



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

27 Cheshvan, 5781 (14/11/20) **Biblical Truth: Deut. 29:29's Faithful Cousin** J. M. Terrett

Chayei Sarah	The Life of Sarah	Abraham Secures His Legacy in Isaac
Torah:	Genesis 23:1-25:8	
Haftarah:	I Kings 1:1-31	
Brit Chadashah:	Matthew 1:1-17	

This portion begins with the death of Sarah at the ripe old age of 127. Isaac was 37 when his mother passed away. He lived his life among many diverse Canaanite groups, including the Non-Canaanite Hittites, but no acceptable candidate for wife was found. Before seeking for a wife for his grieving son, Abraham's first order of business was to secure an acceptable burial site for his deceased wife. The territory where he lives was the land of the Hittites, so he began to negotiate with them for a suitable grave site.

The Hittites came from the area north of the Caucasus mountains and they spoke a language unlike any of the languages which the Canaanites or the Semitic peoples spoke. Their position in the region was not always secure and they tried to give Abraham a burial site for free and if not he was not willing to assimilate into the Hittite culture at least such a powerful man would be a good ally for the Hittite world.

Abraham resists the idea of some kind of alliance with his Hittite neighbors and insists on paying for any burial site he acquires. He meets with the Hittite elders at the gates of their nearest city and refuses Ephron's gift of the burial site he wanted to acquire. Ephron is offended by Abraham's refusal, which what the phrase: "what is there between you and me" means. It was a statement of hostility and he was saying I will sell the land to you, but I do not have to like it.

The newly acquired burial plot was the first piece of land that Abraham permanently owned in Canaan. He camped in various locations, but this is the first time he acquired a permanent deed to a burial site. Once his wife is buried, Abraham has two more orders of business. First, he must acquire an acceptable wife for his son and then he wants to acquire an acceptable second wife to replace his loss of Sarah.

Without a legal heir, his oldest servant, Eliezer of Damascus is his presumptive heir, if no natural heir is forthcoming. Before the birth of Isaac, Abraham pleaded before G-d to make Ishmael his covenant heir, and while Ishmael will be blessed, only Sarah's son shall be the covenant heir. If neither produce another heir, then everything goes to Eliezer.

He does not want a Canaanite heir for his son, even though most of them were not as evil as Sodom and Gomorrah. But being related by marriage to so many idolaters would place the camp at an elevate assimilation risk. He wants to send Eliezer back to Charan to get a wife among his kinsmen. Is no woman there willing to leave Charan and move to Canaan, Eliezer is released from his oath.

At this time, there was a unique way of swearing an oath which did not survive to become part of how Moses instructed the people in oath making. When you swore an oath to someone, you put your hand on their privates (euphemistically called under the thigh) to show that you were serious. Our word for testify comes from a similar custom among the ancient Romans, who had to grab their own testicles to show they were serious and sincere.

When the servant left for Charan, he took a considerable entourage to help transport the considerable dowry. He arrives at Charan in the evening when the townsfolk came to their well to draw water for the next day. Eliezer prays that the lady who offers to give water for his camels and the other members of his group would be the one which the L-rd was selecting as the future wife of Isaac.

Rebekah arrives and she is a virgin beauty, but her actually age is not given. She is likely younger than Isaac, which was the usual custom at that time. When Eliezer discovers that his prayers have been answered, he puts a golden ring in her nose and heavy gold bracelets on her wrists. This was the first installment of the dowry.

She takes Eliezer and his entourage to her home and the negotiations begin. He requires that he is given the right to tell Abraham's story before he agrees to eat a ritual meal. Once he finishes, the people are sufficiently impressed by Abraham's considerable wealth and Eliezer maneuver Laban and Bethuel into giving their immediate agreement to the wedding, without going through a prolonged negotiation.

Laban pledges Rebekah to the wedding and he then turns over the full dowry to the bride's family. Once this is complete, according to the customs of the time, she is now Isaac's legal bride and no further marriage ceremony is need. Her family wants to keep the servant for another tent days to fully celebrate the marriage, but their motive may have been to squeeze out more treasure, but they are unsuccessful.

They consult Rebekah to see if she wants more time to say goodbye to her family, but she says that she wishes to leave immediately to meet her new husband as soon as possible. Her family gives her a standard blessing and she goes with the servant to Abraham's campsite. When they arrive, she spots Isaac, who is meditating in the fields and after they are formally introduced, they consummate their marriage in Sarah's tent. Two things.

First the portion says that Isaac loved her and was consoled over the loss of his mother. This story amounts to the most amazing love story in the Bible and it is recounted from an ancient Hebrew perspective. Secondly, when it says that Isaac loves Rebekah it isn't primarily sexual. He discovered in her all the affection and support which he used to get from his mom. She filled the gap and Isaac becomes whole again.

Our portion deals with two more things.

At the age of 137, Abraham took another wife, named Keturah. Given his aversion to Canaanites and Hittites, she is likely either also procured from Charan or she may have been a member of another Semitic clan which was also dwelling in Canaan. We are not told (29:29). Abraham was told that he would be the father of many nations, as well as the father of the mighty nation which would arise from the descendants of Isaac,

Many nations arose from the descendants of both Ishmael and the five sons which Keturah bore for him. These new groups were blessed and prospered, but the blessing to all nations comes solely from Israel.

The tribes of Israel did not become many nations – it was the other six sons of Abraham who became many nations.

To prevent any potential conflict between the brothers, Abraham sent Keturah's sons far way from Isaac. It is likely that after Abraham's death, Keturah was taken in, probably by her eldest son. However, we are not told how her story ended.

Abraham died at the age of 175, 38 years after the death of Sarah. He saw Keturah's sons grow to manhood. The Bible says that Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father. Isaac was 75 and Ishmael was 88. Esau and Jacob were 15. Abraham was buried beside Sarah in the cavern of Makpela. We are not told where Hagar and Keturah were buried. There is a foolish, malicious legend which supposes that there was hostility between Ishmael and Isaac and their descendants. There was none.

The Bible tells us that Ishmael died 49 years after the death of his father. When he died, Isaac was 124 and Esau and Jacob were 64. Later we learn that Esau took some Canaanite wives when Isaac was 100 and Ishmael was 113. When he dies, Ishmael was buried with his people, in the land where they dwelt, but there is no record about where this burial occurred.

The limits of the country of the Ishmaelites is given. The last time we hear about the Ishmaelites in the Bible is when Judah and his brothers sell Joseph to them. They had become allied with the Midianites or south Moabites who traveled regularly to trade in Egypt. That was where Joseph was sold.

The descendants of Ishmael did not remain an intact nation which survives today. They are not the ancestors of the modern Muslim Arabs. The songs of Keturah also did not survive as intact nations. The blessing of Abraham made them into many nations and in the mix of various ethnic minorities in the Middle East, their descendants may still be with us. But it is only the House of Jacob which is still a mighty nation and a blessing to all nations.

Abraham secured his legacy in Isaac and we are either physically part of this legacy as Jews or are spiritually part of his legacy as Gentiles. G-d's Kingdom purposes can never be thwarted.

Sermon: I Corin. 4:6 Biblical Truth, Deut. 29:29 Faithful Cousin

Passage: " It is because of you, brethren that I made an application in my person and in that of Apollos, in order that you would learn not to go beyond that which is written and that none of you would become envious in favour of one against the other." (I Corin. 4:6)

When Paul established congregations around the ancient world, he had to deal with powerful pagan influences which either tried to add content to the Gospel which the Bible does not provide or to take away content from the Gospel which the Bible does teach. In our passage, Paul is dealing with various teachings about the coming judgment and the end of the world. He affirms his belief in the coming judgment, but declares that it has not yet occurred.

When we come to any spiritual topic, we need to learn not to go beyond that which is written. In Paul's case that which was written refers to the Tanach or Old Testament, since at the time of his writing the New Testament was still being written. Since the entirety of the teachings of the apostles was based on the Old Testament Scriptures, nothing was added by the apostles and nothing was taken away. We always need to follow the example of the Apostles.

When it comes to understanding the timing and the nature of the Messiah's return and His coming judgment, too many believers are getting most of their teachings from a variety of sources which are not biblical or which go beyond that which is written. I called this message Biblical Truth, Deut. 29:29's faithful cousin, because while there are secret things in the Bible which G-d does not explain, it is what is revealed and explained that we need to focus on, nothing more and certainly nothing less.

There is so much which will come to light when the Messiah returns, but which is now hidden. Therefore, we need to concentrate on walking in the light and dealing with all and any baggage we acquire, as we acquire it and leave the rest until the return be revealed and judged.

Over the years, some pretty fantastic and extravagant teachings have surface which attempt to deal with the return of our beloved Messiah and the coming judgment. So many of them leave that which is written very far behind. We need to learn not to try and insert details which the Bible does not provide. This is not always going to be easy as the time of His return approaches.

Probably the worst culprit which goes far beyond that which is written is taking unrelated Bible passages and building an understanding of the return which none of the Apostles would recognize, because it is not based on that which is written.

It is both amazing to me and very startling that just because the apostle Peter says that a day with the L-rd is like a thousand years, for some believers, the seven days of creation are suddenly transformed into thousand-year periods of human history. The actual content of each day is replaced with an arbitrary number of supposed dispensations, with the last thousand-year period being turned into a thousand-year reign of peace on the earth. The Bible does not teach that first creation account refers to the supposed seven thousand years of human history.

Modern evolutionism wrongly teaches that life as we know it gradually developed over millions and billions of years. This makes even less sense than supposing that all of human history can be squeezed into exactly seven one thousand-year periods.

In the Bible, seven is a symbolic number which expressed G-d's agency and control over the finished work of creation which is not continuing to evolve. It is ridiculous to try and give unintended additional meaning to the seven-day creation account, since this definitely goes far beyond what is written. In the Bible one thousand years is also a symbolic number which refers to the ongoing generational mercy of G-d upon those who love Him and walk according to His Word. It never refers to an actual, literal thousand-year time period.

Taking a symbolic time reference of seven days and making each day into a literal thousand-year period is not something which the Bible teaches. Going beyond that which is written introduces strange and wonderful ideas which are not taught by the Bible and which cannot claim biblical authority.

In the Book of Revelation, all the numbers are either symbolic or they are literal. You cannot arbitrarily take some as literal when it suits you and others as symbolic where no such a distinction is indicated in the actual text where the numbers occur.

Adding extra, unintended meaning which the Book of Revelation does not teach is a violation of the teachings of this amazing book and carries with it a horrendous curse. Taking away from what the book actually teaches also carries with it an equally horrendous curse. Let the teachings of the book bless you and do not let your additions or deletions curse you.

The paired visions of the book are not chronological time periods which outline human history and the seven churches do not represent various time periods of human history from the Messiah until the end of the world. The book brilliantly uses at least 247 symbolic references and quotes from the Old Testament to wonderfully describe the absolute sovereignty of G-d, which exists over and above the senseless, confusing events of human history in the time of the Roman Empire. Some portions move beyond one particular period of human history and several times the book actually describes the end of the world in more than one way.

It was written by a man named John to encourage persecuted believers and declare to them that Imperial Rome, in all of its transient glory was weak and frail and less than a drop in the bucket when compared to the matchless power and majesty of the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It cannot and should not be seen as some kind of chronological time line from the time of the early church right up until the end of the world.

The symbolic number of one thousand years (or millennium) appears six times in chapter 20 of the Revelation. It is a symbolic reference to both the binding of our enemy and to our victory over him until he is finally unleashed at the end of the world. He is then defeated and cast into the flames forever.

Again, a careful reading of the Revelation shows that the end of the world is portrayed several times throughout the Revelation and the symbol of a thousand years refers to the ultimate and complete control of G-d over the affairs of mankind in the midst of our violent and chaotic world. Throughout the Bible, most round numbers are symbolic and numbers like seven are used as the number of G-d. This symbolic use of numbers should never be violated.

So, for all the people who go beyond that which is written, all their teachings do is to confuse believers about what is actually going to happen at the end of the world and what is going to happen when the final judgment bursts forth upon an unsuspecting mankind. Some wrongly teach a secret second coming of the Messiah to apparently rescue believers from the tribulations through which it is our destiny to pass. Messiah then returns twice more in a louder, more startling manner.

However, the Bible clearly teaches that the second coming of the Messiah is a single, extremely loud event in which the heavens melt and the earth is destroyed. The instant our Messiah leaves the true Holy of Holies, the whole universe will be destroyed and judgment will occur for all the nations and generations of mankind. Once this is concluded, only then will the New Heavens and New Earth be brought forth.

Extensive theological opinions differ over a lot of material which they claim that the Bible teaches, even when it does not teach what they claim that it does. Over the years as a believer, I have sat under some amazing teaching. However, I have always seen it as my spiritual duty to never let anyone teach me anything which goes beyond that which is written. Sometimes we will run into the solid wall of the secret things (Deut. 29:29). When this happens, we need to back off and focus on the writings which He has revealed.

G-d's Word tells us the story of creation from two perspectives. It talks about the fall of mankind and the flood which cleansed the earth which evil people had polluted. It also teaches about the scattering of our race at Babel. Based on Genesis 12:2, 3 the rest of the Bible deals G-d fulfilling His salvation purposes. Frequently, they have been fulfilled through flawed people who have too often behaved very badly. As well, too often believers who handle the Bible have also misbehaved badly but what they claimed the Bible teaches, especially when they go beyond that which is written.

One of the more subtle ways of going beyond that which is written goes like this: this biblical writer said this, but let me tell you what he really meant. Sometimes various biblical writers are played off against each other and, if you can believe it there are believers who claim some of the writers of the New Testament are wrong in what they teach. This usually occurs when the New Testament writers say something which some people do not like.

One of the key positions that Bible believing Jews and Gentiles hold, is that every word and every part of the 66 books of the Bible are equally inspired and contain no errors whatsoever. This means that we affirm that no one part of the Bible contradicts any other part of the Bible.

Two things.

The most criticized and often misunderstood author in the New Testament is the apostle Paul. Really, he should be considered the Moses of the New Covenant. He is wrongly accused of being an anti-woman chauvinist who wanted the ladies to be silent in services and meekly submit to their husbands and never aspire to any leadership roles in their communities. This is so far from what Paul actually teaches, but some have taken his words out of context and will not let a woman teach boys of any age. From a biblical perspective this is utterly ridiculous.

Sometime read my brochure on the role of gender in ministry. Women who sit apart from their husbands should not disrupt services by yelling questions at their husbands. Women should not teach over their husbands to get them to understand things which they refuse to learn on their own.

Both genders are equally the image of G-d and ladies in leadership creates a gender balance in any leadership team. Husbands who try to bully their wives into submission as meek, silent servants, do not serve the Messiah and are violating their leadership mandate. Being the captain of the team does not mean that you should try and crush and dominate their partner and refuse to give them a voice in any decisions which are made.

The next issue for which Paul is wrongly criticized is the issue of Torah observance in the New Testament community. The next brochure I want to compile will want to demonstrate that all the apostles and the leaders of the early church were, without exception both Torah observant and Sabbath keepers. In the early centuries of the church, a growing number of Gentiles were coming to faith in the Messiah.

At the same time there was an even larger contingent of Gentiles converting to mainstream, Talmudic Judaism. Many lived as righteous sojourners in Israel and it was their children who were fully integrated into the community as full Jews.

This growing number of Gentiles were not required to become Messianic Jews in order to join the redeemed community. It was always Jews and Gentiles and never Jew or Gentile. Gentiles in our midst were only required to avoid all forms of idolatry and fornication. Early congregations were diverse units which contained both Jews and Gentiles who lived in perfect harmony with each other. Some communities had a Gentile majority, others maintained a Jewish majority. Paul lived and died as a Torah observant, practicing Jews who only opposed Talmudic legalism as the way of salvation, but he never attacked biblical Judaism.

As well, the word: "Torah" can both refer to the traditional teachings of men as well as the Word of G-d. It never dawned on early Messianic Jews and Gentiles that believers would one day abandon the Sabbath which G-d enshrined in the Ten Commandments. You see, legalism is both an attempt to require that you earn your salvation by works, and to create a whole series of arbitrary human commandments which are not found in the Bible.

Let me deal with two biggies and then we will draw this meditation to a close. Paul never replaced circumcision with immersion. He just criticized those who wrongly taught you could not be saved unless you were circumcised. He kept biblical kosher and never abandoned Sabbath observance or the festival cycle. Every last one of the authors of the New Testament were kosher keeping, Sabbath observing circumcised Jews. While they never required Gentile believers to become Jews, they also never once attacked any Jewish practices which were based on the Bible.

Paul never attacked biblical Judaism and never tried to suppress or undermine Sabbath observance. The Roman world was full of special holy days that also required worshipers to keep a rigid vegetarian diet in order to be saved. In the Book of Romans, he attacked the need to keep need to keep all the holy special days and the vegetarian diet in order to be saved. He never promoted abandoning the Sabbath or the Festival Cycle.

He did not lay down the foundation for the kind of antisemitic Gentiles Christianity which arose under later Roman emperors. Some of the things he wrote in the New Testament is taken out of context and after the two great Jewish rebellions, Gentiles in the church adopted Roman antisemitism and wrongly drove Messianic Jews out of the church. Instead of requiring Gentiles to become Jews in order to be saved, the surviving Jews were now being required to abandon Judaism in order to be saved. They even wrongly claimed that that the Gentile church replaced Israel as the true people of G-d.

Neither group owns the New Testament and this document firmly teaches that both groups together form one new man. Neither group is called to absorb the other.

As New Testament Jews and Gentiles, we are returning to New Testament Christianity, where the teachings of the Apostles describe an enriched redeemed community of Jews and Gentiles living according to G-d's holy Word. Biblical Judaism does not go beyond that which is written. Gentile Christianity should follow this example and purge all the unbiblical nonsense which tries to go beyond that which is written in any area of what they teach and how they live. Judgment Day is coming. Anything which deviates from the Word shall be consumed by fire and those holding these falsehoods will suffer great loss, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.