

VAYERA { וַיֵּרָא } (And He Appeared)

Genesis 18:1-22:24, 2 Kings 4:1-37, Luke 1:26-38, 24:36-53

A Messianic Jewish Commentary

By Hannah Neshet www.voiceforisrael.net

“The LORD appeared (vayera) to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.” (Genesis 18:1)



Abraham and the Three Angels (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by [James Tissot](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Abraham_and_the_Three_Angels.jpg)) Wikipedia

Welcome to our Torah study for this Shabbat – Vayera (And He Appeared). It is interesting to study this Hebrew word, ‘Vayera’ **וַיֵּרָא** and see all the related meanings. This word is also used in the name of God ‘Yehovah Yireh’ **יְהוָה יִרְאֶה** (God will appear). However, the word Yir’eh can also mean ‘to fear or reverence’. He is the God to be feared and revered. A related word is ‘r’eh’ **רָאָה** – ‘to see or perceive’. When God *appears to us*, and the eyes of our heart are opened to truly *see Him* - to perceive His beauty and majesty – then we will truly bow down in *fear and reverence* to His awesome glory.

Brit Millah

Our study opens with the Lord (יהוה)¹ appearing to Abraham as he sat in his tent door in the heat of the day. The rabbis believe that this visit occurred while Abraham yet convalesced after his circumcision at 99 years old.

Called '*Brit Millah*' in Hebrew, circumcision is Judaism's oldest ritual and the only mitzvah (commandment) which was carried out communally by the Israelites before entering the Promised Land. God commanded Joshua to take flint knives and circumcise their sons:



“Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. Then the LORD said to Joshua, ‘*This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you*’.” (Joshua 5:7-9)

The Hebrew letters making up the word Brit, ברית, meaning ‘covenant’ have a numerical value of 612. When the commandment of ‘millah’ (from the verb ‘la’mul’ (to circumcise) is added, it totals 613 – the number of the commandments in the Torah.

How did we come to call this rite ‘circumcision’? In the 4th century, a new Latin word was invented – ‘*circumcisio*’ (from the verb ‘*circumcaedere*’ – meaning ‘to cut around’). This led to our current use of the word ‘circumcision’ in English.

This is a custom which is considered by most people as something ‘uniquely Jewish’ (although there are many non-Jews who do circumcise their sons for various reasons); since circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God, Abraham, and his descendants forever. Gentiles were therefore referred to as ‘*the uncircumcised ones*’ in ancient times.

When David called out to the giant Goliath, he called him an ‘*uncircumcised Philistine*’.

“For who is this *uncircumcised Philistine*, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26)

What difference would it make to David and Israel whether or not Goliath’s foreskin was still intact or not? David was not announcing to Israel, the Philistines, God and all unseen spiritual

¹ This is the sacred Hebrew name for God which appears in the original Hebrew Scriptures. You may need Hebrew fonts on your computer to see the letters in Hebrew. Most Bibles translate his name as a generic ‘Lord’.

forces the condition of Goliath's sexual organ; but rather the fact that this giant was not in holy covenant with the God of Israel.

Although the commandment to the Jewish people to circumcise their sons on the eighth day still holds true, the Torah tells us that God will circumcise our hearts and those of our descendants when we come back into the Land – to love and obey Him:

“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.” (Deuteronomy 30:6)

The ancient Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah, also called the Jewish people to circumcise their hearts:

“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.” (Jeremiah 4:4)



Sculpture at Yad Hashmona with Scripture from Jeremiah



The issue of circumcision extends far beyond the physical; and becomes rather a crucial matter of the heart. Some Gentiles were coming to faith in the Jewish Messiah believed that they needed to be circumcised, but Paul set the matter straight.

“No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.” (Romans 2:29)

The circumcision of the heart is not done with human hands but is only accomplished by the faithfully working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

“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.” (Colossians 2:11)

Two Jewish customs, still in existence today, originated in God’s visit to Abraham in this parashah. These are the mitzvot (commandments) of *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick) and *hachnasot orchim* (welcoming the stranger).

The Mitzvah of Hospitality

Abraham, in welcoming the ‘*three men*’ who came to his tent, was demonstrating more than just good manners. This attitude of open hospitality displayed by Abraham saved many a nomad’s life in the harsh desert climate.

This parashah also contains more angelic activity than any other of the other parashot². Angels appear to Abraham as men, bring messages to Abraham and Sarah of future events to come; they save Lot from a hostile mob, lead Hagar to water for her son, and comfort Hagar with the promise of Ishmael becoming a great nation. Later in the parashah the angels also prevent Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac.

We are assured that angels are still present today to protect, save, help, warn and encourage.



Abraham and the Three Angels (engraving by [Gustave Doré](#) from the 1865 *La Sainte Bible*) Wikipedia

“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.”
(Psalm 34:7)

It is obvious by his reaction to seeing three unfamiliar men approach that Abraham delighted in offering hospitality to strangers. Hospitality seems to becoming a lost art in some cultures, especially in the West, where the pace of life doesn’t easily lend itself to making time for all that is involved in caring for people in our homes.

² Parashot – plural for parashah (Torah portion)

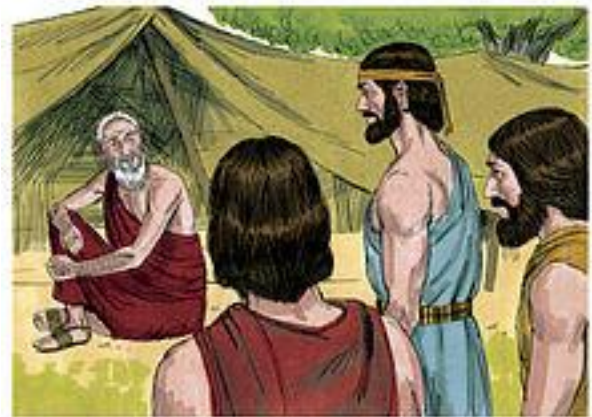
I needed to get used to this cultural difference here in the Middle East where people may drop over at any time; and where offering them hospitality is a given.³ It took me awhile to adjust. I still remember living in a settlement and wanting to write while my youngest child was having a nap. Davka (of course!) it was usually this very time that someone would just happen to ‘drop by’. I tried putting a sign on my door: “*Do not disturb – woman at work!*” but to no avail. I needed to re-order my priorities, crucify my flesh and make time for offering hospitality to people as an act of love and service unto the Lord.

Even the New Testament encourages us to show hospitality to strangers: **“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”** (1Peter. 4:9)

Entertaining Angels

When we offer hospitality to strangers, we may even be entertaining angels unawares. The book of Hebrews exhorts us, **“Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”** (Hebrews 13:1-2)

And in fact, Abraham *was* entertaining angels. Although in Hebrew it calls them ‘*anashim*’ (men), it is clear that two are angels and one is the Lord. Even though Abraham did not know who these strangers were, he gave them his best!



Suddenly he looked up and saw three strangers standing nearby. (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

The Word of God promises that as we give, so shall it be given unto us in good measure. When we bless others, we plant seeds of blessing that will return into our own lives.

“The soul who blesses will grow fat (be made rich), and he who waters (satisfies, refreshes) will also be watered (satisfied, refreshed) himself.” (Proverbs 11:25)

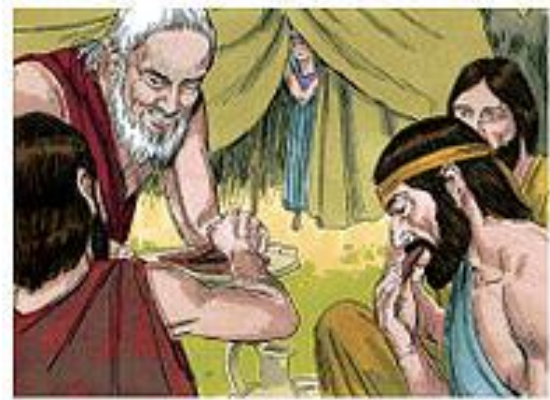
Eating milk and meat together?!

It is interesting to note that the foods Abraham and Sarah prepared: bread, curd, milk, and a calf – were eaten together at the same meal. Anyone familiar with today’s current Orthodox Rabbinical form of Judaism knows that it prescribes separating dairy and meat products.

³ See article on Hospitality on website: www.voiceforisrael.net

This is a non-Biblical tradition that observant Jews follow blindly. Even at Kosher restaurants in Israel the meat and the milk products must be strictly separated. But here we read that even Abraham and the Lord Himself (as well as angels) ate milk and meat together!

The separation of milk and meat is only one of hundreds of non-Biblical traditions or man-made rules (called halachah) that many Jews (and even some Messianics!) believe they must obey.



Abraham invited them to stop and eat with him. (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

Yeshua taught against following traditions that contradict the word of God and criticized the Rabbinic Authority of His day for teaching these man-made rules as if they were doctrines of God, laying heavy burdens on people that even they were unable to carry.⁴ **“They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”** (Mark 7:7, Matthew 15:9)

The Lord says: **“These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.”** (Isaiah 29:13) This aptly describes the form of Orthodox rabbinic Judaism of our day.

Please pray that Jewish people (and Messianic Believers) will receive the word of God and follow its Biblical truth rather than man-made rules and regulations.

Unfortunately, some Messianic Believers are falling into the trap of believing that they must also observe Rabbinical Jewish, man-made rules called ‘halachah’. In my opinion, they are being deceived and treading a dangerous path - a slippery slope which has led many Believers to fall away from their faith in Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah).⁵

Mo’adim – God’s set times

“At the set time (mo’ed) I will return to thee, when the season comes round, and Sarah shall have a son. (Gen. 18:14)

The word *mo’ed* (or *mo’adim* in the plural form) is that used to describe the appointed festivals and remembrance times as described in the 23rd chapter of the book of Leviticus (Vayikra). In English they are loosely translated as ‘Feasts of the Lord’ but this is a poor translation since one of them is actually a fast day rather than a feast.

⁴ Luke 11:46

⁵ See article : [Falling Away](http://www.voiceforisrael.net) on website: www.voiceforisrael.net

The mo'adim are special times that God has chosen or appointed for a specific purpose. God promises Abraham and Sarah a son. Sarah laughed at this, for she knew herself to be well beyond the age of childbearing. To this God responded, **“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”**⁶

There are promises we have received from the Lord that may seem impossible but even Yeshua said that **“all things are possible to those who believe.”** (Mark 9:23)

Are there things in our lives that we hoped for; but have not yet come to pass, so we have stopped believing for them? I know I have some.

One morning, I found a smooth flat rock in my garden, just lying there in the dirt. It could have been any old rock – but I knew it was special. Years ago, I had painted it with one word, “Believe”. I had even brought this rock all the way from Canada to Israel.

And yet here I found it, tossed carelessly into a pile of dirt, its letters barely distinguishable now, having been worn off by the harsh elements of sun, wind, and rain. The Lord spoke to my heart today through this rock.

He said, *“Hannah, you have almost stopped believing in my promises; but I want you to pick up this rock and take up again the shield of faith and believe again for Me to bring My promises to fulfillment in your life.”*

I took the rock into my house and re-painted the word, “Believe”, setting in a place where I would see it throughout the day. Is there a faded rock somewhere in your life? Do you need to perhaps retrieve it and revive your faith in what seems impossible? With God all things are possible.



An angel came to a young, Jewish virgin named Miryam to tell her that she would conceive without having known a man intimately, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and would have a son called Yeshua who will reign eternally over the house of Jacob from the throne of His father David. This seems absurd! But the angel says, **“With God nothing will be impossible.”** (Luke 1:37)

What do we consider an impossibility in our lives? Is it that we would ever be free of depression and walk with true peace, joy, and love? Can we believe God’s promise to exchange beauty for

⁶ Genesis 18:14

ashes, the oil of joy for the spirit of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a continual spirit of heaviness?⁷

Do we really, deep in our hearts, believe that our broken, messed up lives could ever become healed and whole? That we could be healed of an incurable disease? That the lame could walk, the blind see and the deaf hear?

Do we doubt in our heart that our wayward children could ever come back to the Lord? That we could ever get out of debt and enjoy a prosperous life? That we could ever find that ‘special someone’ to share the rest of our lives with and raise a family?

When the angel told Sarah that she would have a child at her ridiculously advanced age, what was her response? She laughed! She tried to deny it, but really it was so absurd that she just plain out laughed. What is that very thing that is such an utter impossibility that if anyone even suggested it could come to pass we would laugh at the sheer absurdity of the notion?



Sarah Hears and Laughs (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)

It is this *very thing*, (as long as it aligns with His will), that God wants to do for us, even if we have given up all hope of it ever being fulfilled in this lifetime.

Each one of us may have our own secret, ‘*that’s impossible*’, scenario; but we can come to Yeshua and say, ‘*I believe – help my unbelief!*’ (Mark 9:24) We can use rocks or other spiritual aids, but really it is only the Spirit of God that can increase our faith and help us to believe in the Promises of God for our lives, even those that seem impossible.

God says, "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?" (Jeremiah 32:27)

“*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” No, there is nothing too difficult for the maker of Heaven and Earth; and yet there is one thing that can block God’s plan to bless us with our deepest heart’s desire – and that is – our own unbelief in His unconditional love and infinite power.

Doubts and fears are thieves and robbers who work for the enemy camp and try to get us to agree with the Kingdom of Darkness. Satan attacks our mind with thoughts of fear and doubt; but faith is the shield that extinguishes all the fiery darts of the evil one.⁸ I had thought it would be

⁷ See Isaiah 61:3

⁸ Ephesians 6:16

impossible, after spending several years back in exile and being divorced from my husband, that I could ever find my way back home to the Land of Israel.

But God is the ‘Way maker’ and here I am, writing to you from my home in a little village in the Judean Hills! The same God who parted the Red Sea can make a way where there truly is no way – if we will only believe.

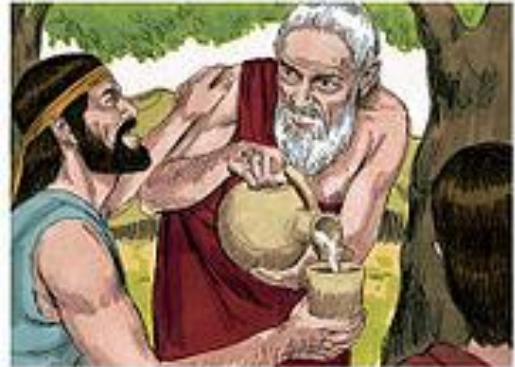
But here is the thing – it has to happen in His way and His time, not our own. It has to be a *mo’ed* – *God’s appointed or set time*. Our job is to wait in hope, faith, and expectation until the set time arrives.

The same God who allowed for a temporary blindness upon the eyes of Jewish people with regards to their Messiah so that the fullness of the Gentiles may come in⁹ will also remove it – at the set time (mo’ed) - and then all Israel will be saved.¹⁰ How we long for that day.

Command your children

The angels and the Lord did not come just to pay a social call on Abraham and to share a cup of fresh brewed Turkish coffee with him. They came on serious business with good news and bad news.

The good news was that Sarah would have a son; the bad news was that God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Of course, Abraham had a personal interest in the matter – it is the place where his nephew Lot lived. Therefore Abraham entered into a time of pleading and intercession for the salvation of Sodom.



One of the men surprised Abraham saying, "Your wife Sarah will have a son." (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

I find it impressive that God tells us why he chooses to share secrets with Abraham; why God promised to make him into a great nation, and listen to his intercession:

“Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing; ...For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice.” (Gen. 18:19)

God knew Abraham – that he took the role of fatherhood seriously. How awesome to see how much God values the training up of our children, not only to see that they receive a good

⁹ Romans 11:25

¹⁰ Romans 11:26

education so that they can make a good living when they grow up, but that they may also know God and keep His ways.

Passing on the torch of faith to the next generation is a noble and challenging calling; and here God praises Abraham for being willing to accept the sacred duty.

I want to applaud, encourage and thank the men who take up their responsibility and privilege as the head of their families and households to lead and instruct them in the ways of the Lord. The spiritual training of our sons and daughters cannot be arbitrarily handed over to the realm of women – wives, female teachers and ‘*Sunday or Shabbat school*’ teachers.

God did not commend Sarah, the mother, for the training of their children but Abraham, the Father. We can achieve great and wonderful and mighty things in the world, but what we are doing behind closed doors with our own families? Let this be our collective prayer:

Adonai, please help the fathers and husbands to rise up in this hour to accept their position as head of their household, not to lord it over them; but to give sacrificially as did Yeshua, a servant leader, as did Abraham, to command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice.

For the Sake of Ten – The Minyan and the Tithe

Abraham, whose name means “*exalted father*”, father of nations, acted as a father who pities his children in pleading for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham pleaded that God would not destroy them if there were fifty righteous men found there. But when fifty could not be found, he pleaded on behalf of forty, then thirty, then twenty, and finally ten.



Abraham pleaded with God on Sodom's behalf. (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

God promised that for the sake of ten righteous, he would not destroy. This is why a minimum of ten Jewish men, called a ‘*minyan*’, must be gathered in order to hold religious services in the synagogue. Ten is an important number corresponding to the tenth Hebrew letter yud, י, which can represent yad, יד the hand of God – *His hand of power and authority and covenant*.¹¹ God wrote the TEN COMMANDMENTS on tablets of stone. He sent TEN PLAGUES on Egypt.

Ten is also a number of testing. Abraham endured TEN TRIALS, ending with the near sacrifice of his son, Isaac. Moses sent out 12 spies to spy out the Land of Israel and TEN came back with an evil report. In the wilderness, the children of Israel tested God TEN TIMES (Numbers 14:22). Jacob’s wages were changed TEN TIMES by Laban. Daniel and his friends were tested

¹¹ See Shalom Morah II Hebrew course : Wisdom in the Hebrew Aleph bet www.voiceforisrael.net

for TEN DAYS in Babylon. There are TEN DAYS OF REPENTANCE between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

A TENTH of our income is also the required portion to give to the Lord. This is also a test. Every time we receive some money, the test is to see whether or not we will give the first ten percent to God or elsewhere. It is really a test of our heart – where is our first loyalty?

This is the only place in the Bible where God invites us to TEST HIM ON THIS! **“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”** (Malachi 3:10)

Tithing – bringing a full tenth of our income into the house of the Lord – is a test. Our cheque book register shows our hearts – what we do with our money is a test. Also for the sake of ten, a tenth of our income, God promises to rebuke the devourer. He will not allow destruction of our material goods for the sake of a tenth. **“I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,”** says the LORD Almighty.” (Malachi 3:11)

People who don’t make it a habit to tithe usually justify their disobedience by saying they just don’t have enough to tithe. Something always comes up - things break that need to be repaired, unexpected expenses crop up, business deals that we were counting on to bring us a profit fall to the ground and fail to bear fruit.

These are all valid concerns - until we realize that the reason the profits are being devoured and there is not enough to meet the need is because of a failure to bring God the tithe. Why does it use the word ‘bring’ and not ‘give’? It is because we are only bringing to God what already belongs to Him. If something does not belong to us, it is not ours to give away. We can only bring it back to its rightful owner. The tithe does not belong to us; it is devoted to the Lord. We only bring to Him what is already His. It is not ours to use.

Jericho was the first city Israel conquered after crossing the Jordan to the Promised Land. Jericho was the ‘tithe’ of all the other cities. Israel was not allowed to take anything of the spoils of Jericho; but one man disobeyed. Achan took something of the spoils of Jericho and hid it under his tent. Therefore Israel had no victory until the sin was found out and Achan, along with his family and all his belongings, were destroyed. (See article, Valley of Achor, on website)

So too, do those who keep the tithe in their possession bring a curse upon themselves and their families. They may wonder why they are not walking in victory? Why all these terrible things – sickness and poverty and accidents, and failures – all keep happening to their family? Could it be a simple answer – robbing God?

**“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’
“In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are
robbing me.” (Malachi 3:8-9)**

Sexual Sins of Sodom

Although God promised to spare Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of even ten righteous men, not even ten could be found. This shows us that Lot did not bring anyone else into the Kingdom in all the time he lived there. Lot may have been a righteous man, but he made no converts to the God of Israel; he failed to be a *‘light and witness’* for the Lord there. We cannot be content to just live somewhere and enjoy the material benefits; we must be always about our Father’s business. (Luke 2:49)



Jerusalem's 2014 Gay Pride Parade.. (photo credit:MARC ISRAEL SELLEM/THE JERUSALEM POST)

Since even ten righteous men could not be found in Sodom, God proceeded with his plans to destroy the wicked cities. Two of the men, angels in disguise, went down to Sodom to bring out Lot. We also see the trait of hospitality in Lot, for he insisted that these strangers spend the night with him rather than in the open square.

This portion of Scripture squarely confronts the sin of homosexuality. Although practically accepted as an *‘alternative lifestyle’* in our day, Scripture is clear that it is an abomination to God: **“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”** (Leviticus 18:22)

All the men of Sodom were addicted to this form of sexual depravity (Sodomy) and called for Lot to send the ‘men’ outside that they could have perverted sexual relations with them. We are horrified to read that Lot offered to send out his virgin daughters instead to be raped by all these men rather than endanger his guests who are strangers.



Lot spoke to the men of Sodom. (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

Obviously Sodom has infected Lot rather than Lot affecting Sodom. We need to be careful about the environment where we choose to dwell. Lot had a house while Abraham had only a tent, but it was Abraham's flimsy but righteous tent that endured; while Lot's solid house in Sodom that was destroyed. *"Unless the Lord builds a house they labor in vain."* (Psalm 127:1)

We see later that Lot's daughters committed incest with their father to become impregnated by him; showing they are true daughters of Sodom. This is not surprising, given that they'd been brought up in such a wicked place.

Where are we raising our children? I hear of so many people who throw their children into the most wicked, depraved environments (such as some public schools) and then wonder why they don't walk with the Lord! They say that their children should be lights in the darkness. I agree, but I also believe that weak, tender, young plants need some sort of shelter from destructive elements until they grow strong enough to withstand them. This is what greenhouses are for.



Lot and his Daughters Flee Sodom (1908 illustration by the Providence Lithograph Company)

I am not saying that we can or should protect our children from everything in the world, but does this mean we need to raise them in Sodom? May the Holy Spirit give us wisdom and lead and guide us to the right place to raise our children. When Lot lingered, the angels took hold of him, his wife and daughters, and pulled them out of the city. Incredibly, the angels said they could not do anything until they escaped. (Gen. 19:22) May we be obedient to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and not resist or delay, since all of heaven may be waiting on us to carry out God's command.

Once Lot came to Zoar, the Lord destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone and fire He sent out of heaven. We cannot see all the 'natural disasters' that come upon cities and regions as simply that – natural disasters. For God is Lord over the heavens and the earth; He even controls the weather patterns and He will judge the wicked if they do not repent. We must warn people even if they, like Lot's son-in-laws, laugh and mock.



The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, John Martin, 1852

Forget the Former Things

The Sodom and Gomorrah motif from the [Nuremberg Chronicle](#) by [Hartmann Schedel](#), 1493. Note Lot's wife, already transformed into a salt pillar, in the center



Lot's wife, in defiance of the angel's words, looked back and became a pillar of salt. When driving to the Dead Sea, there is still a pillar there that is designated as 'Lot's wife'. It stands as a sober memorial to all of us that when God leads us out of a place, we must look forward to the new thing He is doing in our lives and not look back at the place we have left, lest we be paralyzed.

"Lot's Wife" pillar, Mount Sodom, Israel



It is hard to drive forward if we keep looking in the rear view mirror. The Word of God says to forget the former things and focus on the new thing God is doing. (Isaiah 43:18)

It is looking back that caused the children of Israel to lose their inheritance in the Promised Land when God delivered them from Egypt. Whenever things got hard or scary, they looked back and said, “*Let’s go back to Egypt!*”.

I have to be so careful that I don’t do the same thing: when I become frustrated over the hardship of being a ‘not so new immigrant’ in Israel, but still struggling with the language barriers; the cultural strangeness of it all; the challenges with the children trying to adjust to a whole new way of life on a new continent; the loneliness of missing friends and family in Canada; and the continual threat of terrorism; I have to discipline myself not to look back but to keep looking forward and say, like Dorrie in the movie, *Finding Nemo*, “*just keep on swimming...*”

Moving onto Chapter 21, here Sarah actually does conceive and bear Abraham a son at the ‘set time’ (mo’ed) of which God had spoken. Although they had to wait a long time for the promise to come to pass, it was fulfilled at God’s set time.

He makes all things beautiful in its time.¹² Will we patiently wait with faith for God to bring fulfillment to His promises in our lives or will we lose heart?



When Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah gave birth to a son. (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

I hope that even this word serves as an encouragement to you in your time of waiting to have faith and patience and not give up on the dreams God has put in your heart.

Just because it’s taking longer that we would like doesn’t mean it’s not coming. In fact, we could be closer than we think! Let us not waver in faith or nullify the promises through unbelief but be fully convinced, as was Abraham that God is not a man and will not lie but will bring forth His promises, even those that seem not only unlikely but absurd - in His appointed time.

“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” (Romans 4:20-21)

Children of Promise – Setting the Captives free

Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born. They called him Yitzchak צחק from the Hebrew word (tzchok) צחק that means laugh because Sarah said, ‘*God has made me laugh*’. In Hebrew it could also mean, ‘*God has played a joke on me, and all who hear of it will laugh.*’

¹² Ecclesiastes 3:11

This contrasts the birth of Ishmael that brought strife and sorrow. Things birthed of the flesh always bring strife and frustration, but when the Spirit of God gives birth to something in our lives it brings joy and laughter, not only to us but to others as well.

God clearly told Abraham and Sarah that although he would bless Ishmael, the covenant will be passed on through the lineage of Isaac. Ishmael, son of the bondwoman, Hagar, was banished along with his mother into the wilderness for mistreating Isaac.

The book of Galatians makes reference to this in addressing Believers who want to obey all the Rabbinic Halachah: ¹³

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, and the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh and he of the freewoman through promise....



Expulsion of Ishmael and His Mother, by Gustave Doré

“Which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mt. Sinai which give birth to bondage with is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mt Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” (Galatians 4:21-16).

We observe this even today in Jerusalem, seeing all the people in bondage to religious legalism, imposed on them by the Rabbis that have nothing to do with God’s Torah. Paul goes on to write in these passages that just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so does the flesh persecute the spirit and so does the religious authority today persecute Messianic Jewish Believers.

Scriptures say, *“Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.” (Galatians 4:30)*

We have been set free to follow the Spirit of the living God, who would not lead us to defy God’s laws or to sin, but sets us free from heavy bondages of religious legalism. We are children of promise, of a New Covenant, of forgiveness of sins by the blood of Yeshua, and have liberty to live as such and enjoy God’s grace and favor on our lives.

¹³ Halachah is a code of conduct and rules based on the oral tradition of Judaism

My ex-neighbor (before we moved) happened to be the head rabbi of this entire region. When I moved into our rented home, I noticed that he had a large Labrador chained in his back yard, neglected, dirty, hungry and diseased. I never thought this beautiful dog would ever know freedom.

But we fasted, prayed, and asked God to set the captive free. The rabbi fought us tooth and nail; he threatened to have me arrested and thrown in jail for feeding the dog scraps of food. But one day, the impossible happened – ‘Charlie’¹⁴ broke loose from his captivity and was set free. Oh happy day!

We cried with the joy of seeing him free, happy, fed, cleaned up and healthy. The Lord spoke to us that just as He set this suffering dog free so is He going to set free the people of this Land from bondage under Rabbinic Legalism. Halleluyah!¹⁵



‘Charlie Then’



‘Charlie after being set free ‘

¹⁴ Not his real name

¹⁵ For full story, see article, [Charlie and the Rabbi](http://www.voiceforisrael.net), on website: www.voiceforisrael.net

Placing our Children on the Altar

In chapter 22 of Genesis, God tested Abraham. He called him to take his son, Yitzchak, and to offer him up as a sacrifice.

“Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac, and go into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of.” (Genesis 22:3)

In asking Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, God the Father foreshadowed His sacrifice of Yeshua:

“For God so loved the world that He gave (sacrificed) His son, His only son (whom He loved) so that whoever would believe on Him would not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

God Himself provided the Lamb of sacrifice. When Isaac asked where is the lamb (seh)? Abraham answered **God will provide the Lamb**. It was not a lamb but a ram (ayil) that was caught in the thicket. But when God offered up His own son, Yeshua, he gave His life as the Lamb of God led to the slaughter.



An angel prevents the sacrifice of Isaac. *Abraham and Isaac*, [Rembrandt](#), 1634

God (יהוה Yireh) sees our need

God tested Abraham to see if he would be willing to give up that which was most precious to him - even that which God had given him as a promise. In other words, God wanted to see if He had number one place in Abraham's heart - to see if there was anything he was not willing to give to the Lord.

Granted, I believe that God spoke to Abraham in an audible voice; but still, he passed the test of faith and devotion. This causes me to ask myself if I have fully given my life and everything and everyone in it to the Lord? Have I truly placed my children on the altar?

I had to do this when my eldest daughter, Courtney, wanted to return back to Canada. I placed her on the altar and let her go and God returned her to me. She is now married to a wonderful Israeli Believer and along with their beautiful children who also live in Israel on the same moshav (village).

We must hand our children over to the Lord, especially when there is a challenge and we simply don't know how to deal with it. I have so often said, "Abba, this is Your child and You are his/her father. Please show me what to do; please heal, deliver, guide, ...whatever is the need."

When God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, Abraham called the place Yehovah Yireh, which means 'God will appear'. It can also mean 'God will see'.

I take such comfort in this passage of scripture and in being able to call upon Yehovah Yireh, knowing that God sees my need and it is God who will show up in time and provide.



Isaac Bears the Wood for His Sacrifice (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)

Miraculous Interventions

In this week's corresponding Haftorah (prophetic portion) from the fourth chapter of book of 2 Kings, God also sees and meets the need of two women through miraculous intervention.

The first, a widow, does not have a means to support herself and her two children. Creditors were coming to take away her children. This was obviously a woman in desperate circumstances!

Elisha the Prophet asks her, "*What is in your house?*" (2 Kings 4:2) This is like God asking Moses, 'What is in your hand?' God can use whatever we have available, whatever is at hand, to do a miracle. Yeshua even used mud and spit to heal a blind man's eyes. (John 9:6)

Just because we don't have much doesn't mean God can't work with this pittance. All the widow had was a jar of oil. Elisha instructed her to borrow all the jars she could from her neighbors, fill them with the oil, sell them and use the money to repay her debt.

Like the miracle of the loaves and fishes, like the miracle of the oil at Chanukah, a tiny bit of oil was sufficient to meet her need. We don't need to worry that we don't have enough oil, that we don't have enough anointing. God can take the little, tiny, pitiful bit of anointing we have and do a miracle with it! Halleluyah!

Elisha did not just give her the money she needed; he gave her a way to make the money. This is considered the highest form of tzedakah (charity) in Judaism – not to give a man a fish but to teach him how to fish. The greatest miracle may be not that we win the lottery or that someone gives us a huge amount of money, but that God provides us with a way to meet the financial needs of our families.

The word tells us to mind our own business and work at honest labor with our own hands to meet the material needs of our household. As a single mother here in Israel I am also asking God for a miracle of provision – not a handout – but a way to make a living for my children and myself.

I live here with fatherless children but thank God He is ‘**father of the fatherless and defender of widows**’ (Psalm 68:5). He is Yehovah Yireh, God who sees our needs and will provide. PTL!

The next miracle God performed was also a supernatural conception, as with Sarah and Miryam. A Shunamite woman had been kind and generous to the prophet Elisha in offering him hospitality (See how important it is to offer hospitality? ☺)

He wanted to repay her in some way but she refused any sort of payment knowing God was her reward. But Elisha’s servant confided in him that this woman’s heart’s desire was to have a child, even though she had been barren all these years and was already too old.

Again the breakthrough comes at the mo’ed, the appointed time. Elisha told the widow that at the mo’ed, at the set time, she would embrace a son. And indeed, the woman did conceive and bore a son at the mo’ed, as Elisha had said to her.

But when the child was grown, it suddenly cried out with a pain in his head and moments later died in his mother’s arms. How devastating – the child that had come by promise – dead. The mother went to the prophet, Elisha, to plead with him for a miracle.

Elisha came and lay on the child, and the son came back to life. This of course symbolizes the resurrection. Isaac, who should have died, was returned alive to Abraham; Yeshua who died on the cross was resurrected to life. We may have a promise that God has placed in our heart and we may have to go through a season of putting it on the altar, letting it die if need be, and believing for God to bring it back to life – in His time – at the mo’ed that He has chosen.

The seed may need to lie dormant in the darkness of the earth for a season but it is planted, not buried. At the right time, it will sprout forth with new life and so will the seeds of faith that we plant come to fruition – in its time.

Believe in God and the Prophets

Just as these women had the faith to believe in God and in the Prophets of God, and so they found life and livelihood, so will we find the abundant, fruitful life when we truly start to believe in the goodness and faithfulness of God and His word.

“Believe in the Lord your God and you shall be established. Believe in His prophets and you shall prosper.” (2 Chronicles 20:20)

What are we to make of all these accounts of faith, miracles and especially miraculous conceptions? There is one last thing I want to leave you with and it is this: I believe that there are some who are naturally fertile, naturally fruitful – women like Leah who had many children. .

Some women seem to take their womanhood in stride – being an excellent wife and a joyful mother of children. I can think of several right now – women who grind their own wheat to make homemade bread at the same time as homeschooling twelve or so children (with another on the way).

But there are others like Sarah, like Rachel, like Miryam, and like Hannah in the Bible - for whom *'it's gonna take a miracle.'* I consider myself one of those standing in line for a miracle every day. I've come to accept my strengths and my weaknesses and like it or not, I am desperately dependent on God to help me raise my children and be the woman He has called me to be. But that's okay – as long as we keep on asking, keep on hoping, keep on believing God to bring fruitfulness and fertility out of our barrenness,

As we abide in Him, the true vine, He will give us the courage, strength, and wisdom we need to press forward, to run the race set out for us, to overcome every challenge we face in life with courage and dignity – and never, ever, look back.

Vayera Study Questions

1. What are some of the meanings of the Hebrew word, Vayera, and its derivatives? How do these all relate together?
2. What is the meaning of 'brit millah'? Why did David make reference to Goliath as being uncircumcised? What does it mean to circumcise our hearts? Do you believe that circumcision is necessary for all (Jewish and Gentile) followers of Yeshua? Discuss.
3. Why is the practice of hospitality so important? What blessings do we receive by being hospitable to others? Is there something you can do to offer more hospitality?
4. What does this parashah show us about the Jewish custom of separating meat and dairy products? Do you keep this tradition? Share and discuss.
5. What did Yeshua say about keeping the rabbinic traditions (man-made rules)?
6. What is a 'mo'ed' (plural moadim)? Is there something for which you have been waiting for a very long time and basically given up hope? Does this parashah encourage you to keep waiting with faith and patience?
7. Is there anything that is 'impossible' in your life right now for which you need to believe God? Would you like to share and pray about these issues with other believers?
8. What is the significance of the number ten in the Bible? How does this relate to the tithe?
9. What does God promise to do for us if we give Him a tenth of our income and how does this relate to Sodom?
10. Why did God destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? What does the Bible say about homosexuality? How does Lot show that Sodom had infected him and his family? Are you raising your family in a place that they will not be affected by the gross darkness?
11. Could there be a situation from which God wants to pull you out? Are you resisting? Has there been a time when God saved you from destruction? Share and discuss.
12. Why did God say not to look back? Why was it so serious a sin for Lot's wife? What does this say to us when we must leave a place or situation and move on?
13. Have you placed everything and everyone in your life on the altar of God? How does this parashah show us that we can trust God with those we love?
14. What is the meaning of Yehovah Yireh?

About the Author:

Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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