

Prophetic Function: A Shelter in the Time of Storm

Lech Lecha Go Forth Yourself The Beginning of The End

Torah: Genesis 12:1-17:27

Haftarah: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Brit Chadashah: Romans 4:1-25

Our Torah portion begins the story of our father Abraham and the first two verses of chapter twelve are the foundation of the rest of the Bible. He shall become a great nation and shall be a blessing to all nations. After having scattered mankind across the face of the newly washed earth, G-d begins the process of calling all mankind to Himself and He reaches out and calls to one old man and one old woman. And because they respond to His call, they become the founders of the people through whom the L-rd will accomplish the redemption of all the generations and nations of mankind.

Abram is called back to the original site of the Garden of Eden and after a very bumpy start, he settles down and waits for the promises to begin to be fulfilled. His descendants will be like the stars of heaven and like the grains of sand on the shore of the sea and even though this was to be accomplished through a post menopausal, sterile woman, Abram believes that G-d will always do what He promises to.

We have the story of his sojourn in Egypt where the beauty of his wife is instrumental in him acquiring great riches and how these great riches mean that he and Lot have to divide into two camps to avoid competition and overgrazing. There is an unsuccessful rebellion which results in the kidnapping of Lot and after the rescue by an elite force, we encounter one of the strangest personalities in the Bible: Melchizedek, the King of Salem (Jerusalem).

Now before we get all weird and mystical, let me tell you who he is and who he is not. We are not given his name, just his title: the king of righteousness. Generations later, during the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, we encounter another king of Salem with the same title: Adoni-Zedek or lord of righteousness. Both titles are the Hebrew translation of the Canaanite title which the kings of this settlement were given.

However, the one whom Abraham tithed to was a priest of the most high G-d, a righteous gentile, like Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. His was a royal priesthood that was not transferable and, the Psalms later indicate that this is the kind of priesthood which our Messiah shall possess – a royal priesthood which is non transferable. There are several examples of righteous gentiles serving the G-d of Israel, but we do not see a righteous lineage, just a series of people who heard the call to serve G-d and who responded.

The promise of the coming Messiah is given to the seed of Abraham alone, but G-d is never left without an occasional generational witness among the scattered peoples of our world.

Now let me tell you who this mysterious king is not. He is not Adam for three reasons. First of all the death of Adam is recorded. Second of all, Adam was not on the ark and even if he were still alive at the flood, he would have drowned. Third he is not Adam resurrected, because the resurrection only occurs once and it hasn't happened yet.

He is also not Shem, though Shem was alive at this time and there are a number of reasons why this man is not him. First of all, Abraham did not address him as Shem and there is no linguistic connection between the names of these two people. Also Melchizedek was the king of a Canaanite city of Jebusites and there is no indication he was a Semite.

He is also not a Pre-Incarnate appearance of the Messiah because the Book of Hebrews says He appeared once at the end of the age to die for the sins of the world (Heb. 9:26). Theologians agree that our Messiah has an eternal existence prior to His birth, but many of them go further and say that at various times He appeared in what are called christophanies. when G-d appears as the Father, it is called a theophany, or encounter with G-d, so a christophany would be G-d appearing as the Messiah (the Son).

Although there are some 400 references to the Messiah in the first Scriptures it would be a stretch to argue for christophanies, since His appearance was a mystery only to be revealed in its time. This man was a Canaanite king who was also a priest of the Most High G-d and this kind of unique, nontransferable royal priesthood is used later by David and also by the writer of Hebrews to describe the royal priesthood of our Messiah.

To take this any further would be reading into the Scriptures and it is not something which can be derived from the Scriptures. This would be an excellent topic to delve more into at our Thursday yeshiva, to which you are all invited.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, this is the first mention of tithing in the Bible and Abraham settles down again to wait for the birth of the promised son. Sarah takes things into her own hands and gives her maidservant to Abraham and Ishmael is born. He is not the ancestor of the Arab people and later on we find that there was no hostility between Ishmael and Isaac, because they both come together to bury their father. Another interesting topic for Yeshiva.

There are as many urban legends kicking around the Bible as there kicking round our naive world, along with any number of conspiracy theories, which are nothing more than rabbit trails to lead us away from the truth of the Word. They have no real basis in truth and should not be taken seriously unless you want to slide into the mystical realm where you claim that what the Bible says, it does not mean and that there are hidden truths in the Bible, concealed underneath the written text which are only revealed to certain great sages and mystics.

Our portion ends with the institution of circumcision and the entire household of Abraham is initiated into this generational rite of belonging. This is a further indication that while Jewish people are indeed descended from the household of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Israel has never been a separate race. It has always been a household which welcomes strangers who are prepared to abandon paganism and enter our ranks through circumcision.

The prophetic portions speak about the wonderful ability of G-d to accomplish His promises despite whatever obstacles stand in His way or in Israel's way. It also indicates that those who place their faith in this mighty King will have their strength renewed and will see their enemies put to shame. The same is still true today.

The New Testament portion describes how all believers are children of Abraham's faith and that the righteousness he obtained was through faithful obedience and this is still our singular calling today. We are to have faith in the promises of G-d and demonstrate obedience to His Word and

thus follow in the faithful, obedient steps of our father Abraham, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Once Abraham responded to the call of G-d and moved into Canaan, it really was the beginning of the end. After G-d scattered the descendants of Noah across the globe into the nations and generations that prevented the pace of sin from covering our world with a second great darkness, He selected one family to begin the thread which would lead to Messiah and begin to weave all mankind back together under His eternal kingship.

Our Messiah is the son of Abraham, and the son of David and He is the child which was given unto us and who is indeed, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty G-d, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

Sermon: What Are You Looking At: A Shelter in the Time of Storm

Our congregational vision statement contains four metaphors. We are a Lighthouse (prophetic, outreach function), a Tree (discipleship function), a Bride (worship function) and a Repairman (healing restoration function). Last week, I began talking about the first metaphor, which is our prophetic, outreach function and this week I would like to talk about the same function as a shelter in the time of storm.

Several years ago, I put together a teaching on prophecy and outlined the seven scriptural signs of the end of the world which we are beginning to see line up as our world continues its slide back into the great darkness which once covered it in the days of Noah. Unfortunately, many who claim to be teaching about biblical prophecy remind me of chicken little and we all know how that story ended.

Prophecy does not involve making serial guesses where we try and set a date for the end of the world and attempt to recycle Old Testament prophecy out of context and wrongly apply it to our modern setting. We should be cautious about regularly claiming that specific world events are a fulfilment of prophecy because it lowers us to the level of those conspiracy theorists who claim to be able to show after the fact that they predicted events before they unfolded. It destroys our spiritual credibility and since so many have been crying wolf so often, most believers who preach about the end of the world are not taken very seriously.

This is very sad because the heart of the Gospel forcefully proclaims both the end of this world which is fading away and the wonder and the glory of world to come.

The problem is that too many people feel that the mandate of prophecy is to try and correlate prophecies which are given in the Bible with as many occurrences in the world as their imagination lets them run with. Instead of looking at the bigger picture, they get distracted by trying to fit all the details together to show that the bigger picture is real.

This has been going on since the early part of the 1800's and it doesn't look like it is likely to settle down any time soon. More and more complex prophetic scenarios try to show that the world is going to end soon and so many have been stuck on this: "any second" scenario for so long you'd think they would understand that they are coming at it from the wrong end.

One of the biggest flaws with many modern day end of the world prophecies is that they fail to distinguish between when the Bible speaks literally and when it speaks literarily or symbolically.

As a one time teacher of English, I am dismayed that people take things literally in the Bible which are meant literarily and then turn around and take things literarily which are meant literally.

I may have to preach an entire series on prophecy to do justice to this divisive and often confusing aspect of our faith, but this morning I want to talk about three aspects of our prophetic lighthouse. It is a warning to the world. It is also an offer of sanctuary. And finally it offers believers the hope of eternal life where everything shall be fulfilled and all pain and suffering and folly and darkness shall forever be removed, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Let's look at the warning first. It is true that G-d granted our first ancestors free will, but He also says that what we sow we shall reap and our often tragic history has been cycles of sowing and reaping, on both an international and national scale and also on an individual scale. G-d will not force anyone to walk according to the principles of His Word and He will not force people to adopt the truths of His Word, but that only applies to this life and not to the life which is to come.

We need to proclaim to our world that G-d's judgment is coming and to quote a friend of mine, nobody gets away with anything forever. This is because every deed and action of mankind, from those of the world's political and financial leaders, down to the smallest actions of the most humble unknown people in our midst will come under G-d's final judgment, even when it seems that evil and greedy people get away with so much in this life.

We need to firmly and fearlessly proclaim to our world that there are consequences for our actions that will reverberate either in this life or throughout the eternity which no one can escape from. People can say and do and believe and plan and even legislate as much as they please, but there is an inevitable final analysis which is waiting for every man woman and child who has ever dwelt in our world. And this final judgment will be according to G-d's Word and no one is excluded from it.

so instead of bemoaning the results of any election or the progress of any war or the sluggishness of the global economy, we need to remind people about the bigger issue.

Judgment day needs to be a key component of our message and of how we live our lives. we may be accused of being judgmental red-necked, politically incorrect fundamentalist fanatics, but this is the main thrust of the message of the Gospel and we will be held accountable for our faithfulness in sharing it - or our unfaithfulness in ignoring it.

Our message should not be about pie in the sky when you die, but about the final judgment when all that was done in darkness shall be brought to light and the Messiah shall render judgment upon all the injustice, violence, murder and theft that has ever occurred in this world, from the murderous folly of Cain to the last beheading by Isis. Good guys may finish last in this life, but they shall be rewarded in the life to come and my heart trembles when I consider the horror and terror that awaits the dwellers of darkness when they can no longer hide behind their lies and deceit.

I will not waste my time trying to figure out when this is going to happen. I want to spend my life warning people that this will inevitably happen and reaching out with an offer of sanctuary to all who would flee from the wrath which is to come. There was enough room for all the animals to fit onto the ark and the Gospel has more than enough room for everyone and anyone who wants to take refuge under the Messiah's wings.

I want people to understand that it is not a question of negotiating the best deal with our King or of trying to earn our passage into the next life. It is a simple matter of surrender, where we expose our souls to the scrutiny of the King and His Word and ask for a verdict of forgiveness because we have let go of our sin and guilt and have quit playing games with G-d.

When we receive His forgiveness, we also receive a double mandate based in repentance which you all know I call faith and obedience. Faith is the key to a verdict of forgiveness and obedience is the active agent of the repentance, which gives life to our faith and does not render it null and void.

Now many of us will struggle long and hard with the sin which so easily besets us and which endlessly tries to snare us by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. We have to be cautious not to allow the birds of doubt, the rocks of temptation and the weeds of life to choke the seed which G-d has planted into our hearts and lives. It is too easy in our technological, internet driven world to be side tracked by the cares, the riches and the pleasures of life and we need to lead by example and not surrender our lives to the folly of building sand castles on the edge of the sea of life as the tide rises and the next life closes in.

We offer sanctuary to sinners and there is no sin so scarlet that it cannot become white as snow under the eternally awesome power of the redeeming blood of our saviour. He wants to set us free from the power of cancelled sin so we can walk in the light as He is in the light and let His blood and His love cleanse us from every stain which sin tries to brand our hearts and lives with.

The biggest threat to repentance is calling darkness light, because when you do, you end up calling light darkness. All sin is forgivable, no sin is excusable and that's the way it is.

Our sophisticated relativistic, hedonistic, secular world says that if it feels good we should do it because has G-d really said it is wrong? Sexual immorality of every kind is now considered acceptable and we have even reached the point where the murder of babes in the womb is seen as the noble act of a woman protecting her right to do as she pleases with her body.

Our refuge under the blood is able to remove even the darkest stain this world can brand us with, but none of the darkness and none of the stain of sin will ever be excused and considered acceptable before our King. On the Day of Judgment, the dark cloak of political correctness will be peeled back and there will be great weeping and wailing and gnashing of dentures as the truth which people have denied rises up to judge them and no excuses will be accepted and there will be nowhere to hide and avoid our final scrutiny.

We offer sanctuary, but it is not a place from which we can keep on feeding our pigs because there is a moral metamorphosis which reveals our sin to us and shows us that we cannot hold onto them and seek refuge at the same time. Now there is a big difference between fighting a life long battle with besetting sin and giving up the fight and living in sin and this is the greatest weakness of the gay agenda.

As a lighthouse we call a spade a spade and offer sanctuary to anyone who wishes to abandon their sin and seek the power of forgiveness in a renewed lifestyle of repentance as we walk in faith and obedience.

Now there is one more aspect to our lighthouse prophetic function I want to talk with you about this morning and that is the wonderful, powerful hope of everlasting life. For as good or as bad as this life gets, there is another one coming where we shall dwell forever, far from the pain and folly and disappointments of this life. This does not make us so heavenly minded that we are not of any earthly good, it makes us so heavenly minded that we want to do as much good as we can in this life.

We realize that this life is not our home, nor is it our destiny because like David, we are merely trudging through the valleys and scrambling over the mountains, following our Shepherd on our way to our Father's Home in glory, walking on the paths of righteousness with goodness and mercy watching our six. Paul said that the light affliction of the present is not worthy to be compared with the everlasting weight of glory which our faith teaches us to groan and desire more and more as we see the day approaching.

We are a lighthouse community, whose prophetic, outreach function is a clarion call to warn people about the judgment to come. It is also a tenacious offer of sanctuary where people can seek refuge from the encroaching darkness of our spiritually unravelling world. It is also a sound of hope and joy because the light we walk in during this life will eventually burst forth in all of its power and glory upon this unsuspecting cosmos, dissolve it and recreate a better place, forever free from the ravages of sin and death.

Are you a lighthouse dweller? Join us in the light and allow it to fill your life and cleanse you from all the stain and pain of sin by the power of the life which is to come. Let's pray.