

Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation
(Under same management for over 5784 years)

SHABBAT SERVICE

**November 4th - 10:30AM, Lolo Community Synagogue
12:30 PM Oneg Shabbat & Interactive Torah Study
Parsha Va Yera -- Genesis 18 - 22**



"And he took curds and milk and the calf, which he had prepared, and placed it before them..."

וַיּוֹרֶא אֱלֹהִים לְזָה בְּאַלְמֵן מִמְּרֵא וְהָא יָשַׁב פֶּתַח הַאֲהָל בְּחֻם נַיּוֹם

Vayera elav Adonai b'Elonei Mamre veihu yoshev petach-ha'ohel k'chom hayom.

"And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre,
while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day."

Haftarah – Nehemiah 9 15-17

Thou didst provide bread from heaven for them for their hunger. Though didst bring forth water from a rock for them for their thirst. And Thou didst tell them to enter in order to posses the land, which Thou didst swear to give them. But they, our fathers acted arrogantly. They became stubborn and would not listen to Thy commandments. And they refused to listen and did not remember Thy wondrous deed which Thou hadst performed among them. So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But Thou art a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate; Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. And Thou didst not forsake them.

B'rit Hadashah - Hebrews 13:1-2

"Let love of he brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."

Contrasts & Commonalities

In the Torah portion, **Va Yera**, "And He appeared," we observe contrasts and commonalities in the character and lives of God's people versus the lives of those with whom they come into contact. Some of God's people will "lose their blessing," resulting from making poor choices that remove themselves from God's "umbrella of protection." Others will find themselves included by extension in the blessings of God's people through no merit of their own doing. We will observe both unparalleled faith and obedience to God's commands and self-serving "bull-headedness".....even from the same individual!! We will see God's grace and protective provision as well as His devastating judgment. We will see the results of miraculous faith in God's promises and the results of inserting "our plans" into God's promises for quicker results.

As we observe these contrasts and commonalities, let us remember that they are examples for us to know how to please God on His terms. Let us learn from the triumphs and mistakes of others, so that our lives will be pleasing to God.



"And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him..."

Entertaining Angels

Hebrews 13:1-3 admonishes us to love fellow believers and to show God's kindness to strangers, ill-treated ones, and even to prisoners. For in doing so, we might be entertaining angels without knowing it.

In **Chapter 18**, we find Abraham living near Hebron (originally called **Kiriat Arba**), where he had previously built an altar to God (**Genesis 13:18**), by the oaks of Mamre about 22 miles South of Jerusalem. Suddenly Abraham found himself in the presence of three "men." We will come to find out that one of these "men" is the Messiah; **a theophany, the presence of Messiah in the Tanakh.** (A theophany occurs when a "man" appears "out of thin air" for a particular purpose, doing something only God could do or cause to happen. He would be recognized as God and then vanish, when His task was finished.) Abraham was 99 years old and may have recently been circumcised, **Genesis 17:3-27**. He was evidently resting in the shade during the hottest part of the day as was the custom, when all of a sudden there were three "men" standing nearby. Realizing that these "men" were strangers, Abraham ran to greet them and to offer them hospitality. Running while recuperating from circumcision must have been painful for Abraham. Yet for Abraham **hospitality** meant putting aside caring for himself to care for others. In their culture, the minimum requirement of hospitality was that the host provide the stranger a cup of coffee. Abraham offered his guests much more. First he had water brought to wash their weary feet. Then he asked Sarah to make some fresh bread cakes for them. Then he ran to where his cattle were pastured and ordered that a choice calf be slaughtered and prepared for his guests along with curds and milk. [Note the absence of kosher laws, serving milk and meat together.] While his guests sat down to partake, he stood to serve them. *****Compare the attitude of Abraham towards unexpected visitors with that of many of us today. How many of us, while recovering from an operation, would jump up to serve an uninvited stranger, who showed up at our door? How many of us would have the audacity to ask our wives to stop what they were doing and quickly cook a meal from scratch? There were no canned goods, frozen foods, or microwave ovens in Sarah's "kitchen." While we might treat unexpected strangers at our door like "**schnorrers**" (beggars or moochers, who might come to the back door for a handout), Abraham and Sarah treated them as guests, met their physical needs, and continued to serve them. What a witness for the "**chesed**" (covenantal loving-kindness) of their God! ****By the way, how should we treat **schnorrers**? Over the years while studying Torah with an Orthodox Rabbi from Borough Park, NY, there would be times when someone would come to his door, asking for money or food. He always had money put aside just for this situation, so he could give the person what he needed. His wife would hand out food or even drive the person where he needed to go. Would not it be well for us, too, to have some money set aside to meet the needs of those led by God to visit us? **We, who have appropriated God's Ruach, should always be ready to show our faith by our actions, especially to our covenantal brothers and sisters.** Rabbi Issac Roussel notes: "...the concept of '**covenantal bond**' is missing from much of Christian theology. This is such a key tenant of Judaism. God lovingly chooses Israel through no merit of its own and makes a covenantal bond to her, tying His destiny to hers. **This covenant is what the nations**

are grafted into, not replacing. So **Chesed** is like a loving and attentive husband living out his commitment to his wife."

While Abraham remained talking with his uninvited guests, he would eventually realize that these "men" were different from any other men he had known. The first clue might have been when one of the strangers knew the name of his wife. The next clue certainly would have been the prediction of one of the guests that when he returned in a year, Sarah, who had already gone through menopause, would have a son. Sarah laughed to herself at the thought that she would be able to bear a child, even though God had thus previously informed them (**Gen.17:19-21**). Sarah denied that she had laughed, but "the Lord," who had heard her inward laugh, corrected her....another clue that this guest was not an ordinary man. Note: **Genesis 17:17** states that when Abraham heard from God that Sarah would bear him a son, Abraham "fell on his face and laughed..." One might posit that Abraham's laughter was laughter out of amazement for what God could do, while Sarah's laughter was because she was a woman who knew the reality of childbirth from having attended other women in childbirth.

As the "men" stood to leave, Abraham extended hospitality by walking along with them for awhile. The last and most revealing clue that Abraham was talking to Messiah, Himself, immediately followed. "...The Lord said, "Shall 'I' hide from Abraham what 'I' am about to do..." and He repeated the Abrahamic covenant **told to Abraham only by God**. No simple stranger would have known that! The Lord told Abraham that the sin in Sodom and Gomorrah was great. Immediately, Abraham knew that he was speaking to God. Abraham went from being host to "men" to confronting God as an intercessor for the righteous ones in these two cities that he recognized were about to be destroyed by God. Abraham went from meeting the physical needs of strangers to negotiating with these strangers for the physical salvation of others in those two cities. In an age where we are told that it is best to "not get involved" in the situations of others, we should remember the picture of Abraham providing hospitality to strangers and negotiating intercession with God.

Abraham also knew that his nephew Lot and Lot's family lived in Sodom and must have considered all of them to be righteous ones. Abraham must have figured that with Lot and his wife and two unmarried sons and two unmarried daughters along with his two married daughters and their two husbands (**Gen.19:14**), there were at least ten righteous people in Sodom. Abraham tried to negotiate with God to reduce the number of righteous people necessary to save the city -- to the number he knew were in the family of Lot, whom he considered to be righteous (by extension) because they were in Lot's family. **Notice that to be included in God's family requires the appropriation of exclusive faith in the God of Israel.**

Contrast the intercession of Abraham, who had pursued and defeated the captors of Lot and other citizens of Sodom, and who stood before God to negotiate for the welfare of the "righteousness ones" of Sodom with Noah. There is no record of Noah making a physical effort or an appeal to God to save any people other than his immediate family. With Abraham we see a willingness to act on behalf of the welfare of others. Through the concern and actions of Abraham, others could be drawn to the God of Abraham. **There is a comparison with the "great commission" of Matthew 28:19-**

20, where the disciples were told to be concerned with the welfare of all nations; therefore to go to "all the nations" to make disciples and to teach these nations to observe all Messiah commanded.



וַיְהִי הַמֵּתֶר עַל־סָדֹם וְעַל־עַמֹּרָה גָּפְרִית וְאַשׁ מֵאֵת יְהֹהָן מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם:

Va'Adonai himtir al-Sedom v'al-Amorah gofrit va'esh me'et Adonai min-hashamayim.

"Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire
from the Lord out of heaven..." "But his wife
from behind him looked back; and she became a pillar of salt."

God Rescues Lot, But Destroys Sodom

We remember from Genesis 13 that Abram allowed his nephew, **Lot**, to choose from all the land, the place where he would settle. Lot chose the Valley of the Jordan because the land appeared to **be the best** - "like the garden of the Lord"- and **settled in** the cities of the valley as far as **Sodom**. However, as is often the case, **what appears from a human perspective to be "the best" may not be the best from God's perspective**. "Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord" (Gen.13:13). The Lord told Abraham (Gen.18:20) that the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great, and their sin was exceedingly grave. In Chapter 19, the two angels made their way to the city gate of Sodom. They approached Lot, who was sitting by the gate of the city. The gates of a city were where public business was done. Therefore Lot must be either a businessman or have a high position such as being a judge in the city. When Lot saw the strangers approach, he, like Abraham, showed hospitality and strongly urged the strangers to eat with his family and spend the night at his house. Without telling the strangers about the evil men of the city, Lot took these strangers into his home to keep them safe. However, word of the arrival of these visitors became public knowledge, and the men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house. They demanded that the visitors be turned over to them to have sex with them. Lot tried to

reason with the men of the city, even offering his two virgin daughters to them, but was unsuccessful. While Lot is called "righteous" in 2nd Peter 2:7-8 and did offer hospitality and safety to the strangers, it is obvious that the men of Sodom changed Lot more than Lot effected change in their lives. It was then that the visiting angels took control, rescuing Lot and blinding the homosexual men, so that Lot and his family could escape the city. However, it was only reluctantly that Lot agreed to leave after it was agreed that he could go to the small town **Zoar**. He was told: **1) escape for your life; 2) do not look behind you; 3) do not stay anywhere in the valley** (except he was allowed to go to Zoar). Interestingly, Lot was told to hurry because the angel could not do anything until Lot was safe. Illustrated is what I call: God's principle of protection by extension. Because God keeps His promises, those who are attached by faith to the person or people protected by God's promise are also protected. "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot lived" (19:29). We observe the similarity with Noah, where there was no flood until Noah and his family were provided for by God. God provides for His righteous ones (notice, we're **not talking about perfect ones...Lot was far from perfect**), while exercising judgment on those perpetrating evil.

Burn layer at Numeira, the proposed site of Gomorrah



The burn layer at Numeira, testifying to the fiery destruction that overcame the city. There was evidence of a violent earthquake that occurred with the fire. Geologists theorize that an earthquake caused pressure on subterranean petroleum deposits, which were forced out of the ground, ignited, and fell back on the Cities of the Plain.

Then the "Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (vs. 24). [By the way, how many "Lords" ("Adonai") are seen here? This is another incidence showing the plurality of the Godhead in the Torah.] Lot's wife disobeyed and looked back, becoming a pillar of salt. The "look" described here means a longing look or prolonged gaze, as if longing for what was left behind. (When one leaves a sinful situation, one should never longingly look back, secretly wishing to return to that situation.) Messiah uses this event, as a comparison of the events preceding judgment in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot, when people were going about their "normal" evil deeds and were unaware that God was about to bring judgment for their wickedness, warning those, who are on the path to safety to not look back towards their former lives. They should remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall preserve it Luke 17:21-33). Here, Lot's wife, seeking to preserve something of her sinful lifestyle, lost her life. While, Lot and his daughters, choosing at that time to leave the place of that former lifestyle, preserved their lives.

Completing Chapter 19, Lot's daughters worry that they will have no one to marry them. Could they not have returned to Abraham to find husbands for them? Taking matters into their own hands, they made their father drunk and then they committed incest with him. To them are born children, who will father the nations of the Moabites and the Ammonites; two nations that were a continuing snare to the Israelites.

Lot pursued wealth and went from living in a tent neighboring his uncle, Abraham, to living in a house in Sodom. Fleeing Sodom, Lot lived in a cave in the mountains overlooking Zoar. He had lost all his wealth, his wife, and some of his family, who stayed behind in Sodom. He excluded himself from God's land covenant with Abraham. **He pursued "the best," but found that "the best" wasn't God's best for him. Notice that God did not intervene in Lot's choices. Does God allow us to make wrong choices and suffer the consequences of our choices?**

Chapter 20 shows us that **Abraham**, whose faith in God was "reckoned (accounted) to him as righteousness," still had **some trust issues with God.... just like the rest of us**. Abraham went to live in **Gerar**, which is about 10 miles South of Gaza. Abraham told Abimelech, the king of Gerar, the same story about Sarah being his sister that he had told Pharaoh in Chapter 12. The king takes Sarah, and again God rescues Sarah and restores her to Abraham. Abraham tries to justify himself in verse 12, saying that Sarah really was his sister and became his wife. Clearly, though, Abraham's story about Sarah being his sister was meant to deceive the King. Clearly, Abraham had not learned his lesson with his lie to Pharaoh. God's principle of protection would have protected both he and Sarah because it would be through them that their promised child, Isaac, would come. So we might say that Abraham had Perfect Faith..... all the time..... except when he didn't.....Just like all of us.

Chapter 21 records **the birth of Isaac** (Isaac can be translated “laughter”). Sarah gives God the credit for this supernatural birth saying, “God has made laughter for me...” (vs.6). Then several years later, when Isaac was weaned, Sarah asked Abraham to send away Hagar and Ishmael. God tells Abraham to do so because his descendants will come through Isaac. Yet because of God's promises to protect and make fruitful Ishmael in Chapters 16 & 17, God keeps Hagar safe and leads her away from the land promised to Isaac.



The Binding of Isaac

Although God's promises to Abraham would come through the line of Isaac, God tells Abraham in **Chapter 22** to "Take now your son, **your only son**, whom you love, **Isaac**, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains..." How could God require child sacrifice? How could God's promises to Abraham be fulfilled if Isaac was to die? **This is a good example of what we should do when God doesn't seem to make sense: We obey! Even when we cannot figure out how or when God will keep His promises; even in times of horrible uncertainty..... We maintain our faith in God and obey!**

That is exactly what Abraham does. Notice that this time he doesn't attempt to intercede or to negotiate with God as he did when Lot's family was in peril, even though the one in jeopardy was his own son, Isaac. However, there is the hint that Abraham believed God will let him keep Isaac safe. He said to his servant, ..."**we will worship and return to you**" (vs.5). Abraham replied to Isaac, who inquired, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "My son, **God will provide** for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering..." (**Genesis 22:7-8**). "God will provide" - this is Abraham's sole comment in the midst of what must have been great anxiety. God does indeed provide a ram as an offering in the place of Isaac. "Abraham therefore names the place **Adonai Yireh**, The-Lord-Will-Provide; 'as it is said to this day, In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'" (22:14). **The Lord is our ultimate source and overseer, the King over every aspect of our lives.** There is a time to wrestle with the tough questions of spiritual life, but there is also a time when the only issue is God's sovereignty! **Often, it's in the midst of our greatest trials that we must affirm this truth most clearly!**

So we see that God provided a substitute sacrifice for Isaac, after Abraham fully exercised his faith in doing God's will. "...Because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you..." (vs.17). As a result of his obedience, God again reiterated the Abrahamic covenant in verses 17 & 18, adding "and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies." **How does our obedience to God stack up in comparison with the obedience of Abraham? Abraham loved God with perfect faith..... all the time..... except when he didn't do so..... just like many of us!**

SHABBAT SHALOM

