately recognizes them as angels. He is also aware that one of them is a limited manifestation of YHVH.

They agree to take a meal with Abraham and are served cream and milk, along with calf meat, without a time interval between the two kinds of food, which is a Talmudic misunderstanding we should not fall prey to. They are also served wine. This means that when angels temporarily take on a human form, they can eat and drink, even though as spirits, they have no real need of any food.

Once the meal is over, Abraham accompanies his guests as they head in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The angel of YHVH tells Abraham that he will return and cause Sarah to conceive. It is miraculous in that it is a post-menopausal conception. Sarah is listening and she is astounded because she and Abraham are no longer regularly engaged in sexual intimacy. This not the same thing as the virgin birth, it is just conception through regular means with divine help.

Both the sperm and the egg are empowered and conception occurs, partially because Abraham is circumcised and the divine promises are now going to start to be fulfilled. Sarah is rebuked and the angel of the L-RD tells her that nothing is impossible for YHVH. This is not a blanket statement to say that G-d regularly does the impossible – it is a specialized statement. It

declares that whatever YHVH decides to do shall come to pass under His direct and specific intervention.

She laughs because after 25 years in Canaan she has failed to conceive and she knew that for her to conceive now was an impossibility without direct divine aid. G-d never fails to fulfill in a timely manner any promises He has made. We need to put our trust both in G-d's divine intervention and in His timing. YHVH decides to tell Abraham what He intends to do to the wicked twin cities. This because Abraham's life mission is to teach his descendants faith and obedience, which are the double prerequisites for His conditional promises to be fulfilled for them. These prerequisites are called righteousness (blameless spirituality) and justice (blameless conduct as we wander through this darkening world).

Abraham asks that G-d not destroy the evil city if there are at least 50 righteous men dwelling in it. He drops the initial number from 45 to 40 and then from 30 to 20 and finally to ten. He is not so much interceding for Sodom (and its twin Gomorrah) as he is declaring that imminent destruction will only come when the city no longer has an intact righteous core. The same is true for world. The end will only come once the global righteous core is no longer intact.

The two destroying angels arrive at Sodom in the evening when Lot sits at the gate as an elder and a judge. Once the day's work is done this was the time that the people usually consulted their leaders. Lot recognized them as angels, but we could suppose that members of the righteous core have angelic recognition capabilities, but the wicked do not.

Lot takes them home for a feast and while Sodom was not an overly large city, the entire male population gathers at Lot's door to molest the angels. Ancient Middle Eastern hospitality requires protection for any guests and when Lot offers his daughters in place of his angelic guests, he is told that they will do worse to him than they intend to do to the angels. They warn him that he will be raped to death. While Lot is stalling for time, the angels pull him back into the house and blind the spiritually blind assailants.

He is told to gather his family and leave the cities which are about to be completely destroyed. He is told not to look back, but his wife does and perishes in the fire storm. She is likely a local girl and may have thought of something she forgot to bring with her and went back to retrieve it. In this case, looking back meant going back.

Lot settles into a cave near the small town Tsoar, which is located in the hills above the plain. His daughters suppose that no man will come to wed them, likely because their father has become a hermit, so they wickedly take matters in their own hands. They get their father drunk and take turns having sex with him. This did not become a regular occurrence, either because their father wised up to their incest or they parted ways.

The two boys become the ancestors of both Moab and Ammon. It was common practice in this troubled region for powerful people to establish new people groups by gathering the shattered remnants of people groups and this would take an extended period of time.

In chapter 20, Abraham moves into Philistine territory, perhaps because there was better grazing there. We know from history that there were two groups of people which were called Philistines. The original group was Semitic, but while our people were in Egypt another group

of Minoan Greeks conquered them and took their name.

While he is in Guerra, he asks his senior citizen wife to again pose as his sister. She is still extremely beautiful and is afraid he will be killed so someone could take her as their wife. Sometimes our trust in G-d falters and we may become temporarily foolish. When the local king takes her into his harem, during the purification rituals, G-d appears to him in a vision and warns him not to marry her. Abraham covers up his gaff with a half-truth, because she is his half-sister. The king gives them an atonement dowry and his people are warned not to touch them. Abraham is allowed to settle wherever he wants.

At the appointed time, Sarah conceives a son who is given the name of Isaac (laughter) and on the eighth day, he becomes the first Jew to be circumcised on the eighth day. When he is weaned, Abraham holds a feast to mark this transition.

After this Sarah sees Ishmael laughing with his little brother. He was likely mocking him or teasing him and Sarah does not want to threaten Isaac's future by having a competitor in the camp. He and his mother are sent away, likely with a small entourage and during their journey Hagar becomes lost and runs out of water. She walks away from her son, so she does not have to see him die and she pours out her heart as she weeps. An angel showed her where to find water and she survives.

They eventually settle along the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula, which while it was not as fertile as Canaan, was good for grazing and even for farming.

It was about this time that the Philistine king visits Abraham and they swear an oath of generational friendship while Abraham was living at Beer Sheva. The name of this camp means well of the oath in Hebrew.

In the next chapter, Abraham is put to the test when G-d asks him to offer his son up as a burnt offering. He wanders for three days and arrives at the summit of Mount Moriah, the future site of the temple. He then builds an altar and prepares to sacrifice his son. For me, this is one of the most disturbing passages in the Bible, but it is a clear reference to G-d sending His beloved Son to die in your place and mine.

I attempted to seek some clarity about this chapter from a Talmudic commentary, but I encountered some very far-fetched and imaginative fiction, which only served to cloud over the Messianic nature of this incident. When you consult a source, be sure that it clarifies and expands on your passage and does not just add confusion to your search.

Abraham was willing to offer his son without any qualms because He totally trusted G-d. If G-d wanted him to sacrifice the miracle baby then so be it. He was prepared to obey unconditionally, even when he did not understand. There is no indication that Isaac put up any resistance because he obviously trusted his father. It was both his unconditional faith in his dad and his dad's unconditional faith in G-d which makes this passage so powerful.

Just as he is preparing to kill his son and offer him up as a burnt offering, Abraham, is stopped by an angel. Both father and son have passed the test of ultimate obedience and they are shown a ram caught by its horns in a bush. It is to be sacrificed in Isaac's place just as one day the Messiah was going to die in your place and mine.

All the promises made to Abraham are now confirmed by his act of obedience and G-d makes a threefold statement. Abraham's descendants are to be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the grains of sand on the sea shore. G-d's promises are both infinite in their scope and infinitesimal in their attention to detail. This number refers to a humanity united by Abraham's faithful obedience. He is told that his descendants will also overcome their enemies. And because Abraham obeyed the voice of G-d all nations will be blessed in His posterity.

Abraham and Isaac passed the faithful obedience test, may YHVH help us to do the same. The portion ends with a short genealogy of Rebekah, Isaac's future wife. G-d got the ball rolling in Abraham's life. Are you letting Him do the same in your life? His promises are unstoppable, may our faith and obedience be the same.

Sermon: Second Hand Knowledge or Biblical Truth. Acts 17:11

“Now these Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the Scriptures every day to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

In this series, we are examining the two sides of Deut. 29:29. We need to learn to leave the secret things with G-d as we do our best to put the things which He has revealed to us into practice. Today we are going to examine the eager reaction of a community which not only received the message, but were diligent in making sure it was biblically accurate. The Scriptures which they examined daily refer to what is now called the Old Testament or Tanach.

The teachings and explanations which Yeshua had left to his apostles were still in the process of being written down, so when believers shared their faith, they shared from two sources. They would have shared what has come to be known as the apostolic tradition and would go on to demonstrate that the message which they shared was faithful to the teachings of the Tanach (Old Testament).

You see, the New Testament is actually a commentary and when writers of the New Testament refer to the Scriptures, they are referring to the Old Testament, as well as to the teachings of the apostles. You see, there is no contradiction between the two amazing sections of G-d's Holy Word. Sometimes, however, a quote from the Old Testament in the New Testament may differ slightly from the Old Testament which appears in our Bible.

Let me explain why. Most Jews and Jewish believers in Yeshua, used the Greek language translation of the Tanach called the Septuagint. It was translated a few hundred years before the arrival of the Messiah in Alexandria. The job was carried out by a group of some seventy Jewish scholars, so that Greek speaking Jews could read the Tanach in a language which they understood. Hebrew was dying out as a spoken language and most Jews either spoke Aramaic or Greek (or both).

References to the Messiah in the Septuagint were so crystal clear that it was not heard to demonstrate that He is indeed the Messiah, who came at the right time and was born in the right place. Eventually a group of rabbis decided to come up with a new Hebrew translation so they could appear to be challenging the claims of believers and make it appear that their claims

were not biblical.

They altered as many words as they dared but with at least one fatal flaw. You can only correct and older text by using texts that were older still. At the time of its translation, the Septuagint was considered as accurate as if Moses himself had done the work. They wanted to discredit this Greek translation and even today, some Jews have the idea that the Septuagint is a Christian translation and not a Jewish one.

It was done by Jewish scholars for Jewish people and what is called the Masoretic or traditional text, was an attempt to reassert a Talmudic understanding of biblical texts and to discredit the older Greek translation. Though the two translations are very similar, in places the Masoretic text changes passages which are found in the New Testament or are used to show that Yeshua of Nazareth is the promised Messiah.

An example of this is Isaiah 7:14 which says in the Septuagint that a virgin shall conceive a child. The Masoretic text says that a maiden shall conceive, in an attempt to downplay the miraculous virgin birth of our Messiah. The problem for them is that the word virgin and maiden have the same meaning in Hebrew. So; whenever you see a difference between a New Testament quote and how it is worded in the Old Testament, the New Testament is quoting from the Septuagint.

When the reformation was happening, most Bible translators worked from the Masoretic text, when they should have been using the Greek text of the Septuagint. Differences in quotes in the New Testament are not changing or challenging the authority of the Old Testament, they are just indications of the changes which later Talmudic Jews tried to insert into the Bible.

When the writers of the New Testament refer to the Tanach, they are referring to the Septuagint translation. Instead of trying to change the Bible and make it say what we want it to, we need to let the Bible change us so that we learn to say what it says. Whenever passages in the Old Testament do not agree with the New Testament quotes, the New Testament quote is more accurate.

When the Bereans received the Message of the Messiah, they did so enthusiastically, and rightly turned this enthusiasm into verifying that what they were taught was actually in the Bible. Are you enthusiastic about the Gospel message of our Messiah? Do you search the Scriptures daily to make sure that you have the message right?

One of the biggest problems which modern believers face is that there are so many people saying so many things about G-d and His Messiah, that unless we verify what is being said from the Bible, we risk being led astray by secondhand knowledge. Take the time to verify the message you have received. When the Bible began to be translated into modern languages, many scholars dug into both the Greek and the Hebrew and discovered that many of the traditional teachings of the church were wrong and needed to be reformed.

In our day, when many believers put aside what their various denominations teach about the Jewishness of our Messiah, they discover the wonder of our Jewish Messiah and it is almost like a veil has been finally dropped when they reread the Tanach. Modern Christianity needs another reformation where all and any church teachings which go against what the Bible teaches are discarded with great enthusiasm.

Is your examination of the Bible daily? Do you come to its teachings with great enthusiasm? Is your faith based on spiritual gossip which has no firm biblical base or on the eternal, changeless Word of our Messiah? Never be afraid what you might discover in the Bible. Be afraid that there are things in the Bible which you have yet to discover.

As well, whenever anyone claims that they are teaching what the Bible says, before you accept what they are teaching, take the time to go back to the source and verify what the Bible actually teaches. When you encounter the solid wall of Deut. 29:29, be content to leave the secret things to G-d and pour all of your spiritual energy into discovering the things which He has revealed and which belong to our children and to us, forever – so that we may put them into practice. Learn to be a Berean Jew, addicted to Bible study and allergic to the spiritual gossip which falsely claims to be biblical.

In the lead up to Chanukah, be a warrior committed to studying the Word. The only second-hand food we should eat is milk and honey. Second hand teaching which claims to be biblical should be verified before it is consumed. We will not get aggressive or argumentative. The Bereans weren't. Let's be excited about digging into the Word. I have been doing so for over 48 years and the well has never gone dry yet – and never will.

I am not talking about nit picking or trying to go underneath the text of the Bible. It has no secret messages or hidden codes. We need to learn to build a Deut. 29:29 fence around our understanding of the Scripture and avoid mystic claims of secret revelation. Take the Word at face value and use your energy finding new ways to put it into practice when you encounter new situations.

Those who claim to have new and special revelations of hidden biblical truth are either; false teachers who want to change the Bible for their benefit and prophet or they are deceived by those who undermine what G-d has really said. History and a study of languages can be helpful, as long as we do so to get at the usual and normal meaning of what the Bible says.

We should all be enthusiastically studying the Word and stringently applying in in every area of our lives. Second hand knowledge should be treated the same way as Gossip and you need to get your story right before you pass it along. The Bible still fascinates me as much today as it did when I first came to faith. In fact, I would say that this fascination has grown as I learn more about what the Bible actually says and am delivered from teachings which do not proclaim what my Bible does.

Join us in this mighty task. The Gospel of our Messiah is what the Bible teaches and we need to make sure that every aspect of what we believe about our Messiah comes solely from the pages of the Bible. I do not follow a blond-haired, blue-eyed, Gentile Messiah. My Messiah is Jewish and His message is addressed first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

How is your grasp of the Gospel of the Jewish Messiah doing? Make it biblical and leave all the spiritual fiction behind.

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.