

Shavua Tov

Weekly  Parsha

A Road Awakening! Torah Commentary
By Glenn McWilliams

Torah Portion: *Vayera* וַיֵּרָא “And He appeared”

God appeared to [Abraham] in the Plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the hottest part of the day

Vayera elav Adonay be'Eloney Mamre vehu yoshev
petach-ha'ohel kechom hayom

Scripture for study: *Bereshit (Genesis) 18:1 - 22:24*

In our teaching last week we discussed the difference between the potential for doing good and the actual doing of good. This theme continues on in our portion this week as we are reminded that the Torah is not lived in a vacuum but in a real and all too imperfect world. We should not be ignorant of the reality that there is a cost to entering the covenant with YHWH. The invitation to enter the covenant is not an invitation to become a passive recipient of the grace and mercies of the Holy of One of Israel. The invitation to enter the covenant is an invitation to bind oneself to fulfilling the purposes of the Holy One regardless of the cost. We should realize that we have been called not merely for our potential but for an actual purpose. For those of us coming out of the Christian tradition we may be more accustomed to speaking about the cost of discipleship.

“And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned and said unto them, If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my talmidⁱ. And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my talmid. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him. Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an

ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my talmid.” (Luke 14:25-33)

“And it came to pass that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Adonai, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Yeshua said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Adonai, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Yeshua said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of Elohim. And another also said, Adonai, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Yeshua said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of Elohim.” (Luke 9:57-62)

“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matthew 10:37-39)

We should clearly understand that entering the covenant and being a disciple of Yeshua is truly one and the same thing. To be a talmid of Yeshua the Messiah means that we give our whole life to embodying the Messiah, his attributes, character, teachings and deeds. Since Messiah came to do the will of the Fatherⁱⁱ, which is to fulfill the Torahⁱⁱⁱ, then this is our calling and purpose as well. For those who truly feel called to this covenant relationship with YHWH through Messiah, we must recognize that we have been called not merely for potential good but for actual good. This means that we are to translate the Torah teachings of Messiah into knowledge, and this knowledge into understanding and understanding into wisdom and wisdom into action. We have not succeeded in being a talmid of Messiah until the words, teachings, actions, attributes, and Torah of Messiah become embodied in our deeds. Let us pay particular attention to the emphasis that Messiah Yeshua places upon actually doing the will of the Father.

“Yeshua saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)

“Then Answered Yeshua and said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” (John 5:19)

“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” (John 5:30)

“Then said Yeshua unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with: the Father hath not let me alone, for I do always those things that please him.” (John 8:28-29)

“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass one jot or one tittle, shall in no wise pass from the Torah, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:18-19)

“For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister, and mother.” (Matthew 12:50)

“And behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing must I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one that is Elohim: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:16-17)

“The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever he bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say and do not.” (Matthew 23:3)

“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said I will not: but afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said I go sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?” (Matthew 21:28-31)

“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Yeshua saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children ye would do the works of Abraham.” (John 8:39)

What, we may ask are the works of Abraham? The works of Abraham is to do the will of YHWH even in an imperfect world.

As we begin our Torah portion this week we should be mindful of the fact that in his day Abraham alone lived to fulfill the calling of YHWH to be a blessing^{iv} to the rest of the world. Within the chapters and verses of the scriptures that cover the life of Abraham we should take careful note of the contrast between the righteousness of Abraham and the unrighteousness of the world in which he is called to journey, dwell, serve and be a blessing. We should also be mindful of the cost of obedience that Abraham is asked to and is willing to pay. Finally we should be especially understanding of Abraham’s motive for doing the will of the Father.

Our Torah portion begins with a little bit of controversy. For those who have never seen an actual Torah Scroll they are sometimes surprised to find that they are written in Hebrew and not English, and that they read from right to left, and that there are no chapter or verse numbers. The truth is that our modern chapter and verses do not line up with the Torah portion divisions. Therefore there is sometimes debate about where the actual break in the portion or chapter should be. Such is the case with the opening sentence of our Torah portion. Last week’s portion ended with the story of Abraham circumcising all the men of camp,

Ishmael, and himself. Therefore some of the sages feel that the first part of the opening sentence of our portion belongs at the end of the story of circumcision.^v The story would then read,

“In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought, with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him. And YHWH appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre;” (Genesis 17:26-18:1a)

This, say the sages, is showing that Abraham’s obedience was rewarded with the presence of the Holy One. That chapters 17 and 18 constitute a continuous story is given evidence by the fact that Abraham’s name is not mentioned again until 18:6. So we should clearly see a connection between the obedience of Abraham in circumcising and the visitation of YHWH. Fearing the idea that YHWH be considered a man, Rashbam, Rambam and other rabbis try to explain away this verse identifying one of the visitors as YHWH by declaring that this first part of verse 18:1 is merely a title for the narrative that follows.



“The Rashbam, Rambam and others maintain that this opening verse is nothing more than a title to the story that follows, a general statement, the particulars of which are elaborated on in the succeeding narrative. In other words, the succeeding verses from two onwards do not constitute a detached narrative of new events but are merely an intensely concreted elaborations of the cryptic introductory statement in the first verse. This is the point made by Rashbam in his commentary: ‘And the Lord appeared unto him’ – How? Through the arrival of three angels in the guise of men.”^{vi}

It seems that the rabbis have great difficulty with the idea of the Infinite and Eternal one appearing as a man as the text describes. Therefore the three men are referred to by the rabbis as being merely angels on a divine mission from the Holy One. That the text clearly states that it is YHWH seems not to matter. Beyond this, at Genesis 18:13, the speaker is again clearly identified as YHWH and even makes promises to Sarah and Abraham.

“And YHWH said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything to hard for YHWH? At the time appointed I will return unto thee according to the time of life and Sarah shall have a son.” (Genesis 18:13-14)

And again at 18:17 the text clearly states that it is YHWH speaking and declaring what the mission of the two angels are that go on to Sodom.

“And YHWH said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?”(Genesis 18:17)

The dialogue over sparing the righteous of Sodom that takes place between Abraham and YHWH clearly indicates that it was indeed YHWH manifested in physical form that visited with Abraham. While the rabbis and sages of old reject YHWH’S ability to diminish him-self in time and space, the testimony of scripture is too overwhelming to deny. Every time the Eternal

One enters into a covenant he restricts and binds himself to acting always in a certain predicted way within time and space. YHWH appeared in numerous fashions and manifestations through out the Torah; as pillar of cloud and fire, as a burning bush, as an audible voice from Mount Sinai which was heard by all the children of Israel at once. I fear that much of this controversy is caused by fear of validating the Church's incarnational teaching about Jesus. Regardless of their motivations the sages and rabbis seem to go to great extremes to explain away what is clearly stated in these verses. YHWH visited Abraham. Why is this important for us to understand? Because it demonstrates that YHWH desires to be known in this world. YHWH came to relate to, fellowship with, and commune with man upon this earth. YHWH did not rapture Abraham up to the heavens to speak with him. From the very first letter of the Torah, the enlarged BET of Bereshit, YHWH reveals that it is his desire to tabernacle with his creation upon the earth. It is here on earth that we as the descendants of Abraham, the recipients of the Torah, and the talmidim of the Messiah are to embody YHWH in our flesh that the world may commune with him. To this end Abraham demonstrates for us one of the greatest mitzvot given to man which is the showing of hospitality. The Torah reports that Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent in the heat of the day when he sees visitors coming his way. Let us watch Abraham to see the manner in which he extends his hospitality.



“And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Adonai, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said so do as thou hast said. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd and fetched a calf tender and

good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree and they did eat.” (Genesis 18:2-8)

For those of you who have given up the King James Bible because of the “these”, “thou”, “Ye” and “Your” language I want to show you now how important these words are. In the King James English, the pronouns beginning with the letter “T”; Thee, Thou, Thy and Thine, are all singular pronouns. Likewise, words beginning in “Y”; Ye, You, and Yours are always plural. With this in mind let us take note of the specific use of these words in the above passage. I should mention here that the Hebrew word Adonai, which is often translated as Lord is a plural word. Therefore our English text should say, “My lords” as it does at Genesis 19:2. The Hebrew word Adonai in its plural form when used with singular verbs is always in reference to YHWH ELOHIM. While the title Adonai is indeed plural we should note that all of the pronouns and verbs of this sentence are singular. Therefore it becomes very clear that Abraham is not

addressing all three as adonai but just the One as Adonai, thus supporting the above statement that it was indeed YHWH that visited Abraham. After speaking with Adonai, Abraham then extends his hospitalities to his companions as well. We should note the speed with which Abraham fulfills this mitzvah, running, hastening, hurrying to care for and feed his guest. As keepers of the covenant we should not delay in fulfilling our calling. The Torah teaches,

“When thou shalt vow a vow unto YHWH thy Elohim, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for YHWH thy Elohim will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee...That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; ”
(Deuteronomy 23:21,23)

As the children of Israel we must remember that when YHWH spoke from Mount Sinai we responded with our vow.

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation....And all the people answered together, and said, All that YHWH has spoken we will do.” (Exodus 19:5-6,8)

We should also recognize that Abraham first saw these visitors only as men. Thus Abraham demonstrates for us that we should treat even strangers as we would YHWH ELOHIM. This Abraham learned from the covenant that YHWH made with Moses.

“And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of Elohim made he man.” (Genesis 9:5-6)

Here we learn that we are to see the Creator in every person. Thus even in the most vile of men we must search to honor the reality that even a perverse, twisted, sinner, was created to possess and bear the image of the Holy One, and the life that is within him was given by Elohim. In honor of the Creator we extend respect and kindness to every living thing including total strangers. By extending this hospitality to strangers Abraham hoped to plant the seeds of hospitality in those he served. This was so because Abraham was himself a stranger in the land.

“I am a stranger and a sojourner with you;” (Genesis 23:4)

Abraham likewise remembered the revelation he received at the covenant of the pieces.

“And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years.” (Genesis 15:13)

By planting the seeds of hospitality to strangers, possibly Abraham hoped to change the land in which his descendants would sojourn as strangers.

We should also note that by being ready to show hospitality without discrimination Abraham was prepared to meet YHWH MESSIAH when he came. The author to the book of Hebrews instructs us,

“Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (Hebrews 13:1-2)

Messiah Yeshua likewise taught his talmidim;

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Adonai, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” (Matthew 25:34-40)

We should also note the humility evident in Abraham’s service unto his guests. This is especially evident in the way he puts his guests at ease speaking of his own actions as if they are no trouble. See that Abraham speaks to his guest of bringing only a “morsel of bread” but then prepares for them an entire feast. So we too should not over value our service to others, for all that we do we do unto YHWH. This is truly the motive behind Abraham’s hospitality. Love of Elohim, as He is seen in the stranger His presence evokes kindness and joy in serving others. Shaul writes,

“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Messiah; Not with eye service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Messiah, doing the will of Elohim from the heart; with good will doing service as to Adonai and not to men.” (Ephesians 6:5-7)

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to Adonai, and not unto men.” (Colossians 3:23)

For comparison sake let us look at Abraham’s nephew Lot as he too receives these angelic visitors. We should note that from the start of this story the visitors are clearly identified as being angels and not mere men.

“And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them and he bowed himself with his face to the ground; and he said, Behold now, my lords turn in, I pray you, into your servant’s house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay, but we will abide in the street all

night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.” (Genesis 19:1-3)

Clearly we see Lot showing efforts of hospitality. But note that where Abraham ran to meet his guests, Lot merely stood. Also Lot invited his guests to his home and encouraged them to wash their feet but did not offer to draw any water for them as Abraham did. Maybe the biggest contrast is that Lot offers to prepare them a feast but makes them only unleavened bread, whereas Abraham offered only a morsel of bread but prepared them a feast. The sages teach that this is the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous. The righteous say little and do much, the unrighteous boast of much but do little. Nehama Leibowitz in her commentary on Bereshit writes of Lot;

“Lot is an example of the average man, a study in mediocrity faithfully following in the steps of his master Abraham, until his pocket is affected. As Rashi points out; “And Lot journeyed east” He journeyed away from the primal being (a play on the word Kedem meaning first) of the world. He said, “Neither Abraham nor his God!” He left Abraham for the fertile fields of Sodom – From one pole to another, from Abraham and his God to Sodom. (Cp. Genesis 13:10-11) Lot tried to maintain Abraham’s way of life even in the heart of Sodom, striving to preserve, at risk to his life, the elementary obligations of hospitality to strangers, in a city where such behavior was forbidden by law. Naturally his attempts were doomed to failure, resulting from his inability to choose between Abraham and his environment and Sodom and its environment.”^{vii}

Here we see yet another contrast. We should not miss the contrast between Abraham and his environment where YHWH is free to come and commune with him, and the environment of Sodom and Gomorrah where only the wrath of Elohim is appropriate. We must note that YHWH does not go to Sodom but sends his witnesses on a head. In speaking of Abraham YHWH declares,

“Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of YHWH, to do justice and judgment that YHWH may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” (Genesis 18:17-19)

Here we see that YHWH is confident in Abraham, and the fulfillment of all that YHWH determined for Abraham and his seed after him. This confidence is based upon the fact that Abraham will teach his children the way of YHWH, to do justice and judgment. In contrast we read of the inhabitants of Sodom that men of Sodom both young and old are perverse.

“But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: and they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may know them.” (Genesis 19:4-5)

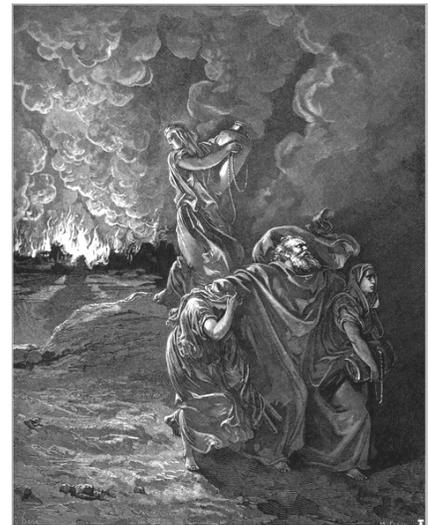
While there may be some who sympathize with Lot and defend him by pointing to how hard it is to do righteousness in such a perverse environment. I agree. But let us remember that Lot chose to live in such an environment.^{viii} We should also see that Lot progressively joined the people and environment of Sodom. When Lot departed from Abraham the Torah tells us that Lot was still living in a tent outside the city of Sodom.

“And Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.” (Genesis 13:12)

In our portion however notice the significant changes. Lot meets the visitors in the city gates, a place used as a civic center and generally filled with the town’s elders and elites. Lot invites the visitors to enter his house (Byit) no longer a tent (Ohel) which is now within the city limits. Lot also appeals to the perverse men of his city as brothers. Lot also allowed his daughters to marry the sons of Sodom. Clearly Lot was at home in the city of Sodom. Even when the intentions of YHWH were made known to Lot and his family still they would not bring themselves to depart from their beloved city.

“And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here, lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.” (Genesis 19:1)

Here we should take careful note of the angels’ warning. They do not warn Lot and his family to leave because they will be caught up in the judgment of Elohim, but rather that they should leave before they become more entangled in the iniquity of the city. The angels are warning Lot of the danger of dwelling among such worldly people. But how did Lot react to this divine advice?



“And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; YHWH being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. ” (Genesis 19:16-17)

Instead of running for their lives from the certain destruction that would befall them, Lot lingered, and then bargains with the messengers to remain close by, while Lot’s wife looked back and was consumed! So attached had they become to the world of Sodom that they found it hard to leave even when it was under the certain judgment of Elohim. While Lot may have indeed struggled to keep some sense of righteousness about him while living in the darkness of Sodom and Gomorrah we must realize that Abraham when called to leave the idolatry of his country, kinfolk, and even his father’s house did so quickly and without the threat of destruction over his head.

“Now YHWH had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as YHWH had spoken unto him:” (Genesis 12:1-4)

We should also remember that YHWH led Abraham to the land of Canaan where the Canaanites perform all manner of sexual perversity and idolatry in the worship of their elohim. Chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus enumerates all these perversities which ultimately caused the land of Canaan to spew out its inhabitants. We should also remember that Abraham spent time in the godlessness of Egypt where his wife was kidnapped and his life threatened.^{ix} Abraham was also forced into battle due to the rebellion of the kings of the plain, and the kidnapping of his nephew Lot.^x Finally in our portion we see a repeat of Egypt, when Abimelech king of Gerar requisitions Sarah for his harem. By the grace of YHWH Sarah is spared defilement. Abimelech asks Abraham why he deceived him by saying Sarah was his sister, and Abraham boldly declares,

“Because I thought, Surely the fear of Elohim is not in this place.” (Genesis 20:11)

My point is that Abraham was living in the same world that Lot lived in. Thus Abraham faced the same challenge as Lot to be in the world but not of the world. I do not wish to judge Lot, for it is never easy to be the sole light in a sea of darkness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer^{xi} in his book Life Together reminded his students,

“It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers.”^{xii}

Now quoting Martin Luther, Bonhoeffer writes,

“The Kingdom is to be in the midst of our enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ: he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared.”^{xiii}

Bonhoeffer goes on to explain the purpose and plan of YHWH in this matter,

“I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries” (Zech. 10:9). According to God’s will Christendom is a scattered people, scattered like seed ‘into all the kingdoms of the earth’ (Deut. 28:25) That is its curse and its promise. God’s people must dwell in far countries among the unbelievers, but it will be the seed of the Kingdom of God in all the world.”

Clearly the calling of YHWH upon Abraham and his descendents was to leave everything behind. This includes all of our attachments to earthly things. We are not to be a part of this world and its kingdoms but a part of YHWH'S kingdom. This was one of the many differences between Abraham and Lot. Abraham had entered a covenant with YHWH and was bound by his word. Abraham had met YHWH and spoke with him. Abraham had the promises of YHWH buried deep in his heart. Lot had the world and nothing more. But there is another difference that becomes quite evident in the last story of our portion. It is this last story that lays bare the heart of Abraham and reveals the motive behind all that he does.

We know that while Abraham may be superior to Lot in his righteousness, still he is not perfect. Abraham, like the rest of us, is still human and prone to stumbling. It was this stumbling that produced Abraham's firstborn son Ishmael. Ishmael was the product of Abraham and Sarah hearing what YHWH was going to do and then doing it for themselves. This failure of patience and faith had very significant consequences. Some of the enemies that we must learn to love and live with today are the direct descendants of this stumbling. Abraham loved Ishmael none the less. Ishmael was 14 years old when Isaac was born. The tension between mothers was already great and now to be made even greater.

“And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham mocking.” (Genesis 21:9)

The word Hebrew word being translated as mocking is Tsachaq (Tsade, Chet, Qof) and can mean laughing, sporting with, or toying with, and may have the implication of dangerous play. Therefore Sarah demands that Abraham send both Hagar and Ishmael away from them. Abraham's heart was grieved deeply by these words, but the Holy One affirmed that this was the right course of action to take. Once again we see Abraham acting quickly to carry out the commandment.

“And Abraham rose up early in the morning and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away.” (Genesis 21:14)

After this painful departure the Torah tells us that Abraham planted a grove of trees in Beersheba and continued to dwell among the Philistines in that land. Here we are reminded that Abraham has already given up country, kindred and heritage to follow YHWH to sojourn in a strange land. We have also seen that Abraham sent away his firstborn son into the wilderness not knowing whether he will ever see him again. But at least Abraham has the promise of YHWH and the son of that promise Isaac. But what comes next would be the test of all tests. The Creator calls upon Abraham to leave his camp with his son and to offer him up as an elevation offering.

“And it came to pass after these things that Elohim did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took tow of

his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up and went unto the place of which Elohim had told him.”
(Genesis 22:1-3)

There is much revealed in these verses. First let us notice that once again Abraham was quick to fulfill the commandment of the Holy One. Lest we think that Abraham acted on impulse or in a state of shock over the request, the Torah tells us that the journey took three days, giving Abraham ample time to think, to intercede, or to rebel. But Abraham did not rebel. Nor did he intercede. Instead he simply and faithfully obeyed. A second thing that we should see is the connection between this final testing of Abraham and the first testing. In Genesis 12:1-3 the calling begins with the Hebrew words “Lech Lecha” /”Go for yourself”. These same words appear in the phrase “get thee into the land of Moriah.” So we see the words “Lech Lecha” hanging like brackets around Abraham’s life. In the first instance YHWH called Abram to give up his past, his identity with a people, his citizenship, his heritage, and even his inheritance from his father. But at this first instance YHWH made Abram a promise to bless him and enlarge him and make his name great. So it could be said that Abram was willing to give up all of his past because of the promise of a better future was laid before him. In this last instance however, YHWH calls Abraham to give up even his future. Remember that Abraham had already put away his firstborn son Ishmael. Isaac was the son of promise. Isaac was the son who passed through the cutting. Isaac was clearly the heir to the covenant, the land, and the promises. Isaac was clearly Abraham’s future. But now, without explanation, and without any promises attached to the command YHWH calls upon Abraham to make the ultimate sacrifice, his only and beloved son.

There is much for us to learn in this incident. The first thing that we should see is that it is this event that reveals the very heart and motive of Abraham. The absence of any promise of blessing for obedience or condemnation for failure to comply, tells us that Abraham did not act out of desire for blessing or out of fear of retribution. Abraham’s sole motive was simply the love of YHWH! This is what lies at the heart of Abraham’s righteousness. Abraham loves YHWH. He delights in YHWH’S will and word. We see the same reality expressed by the children of Israel after being delivered through the Red Sea. The children of Israel had been freely saved from bondage in Egypt and Pharaoh’s army. Only after they are safely on the other side of the Yom Suph (*Red Sea or Sea of Reeds*) does YHWH bring them to Sinai and invite them into a covenant relationship. We must understand that Israel was a free people and could have chosen to go their own way. The only reason for them to willingly enslave themselves again to servitude to YHWH is love for the one who delivered them and redeemed them. **THE ONLY REASON TO KEEP THE TORAH IS LOVE FOR YHWH.** We do not keep the Torah to get saved or to escape hell. We do not keep the Torah to gain blessings or to escape curses. We keep the Torah out of an incredible love for the One who created, redeemed, and that continues to sustain us. The only one preaching that the Torah is teaching that salvation comes through keeping the law is the Christian Church. The second lesson we should learn from this event is that obedience has a cost. To fulfill the calling upon us we must be willing to give up our past, and our future out of love for him who is eternally present. If we are to be the embodiment of YHWH in the world then like him we too must be living in the present. We must be willing to give him our all. Yeshua taught,

*“Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of Elohim, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”
(Matthew 6:31-34)*

To have the strength to serve YHWH in this fashion we must indeed love him more than mother, father, son, daughter, past or future, or even our own life. As the body of Messiah we must be willing to pick up our cross and follow. Finally we should not miss that fact that as willing as Abraham was to sacrifice his son, so was his son willing to be sacrificed. Here we see the reason why YHWH would even ask Abraham to perform this detestable act. Realizing that there was no apparent reward or blessing in it for himself, Abraham acted for our sake. By faithfully doing all that YHWH called him to do, regardless of how painful or offensive it may have been, Abraham and Isaac provided us with a very clear shadow picture of the Messiah and how he would eventually redeem. Here we may remember of how Moses was called upon to perform the same function in his day. By striking the rock to bring forth water in the wilderness Moses gave us a shadow picture of Messiah’s sacrifice upon the cross. However, when Moses was called upon to complete the shadow picture by speaking to the rock the second time to bring forth water, Moses in his anger disobeyed, and struck the rock a second time, thus changing the picture of the resurrected Messiah. For this offense Moses was prohibited from entering the promise land with the children of Israel. Thus we should realize that sometimes what is happening to us is not for us but for those who will come later and see and understand. Our task is simply to love YHWH enough to faithfully do his will regardless of whether it makes sense to us or has some obvious blessing attached to it. Only love for the Holy One will allows us to pay the cost of discipleship and to be a light even in the darkness of the imperfect world where we have been sown and called to bear fruit for the kingdom.

SHAVUA TOV !

ⁱ Talmid – Hebrew: student or disciple

ⁱⁱ John 6:38

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 5:17

^{iv} Genesis 12:1-3

^v New Studies in Bereshit, Nehama Leibowitz, LAMBDA Publishers, Inc, Pp. 158-160

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} New Studies in Bereshit, Nehama Leibowits, LAMBDA Publishing, INC. Pp. 175-176

^{viii} Genesis 13:10-13

^{ix} Genesis 12:12-20

^x Genesis 14:1ff

^{xi} Dietrich Bonheoffer was a Lutheran Pastor in Nazi Germany who was executed in a concentration camp for his part in a plot to assassinate Hitler.

^{xii} Life Together, Dietrich Bonheoffer, Harper San Francisco, Pg. 1

^{xiii} Ibid, Pp. 1-2