

Vayera **And He Appeared**
Torah: Genesis 18:1-22:24
Haftarah: 2 King 4:1-37
Brit Chadashah: Luke 17:28-37

This portion covers five chapters and deals with both the birth and the near sacrifice of Isaac. It also deals with Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah and the total destruction of those two evil communities. This is the last mention of Lot and he becomes the ancestor of both Moab and Ammon. It also mentions the last time Abraham left Canaan during a famine. Isaac is the first Jew to be circumcised on the eighth day and the passage also mentions the departure of Ishmael. Toward the end of the portion, Abraham makes peace with the Philistines and it ends with Abraham being prepared to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering.

Sometimes people take things from a passage that were never intended and sometimes they do not see what they do not want to see. Abraham has an encounter with YHVH which is sometimes called a theophany. YHVH has two angels with Him and as they come close to Abraham's camp, they are invited in for a meal. We are not told how Abraham recognized that these were angels or that one of them was YHVH. No one could survive an encounter with the actual presence of YHVH, so frequently YHVH used an angel as a spokesman.

When they eat a meal with Abraham, look what is on the menu: meat and dairy together. Rabbinic kosher is not the same as biblical kosher and while we should never boil a young goat in its mother's milk, we are allowed to eat meat and dairy together. As they eat, Sarah is summoned and is told that at this season of the year, next year she will have a son. She laughs to herself and tries to deny laughing.

When the men (angels) get up to leave, Abraham goes with them and speaks with the spokesman of YHVH. He intercedes for the twin communities and YHVH says He would spare them as long as their righteous core was intact. Abraham starts with fifty just people and ends up with a minimum of ten righteous people and we learn later that the righteous core has shrunk to just four people. The two angels that appeared with YHVH's spokesman go on to Sodom.

They encounter Lot sitting as an elder at the gate and accept an invitation to dine with Lot and stay in his home. Just after they go to bed for the night, Lot's house is surrounded by the entire male population of the community. They want Lot to send out his two house guests, whom they intend to gang rape. When Lot refuses and even offers his two daughters to the crowd, they say unless he complies they will do worse to him than they intend to do to the guests. This is a death threat, but Lot is rescued by the two angels.

They tell Lot to gather his extended family together so that they may leave the city and not be destroyed along with it. When his two future sons-in-law refuse to leave with him, Lot eventually takes his wife and two daughters and they head for a small community in the hills. Lot's wife may have been from Sodom and when it says she looked back, it means that she went back. After the destruction of the two evil communities, Lot hides in a cavern and fathers one child with each of his daughters. They will form the core of the future people of Moab and Ammon.

When Abraham takes refuge in Gerar, he tells everyone that Sarah is his sister and the king Abimelech almost takes her as one of his wives. YHVH warns the king in a dream and he pays Abraham for his mistake. He is asked to leave, but is told that he can live anywhere in Philistine territory. After Abraham departs, Philistine women are no longer sterile.

When it says that YHVH remembers Sarah, it just means that at the appointed time, she conceives a son whom Abraham names Isaac (Laughter or giggle). Again, he is the first Jewish boy to be circumcised on the eighth day. Apparently Ishmael mocks his younger brother and he and his mother are told to leave the camp. Ishmael grows up and his mother gets him a wife out of Egypt and they settle in the wilderness of Paran. The chapter ends with Abimelech making peace with Abraham as he settles at Beersheba.

The passage ends with one of the most disturbing stories in the Torah. It is also one of the first mentions of Messiah's sacrifice for us. Abraham is told to take his adolescent son to a far place and there, to offer him up as a burnt offering. Now many things have been said about this incident which the text does not support.

Abraham fully intended to impale his son on an altar he built. He has Isaac carry the wood while he carried the fire. He did not bring his servants to the top of the hill, so there was nobody there to stop him. It may be that he expected his dead son to rise from the dead or that Sarah would give him another one, once he had disposed of this one. We are not told. All that we are told is that he bound his son on the altar and got ready to impale him before he was offered up as a burnt offering to YHVH.

Isaac apparently did not resist and Abraham was not just stalling to see if YHVH would change His mind. Just before he kills his son, he is told to stop and is shown a ram caught in the bush by its horns. He offers the ram in the place of Isaac and this kind of substitution sacrifice is called a vicarious atonement. Messiah died in my place and yours as the ram of G-d. A ram is a grown up lamb.

YHVH tells Abraham that because he was willing to surrender his covenant son to YHVH, that all the promises he had received would be fulfilled through the descendants of his son. They would both be as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the shores of the sea. He had been put to the test and he passed. We should never consider anyone or anything more precious than YHVH because all we have and all we are, already belongs to Him.

Abraham did not question YHVH because not only did he believe in the promises, he also obeyed when YHVH spoke to him. If we surrender something or someone to YHVH, He will either give it back or give us something to replace it. It is a bit cutesy, but true to say that if He is not L-rd of all, He is not L-rd at all.

We are not told how Abraham felt about what he was commanded to do, but he could be counted on to obey. Can you be counted on to obey? If we withhold anything or anyone from YHVH, then no matter what we say or no matter what we do, in reality YHVH is not the most important thing in our lives.. Believers can talk themselves into many things and talk themselves out of many things, but it is only YHVH by His Word that we should be giving our first allegiance to. We should be prepared to sacrifice anything and everything to YHVH, otherwise we are not really walking with Him by faith and by obedience. How is your walk with YHVH doing? Are you holding anything back? Don't.

Sermon: **We Will Meet Again**

I am at that stage of my life when I know just about as many dead people as I do those who are still alive. One day soon my picture will be on the table and I am not afraid of the sleep of death. I do not wish to die and I am grateful for every year I am given. I miss many of the people whose pictures are on the table. It is not morbid to remember the deceased because they were once just people like you and me.

As a believer I realize that death is only a temporary sleep, so when I lose someone I do not grieve like someone who has no hope (I Thess. 4:13-18) and today I want to explore the concept we shall meet again. Now there is a crazy idea which some believers have that says when Yeshua returns, He will undo all the evil and that all of mankind will rise from the dead and joyfully enter the Kingdom of our Messiah.

All of mankind, in all of our generations will rise from the dead and be judged from two books. First from the book of our works and deeds, because everyone's deeds bears our signature, but I do not find this to be scary. All that we have confessed to the Messiah and repented of, is washed away and will never be brought up again. David did some pretty bad things but he surrendered them all to YHVH and was able to bask in forgiveness.

The contents of our hearts and lives will all pass through the fires of judgment (I Corin. 3:10-15). Some will be rewarded while others will suffer great loss. Our job is not to fill our hearts and lives with the flammable materials like hay, wood or stubble. We should be humbly filling our hearts and lives with gold, silver and precious gems. The fruit of the spirit should be growing in our lives and hearts and we should never allow them to be choked with the work of the flesh. In my experience it is one thing to talk about being spiritual and quite another to actually be spiritual.

I am relieved when I read passages about the coming judgment, and it is not because I am being morbid. No one will get away with anything forever (Eccl. 12:13, 14), but we should not judge anything before its time (I Corin. 4:5). Only G-d has all the facts and only He is qualified to pass final judgment. I truly believe that it is right and proper to punish criminals and law breakers, but entrance into the final Kingdom is decided by our Messiah (John 14:6) and only He knows who names are written in the second Book, the Lamb's Book of Life.

Evil doers and those who endorse criminal behaviour will not have their names written in this marvellous book (I Corin. 6:9-11), but some of those who have committed criminal acts and who have repented will be welcomed to their forever home by the resurrected Lamb of G-d. Religious people are actually divided between the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46), not because of some supposed decision which G-d made on our behalf before the foundation of time, it is based rather on our conduct and the good we have done in His name or have neglected to do.

Now how our name gets written in the Lamb's Book of Life and how it can be erased is a decision made by our Maker, who has all the facts and knows all the motives. Among the number of the blessed there will be many people who did not personally come to faith, but who would have if they could have, because they spent their lives obeying His Law which is written in everybody's heart (Romans 2:12-16 and 2 Corin. 5:10).

Now I am not talking about what some people call “cheap grace”, where because of G-d’s great love and the power of the Cross, every single human being who was ever conceived, makes it to glory, no matter how heinous they were or whether they repented of their evil deeds or not. Our Messiah will judge everyone according to the truths of His Word and never according to the opinions of men.

While I was working with my indigenous friends they asked me what would happen to their ancestors who died before the Gospel could be preached to them. I answered that everyone will be judged by the Messiah and those who would have if they could have, will be treated the same as those who did receive the Messiah into their hearts and walked with Him through our darkening world. I know some very good and sincere people who firmly believe that only those who have personally accepted the L-rd into their hearts will make it through the gates of heaven. They are sincerely wrong because YHVH does not look at the times of ignorance which some people never escaped out of (Act 17:30, 31). As well, many who believe this will still admit that some Catholics will be welcomed into Glory, along with some good folk who are trapped in various cults.

I am willing to discuss the coming Judgment with anyone who will listen and talk about the two pillars it will be based on: faith and obedience. This is the truth and if people do not live for the truth, none of their theology can save them. Now I will always do my best to understand what the Bible says and to respond to the ups and downs of life according to its stipulations. G-d will condemn those who are truly sinners, but what will He do with those babies who were murdered in their mother’s womb?

I once heard of someone who said that all the non Christian Jews who were murdered in the death camps would all burn in hell because they did not possess saving faith. The world is so full of innocent victims and evil victimizers, I will let our Messiah determine the final fate of all of mankind. Of course I want everyone in the world to get right with YHVH and to live right with YHVH, for this is the whole duty of mankind (Eccl. 12:13).

When I came to faith 52 years ago, I was given a haven of peace that I would never trade for anything and I would wish this blessing on everyone in the world. So many religions are wrong and do not teach the truth. I was a Buddhist but I also considered Islam and Hinduism. I know that they are wrong and I want to live by the truths of G-d’s Word. Some of these folk believe that I am wrong and that I am going to hell. Many of my believing friends believe that all non believers are going to hell, just because they are unbelievers.

They collect passages which support this perspective and ignore those which do not. I will cling to the truth of G-d’s Word and encourage everyone I meet to do the same, but it is Yeshua and Yeshua alone who will decide who to include in His coming Kingdom and who to exclude. It is my duty to be a salty light and to remain on the bumpy straight and narrow, whether or not there are many others who will follow suit. It also my job to ensure that what I believe in is based on what the Scriptures actually teach. We have to learn to leave the hidden things to YHVH (Deut. 29:29) and not get bent out of shape and fill our faith with a bunch of arbitrary boxes where we have gone beyond that which is written (I Corin. 4:6). The Word of G-d did actually come down from heaven, both through the words of the Bible and the ministry of our Messiah. The rabbis are wrong when they say that now that we have the Bible, even G-d has to listen to us. No, we need to keep listening to Him and leave the secret things alone.

Frequently, people say the nicest things about the deceased, whether or not they also did so when the people they are talking about were still alive. Some of the people on our memorial table did not live their lives as believers and some were also committed to ideas and beliefs which attack and try to discredit the Bible. When all of humanity rises from the grave and stands before the majestic glory of our Messiah, they will have to acknowledge that Yeshua is Lord and they will bend their knees to Him (Phil. 2:9-11).

But no matter how much they will regret their folly, once the truth is manifested to them, they are not given a second chance to come to faith. There will be no second chances on the Day of Judgment. God will sift through the darkness and folly of people's hearts and lives to see if they have anything which is truly of eternal value. If He finds even the slightest bit of something of eternal value, the rest is burned, while what is left is welcomed into the Kingdom. I used to tell my native friends that I would rather be an amoeba in Heaven, than a whale in hell.

He will always judge according to what Francis Schaeffer called the true truth and He will be as merciful as He is severe and there will be no room for excuses before Him. People who have been lying to themselves and to others, will have to see and admit the truth on the Day of Judgment. What surprises will be waiting for you on Judgment Day? We remember those who have preceded us into the sleep of death, and whether we like it or not, we will meet again.

We will not look like what we looked like in this life because we shall receive sin resistant bodies where who we really are on the inside shows up on the outside. There will be no more gender in the coming Kingdom and there will be no more need to conceive children because we will all live forever and never grow old. There will be a final, mighty reckoning and some of us will be rewarded while others will lose their reward. Some will be severely punished, but any punishment will always fit the evil some have done and which they did not repent from.

What we call Hell (or Gehenna) is merely God's remand centre and it is not a place of suffering because none of those are sleeping in it have been judged yet. Hell is not on fire and Satan does not rule there and has never been there. He lost any access he had to the heavenly realm when our Messiah ascended and now he and the fallen angels are restricted to our planet (Rev. 12: 4, 7-10). Satan roams around like a roaring lion, looking for fresh victims to devour spiritually (I Peter 5:8, 9).

Those who have finished their race and are resting in the sleep of death will have to wait for Judgment Day before they are rewarded or punished. They are asleep and not conscious (Rev. 6:9-11) and we cannot communicate with them and they cannot communicate with us. Those who try to send messages or to receive messages from the departed are wasting their time and are usually being tricked by charlatans and fakes who are in it for the money.

The only active role the dead can have with the living is their legacy and the memories we cherish as we remember them. The Catholic church and the various orthodox churches have come up with a long list of saints who led lives of special virtue and supposedly have the ability to bless and to protect those who call upon them in prayer. None of the deceased from Abel to those who are dying as martyrs in our generation, have the ability to have an active part in the lives of the living. They can no longer be hurt and are not able to help the living.

In most synagogues, the names of the deceased are represented by engraved plaques with little light next to their name. On the date of their passing, the little light is turned on and those who remember them give thanks to G-d for their lives. I do not want to just become a name on the wall, next to a little light that is turned on to remember the day I died.

When I first took my first shul, I came up with the idea of a memorial table with actual pictures of our beloved departed. The rule of thumb is that a picture of a deceased loved one can stay and be set up on the four times a year we have our congregational Yizkor (memorials) as long as there is someone who remembers them. It might be a good idea to make up name tags to identify those we are remembering. Two of our people have recently lost their fathers and we attempt to always place the most recently departed in the middle of the memorial table as a place of honour, as they join the crowd of those we have been remembering for many years.

Don't be shy about bringing a picture. You can either leave it with us or bring it each time we hold a memorial. Again, in Judaism, we say that someone is not really dead as long as there are people who remember them. Yesterday, we remembered our fallen soldiers and honoured our veterans who are still with us. War is always a tragedy, but we should always honour and respect members of our military. Many of them served with distinction in dangerous situations that have left them traumatized and sometimes some of them need our help to move on from what they experienced.

There is one group who cannot move on because they paid the ultimate price and as the horrible memories of the two world wars continues to fade, we are determined never to let the memory of them fade. The same needs to be said for the friends and family we are remembering.

In Messiah we have faith in the coming kingdom where we will all meet again. They are not lost, they are just asleep. We often say: "May they rest in peace" and add: "May their memory be blessed." We are not calling on them to help us which some people claim that the deceased are able to do. Hebrews says that the deceased are part of a giant crowd of witnesses who have had their turn in life and are no longer actively part of it.

Some of them have been good examples and role models, while others lived lives and made choices which we should avoid. Unless the Messiah returns in our lifetime, death is waiting to welcome all of us, whether we live to a ripe old age or are taken too young, like many of the fallen soldiers we are remembering and honouring.

Be encouraged, there is life after death, but this will only become a reality when Messiah returns to set up His everlasting Kingdom and the dead are resurrected. The coming Day of Judgment is a reality which does not depend on whether people believe in it or are ready for it when it comes.

Our Yizkor services are an expression of our faith in both the resurrection and the coming Kingdom of our blessed Messiah. We live in a world where many sophisticated modern people have rejected the spiritual realities which our Bible outlines. We have not and we will not. We may not be called upon to give our life in the service of our country, but as believers, we are all called upon to live our lives in the service of the coming Kingdom. How is your service doing? What will people say about us when it is our turn to take our place on the memorial table? Being Kingdom conscious is the only way to live. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov. Rejoice, because we shall all meet again!