

# וַיֵּרָא

## VAYERA/AND HE APPEARED Bereshith/Genesis 18:1-22:24

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Last week we ended our reading with the **circumcision of Abraham** which **followed his faith** in the **promise of a son**. The **words** beginning this week's parasha are some of the most **exciting in Torah**:

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה

And **יהוָה** **appeared to him**

Thus the parasha **begins** with **יהוָה** **appearing to Abraham**, and **climaxes** with the **Akeida** (binding of Isaac) **demonstrating** the **extreme obedience** of a **father** when asked to **sacrifice his beloved son**. It is also **fascinating** that **Jewish commentators** point out that the **final word** of the **parasha** is “**ma’acha**” (**מַעֲכָה**), which in Hebrew is an **acronym** for “**King of all the earth**” (**מֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ**). We should therefore be reading every word with **expectation** of finding **revelations of our Messiah!**

We are going to begin with what appears to be some **sharp words** from **Sarah concerning Ishmael**:

*Bereshith 21:8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup> And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. <sup>10</sup> Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac."*

It will be **helpful** for us to do a little **historical digging** at this point. Of the **several law codes** surviving from the **ancient Middle East**, the **most famous after the Torah** of course, is the **Code of Hammurabi of Babylon**. The **laws are written on a black stone**, seven and a half feet in height and six feet in circumference. The **stone depicts the king receiving the law from Shamash, the god of justice**. It encodes **many laws** which had probably **evolved** over a **long period of time**, but it is interesting to the general reader because of what it tells us about the **attitudes** and **daily lives** of the **ancient Babylonians**. This **stone** can be found today in the **Louve, in Paris**.

Remember **Abraham and Sarah** came from the **area of Babylonia**. The **code** seems to have some things in **common** with **customs that appear in the Torah**. Many experts have concluded that **Hammurabi and Abraham** might have been **contemporaries**. It is possible to see **evidence** of this in **how Sarah and Abraham handled** this incident with **Hagar**.

Here is a **law** from the **Code of Hammurabi** which **apparently Abraham and Sarah followed** when they **banished Hagar** from their **household**:

“If the **wife was barren**, the **husband** was **allowed** to **take a handmaid** from his wife's court and **bear a child for his house**. This **concubine** was **not held in equal status** with the **wife** but inferior to her. **If the concubine became a rival**, the **wife could reduce her to slavery again**, **sell her**, or **dismiss her from the household**.”

**How did Sarah relate to Hagar?** Note that in **verse 10**, **Sarah** does **not even mention Hagar or Ishmael by name**. She seems to be **emphasizing** that she **still considers Hagar** to be an **Egyptian**

**slave.** After many years, was **Hagar** still **holding on to Egypt** in her **heart**? Now **remember Sarah's original plan** was to **adopt Ishmael**:

*Bereshith 16:2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, אִנִּי has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.*

**Apparently, Hagar** had **never really allowed Ishmael to bond with Sarah**, although there does appear to be a **relationship** between **Abraham and Ishmael**. **Sarah's "works"** in coming up with a son had **not been successful**. אֱלֹהִים okayed **Sarah's plan of setting Isaac apart, despite Abraham's concern**:

*Bereshith 21:11 And the matter was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.<sup>12</sup> But Elohim said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.*

Only **offspring through Isaac** would be considered **Abraham's true heirs**. It appears at this point that **Sarah** has an **understanding** that **Abraham does not yet see**. Jumping ahead, however, we see that **Abraham** does something **similar** of his **own initiative** long **after Sarah's death**:

*Bereshith 25:5 And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac.<sup>6</sup> But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.*

As we read and study the **stories of the patriarchs**, we must **constantly be switching between the earthly/mortal and the divine/spiritual perspectives**. These **perspectives** are **each a side of train tracks that travel together into the future and merge into one**. The **Almighty's plan** was to **set apart a people (physical and spiritual) who would carry His Seed (physical and spiritual) and inherit the Promised Land (physical and spiritual)**. In doing so, they would become a **blessing to all the nations of the earth**. Every event in their lives had **significance** and worked for the **good of the plan**.

*Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love Yah, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

So...**who** was the **Almighty's choice** in **realizing the divine destiny** of **establishing the nation of His covenant**? It is clear in reading **Bereshith 21:12**, that it will be **Isaac** who will be the **forefather of a nation as numerous as the stars**. In His mercy, אֱלֹהִים also tells **Abraham** that there will be a **plan** for **Ishmael**. He too will become a **great nation**:

*Bereshith 21:12 But Elohim said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.<sup>13</sup> "Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."*

**Rav Sha'ul** makes a **midrash** on the **story of Ishmael and Isaac** in **Galatians 4**. It is a very **misunderstood allegory** that is **mistakenly looked at** as a **contrast between the new covenant and the**

**old covenant**, or even between a so called **Christian covenant** and a **Jewish covenant**. The **context** of this story is **Galatian Gentiles** who have **accepted the dogma** that they **must undergo a ritual proselyte conversion through** means of **circumcision in order to be reckoned covenant members with Israel**. In a comparison to Ishmael, Sha'ul says that they are "**born according to the flesh**":

*Galatians 4:23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise,*

**Physical circumcision DOES** play an **important role** in the **decision of who is chosen**. Last week we were told that **circumcision** was to be a "**sign of the covenant**":

*Bereshith 17:11 "and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.*

**Circumcision** is a "**sign of the covenant**," but it's **not the covenant itself**. After **Abraham** was **circumcised**, the "**seed of his descendants**" would **pass through the cutting of the circumcision**. This is **important**...it is the **SEED PASSING THROUGH THE CUTTING**, for that is **how a child entered into the physical covenant of the chosen people of יהוה**.

This is **why** there was a **difference between Isaac and Ishmael**. Both **Isaac and Ishmael** were "**seeds**" from **Abraham's body**. **Ishmael** was the **physical firstborn** and he was **even circumcised**. But **Isaac** was the **first of Abraham's seed** to actually **pass through the cutting of the circumcision of Abraham!**

**Glen McWilliams** addresses an often asked **question**...**how do women enter the physical Abrahamic covenant?** Quoting **Glenn** (emphasis mine):

"Since the **Torah** teaches that **only males** are **circumcised**, then **women**, especially unmarried women, **could not enter the covenant**. Clearly this is **not what the Torah teaches**. If, however, **one enters the covenant by passing through the cutting of one's father's circumcision**, then **all the seed of Israel, male and female, enter the covenant in the same manner**...

For **centuries misinformed teachers** and preachers have been **erroneously teaching** that **Shaul** has **done away with circumcision**. **Nothing** could be **further from the truth**. What **Shaul** is **teaching** is that there is **no way for a grown Gentile man to enter the covenant by being cut**...therefore, an **adult male Gentile need not be circumcised to enter the covenant**. The **adult male Gentile believer** will enter the covenant through **faith**; he **cannot enter through circumcision**.

*Romans 4:1 What then shall we say that **Abraham our father** has found according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup> For if **Abraham** was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before **Yah**. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "**Abraham believed Yah**, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*

Clearly **Shaul** is **holding up Abraham** as the **example** for the **believer to follow**. **Abraham entered into the covenant with יהוה** by **faith** and **then circumcised himself** and his children after him:

*Acts 7:8 "Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.*

(end of quote)

**Abraham** is the *"father of our faith."* He **entered into the covenant by "believing,"** before **circumcision**. After his **faith decision**, he **agreed to live by the Torah of יהוה**. The **Torah** says to **physically "circumcise male children on the 8<sup>th</sup> day."** However, our **spiritual identity in Messiah** is **enough to be included in the promises of the covenant** because by **identifying with Him**, we have all (male and female) **received His Seed** by passing through *"Messiah's circumcision"*!

*Colossians 2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Messiah,*

**Rav Sha'ul**, like **Moshe**, the **prophets**, and even **Sarah**, **realized** that the **mere physical aspect of circumcision** (for example **Ishmael**) was **meaningless** if it was **not received in a spirit of submission and obedience to the will of the Almighty**. The **Israelites would come to bear the "sign" of the covenant**, but it was **insincere** if they did **not intend to keep the covenant**:

*Devarim 10:16 "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.*

*Romans 2:25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the Torah; but if you are a breaker of the Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.*

Through **faith** we have been **crucified with Messiah** and also **raised with Him**. Therefore, we've also been **circumcised with Him**. Our *"faith"* is **not in the act of physical circumcision** which does **not automatically make one a member of the covenant**. **Esau** was **physically circumcised** yet **rejected his birthright**. Through *"faith"* we become part of the **body of Messiah**, and our **spirit desires to become obedient**; an **obedience** which includes the **physical circumcision of sons on the 8<sup>th</sup> day**.

Now, with the thought in mind that **only the seed for Isaac had passed through the circumcision of Abraham to make him a physical son of the covenant of promise**, let's take another look at these verses in **Galatians**:

*Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the Torah, do you not hear the Torah? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. <sup>23</sup> But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, <sup>24</sup> which things are an allegory. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar -- <sup>25</sup> for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children -- <sup>26</sup> but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. <sup>27</sup> For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, you*

*who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband."* <sup>28</sup> Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.

If you read through the **first chapters of Galatians**, you will see the **emphasis** is on **inheritance of the "promise"** through a **relationship with Yeshua the Messiah**. **Obedience to the Torah or circumcision of the "flesh" by itself will not gain you the "promise."** Those who are **"under the law"** are those who are **attempting to establish righteousness without the relationship**. They are **working hard** at their **obedience to Torah** which is **like entering into the "covenant of Mt. Sinai"** ahead of the **relationship gained through the "covenant of Abraham."**

So the **story of Hagar and Sarah** has to do with their **actions...i.e. their "works."** **Abraham and Sarah** were **given the promise of a son**. Because **time** seemed to be **working against them**, they **lost faith** in the **promise** and fell into a **"works" mode**. As a result, **Ishmael (product of "works" not "trust")** was **born** through **Hagar**. These are the **two covenants (agreements/promises)** being referred to:

- **Abrahamic – relationship/trust**
  - *Bereshith 15:5* Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed in יהוה, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.
- **Mosaic – obedience/works**
  - *Shemot 19:5* 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

These **covenants** are **built on an order** which **cannot be switched**. If **"obedience"** is **attempted before** the **"relationship"** through **"belief"** then the **result** becomes **"bondage."** In other words, **"obedience"** is built on the **foundation** of **"relationship."** This is the **point** of the **allegory in Galatians**. **"Works"** cannot run ahead of **"belief/trust."** A **promise** was made to **Abraham and Sarah** that they would **produce a child** whose **seed** would become a **multitude of nations**. Instead of **trusting** the **Almighty's timing**, they **ran ahead** and **Abraham entered into an improper relationship** with **Hagar** that was **based on "works."** **Hagar** becomes a picture of **"works" without "relationship."**

Notice how **"Hagar"** and **"Mount Sinai"** are compared to the **"Jerusalem which now is."** Keep in mind that **Galatians** is **written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century**. We read often in the **Gospels** where **Yeshua** is **confronting Pharisees and Sadducees** who represent the very **essence** of what **Mount Sinai** can become **without a relationship with Yeshua**. This **attitude** promoted **strict adherence** to the **Torah** without the **redeeming blood of the sacrifice**. Their **hearts** were **not circumcised** and thus **many** were **not able to see their Messiah**.

And who is the **"Jerusalem above"** of **Galatians 4:26** **"which is the mother of us all?"** If **Hagar** is **associated with Mount Sinai** and the **improper order of the covenants**, then **Sarah** is to be **associated** with the one who is the **"mother of us all."** And **why** would this be so? As **Abraham** is the

“*father*” of those with faith, so Sarah is the “*mother*” of those with faith. She was the mother of Isaac who carried the blessed “*seed*” of the promise:

*Romans 9:7 ...In Isaac your seed shall be called."*

*Isaiah 51:2 Look to Abraham your father, And to Sarah who bore you; For I called him alone, And blessed him and increased him."*

More information on the “*Jerusalem above*” can be found in Hebrews:

*Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living Elohim, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,<sup>23</sup> to the general assembly and ecclesia (kahal) of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to Elohim the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,*

Let’s return now to Isaac and Ishmael. Both of these sons received promises:

*Bereshith 17:19 Then Elohim said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him."<sup>20</sup> "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.*

Our parasha thus begins the fulfillment of the double promise. We usually focus more on the promises given to Isaac, but let’s center our attention on Ishmael. Earlier Hagar was given more information from an angel concerning her son, Ishmael:

*Bereshith 16:10 Then the Angel of אלהים said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude."<sup>11</sup> And the Angel of אלהים said to her: "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because אלהים has heard your affliction."<sup>12</sup> He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."*

It is interesting that Elohim hears Ishmael’s voice in the desert:

*Bereshith 21:17 And Elohim heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of Elohim called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for Elohim has heard the voice of the lad where he is."<sup>18</sup> "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation."*

Elohim “*hears him*” and will help him to find the secret of human existence in the desert – the “*well of water*”:

*Bereshith 21:19 Then Elohim opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.*

**Ishmael, son of “works” has a miraculous rebirth from the brink of death. But Ishmael is not the only one whose life benefits from a miracle. In chapter 22, Isaac is bound on the altar and nearly sacrificed. In both cases, their near death will result in the realization of their destiny.**

**Ishmael will live up to his reputation as a “wild man” whose “hand is against every man.” Many of Ishmael’s descendants are Arabs that have been warlike, yet are living today again in the “presence” of Israel (“their brethren”). The Almighty fulfilled His promise in making Ishmael a “great nation” in the desert. Ishmael is still jealous of his brother; but if history repeats itself, we will see that in the future Ishmael will again be dying of thirst in the desert. If the descendents of Ishmael are to survive, their eyes must be open to the “wells of salvation”:**

*Isaiah 12:3 Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

*Isaiah 35:6 ... For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. <sup>7</sup> The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water...*

**Scripture points to a time when Isaac and Ishmael were reunited:**

*Bereshith 25:9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him (Abraham) in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite,*

*Psalms 133:1 A Song of Ascents. Of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Ardelle**