

*Shiur L'Yom Shishi*¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: *Torah Lecha:* Genesis 16:1—17:27
***Haftarah:* Isaiah 41:14-16**
***B'rit Chadasha:* Romans 4:13-25**

***'I am El Shaddai;
I will empower you to walk in My Presence and be wholehearted in devotion.'***
[Genesis 17:1]

**Today's Meditation is Psalm 115:12-18;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Kadosh*, the Prayer of Holiness**

We have already been privileged to walk alongside our ancestors Avraham and Sarah through some very interesting life experiences. It has been quite an enlightening journey thus far. We have learned some critically important lessons about what it is like *to live in and live out of a covenant relationship with the Creator of the Universe*. We have learned how essential – and yet how difficult - trusting our Unseen Shepherd's kindness, wisdom, and timing is. We have learned how critical inclining our hearts toward and responding in real time to every word of Divine communication is. We have learned how those who curse us really do wind up being cursed, and those who bless us really do wind up being blessed.

But we have only just begun to explore the ramifications and possibilities of Covenant-centered life. Indeed, some of the most important lessons our ancestors' experience has to teach us about covenant-centered life lie ahead of us in the upcoming portions of the Patriarchal Chronicles. And today we are going to learn that a life such as we are called to live involves great challenges as well as triumphs. The Holy One is calling us to be overcomers and Transcenders – and for that to have any real meaning there must be some very serious obstacles and difficulties for us to face, overcome, and transcend – obstacles and difficulties we cannot hope to navigate in our own strength, in our own ways, or by our own wisdom.

The Beautiful Voice that spoke to Avram in the fields of Charan never promised him – or us - a rose garden without thorns. Especially if he – or we - should leave the trail that He has blazed and lapse into folly along the way, thorns and thistles and drama and disaster are to be expected.

¹ All rights with respect to this publication are reserved to the author, William G. Bullock, Sr., also known as *'the Rabbi's son'*. Reproduction of material from any *Rabbi's son* lesson without written permission from the author is prohibited. Copyright © 2005 – 2014.

The Covenant comes with no ‘*Get Out of Jail Free*’ card. In the Covenant, real life *choices* have real *life consequences*.

In the Covenant, walking in the Holy One’s way brings a level of protection and provision and productivity. But in the Covenant walking in our own way – or the way of the world - yields self-destruction, disturbance of *bayit shalom* [i.e. peace and well-being in the household] and misery.

Doing what ‘seems right to man’, or ‘following our heart’ instead of following our Unseen Shepherd’s Wise Instructions is never going to end well – for us, for those we love, or for the world.

There is, however, some really good news inherent to the Covenant. That good news is that even when we err or stray – as we all do from time to time - the pathway the Holy One has blazed for us always beckons to us to ‘return again’ to its wisdom. Even when we foolishly let our eyes and affections and appetites light upon and entangle with something in this fallen world to the extent that our identity and mission as sons and daughters of the Holy One gets compromised, the Unseen Shepherd always calls to us to come back to Him so that He can bind up our wounds. Even when we make really bad life choices, and lend our minds, our mouths, and any number of other members of our bodies to *tamei* [unclean] works of the flesh, the Beautiful Voice out of Heaven always looks for an opportunity to speak restoration into our souls, redemption into our messes, and renewal into our minds. This is the wonderful reality of the Avrahamic Covenant. This is a drastic difference between *the Covenant-centered life* and lives built upon morality, philosophy, ideology, and religion.

The Holy One does not do these things for us because we have done or could do anything to deserve or merit them. We have not and we cannot. He does these things *for the honor of His Name*, and in order that He might fulfill every commitment He made to Avram Avinu. Some receive and embrace this reality; others choose another path, surrender to another shepherd, and suffer another destiny.

But we were speaking of Avram Avinu, weren’t we. Grab onto the *tzit-tzit* of Avraham’s garment and let’s see what life experiences and God-encounters are in store for us today.

From the Mountaintop to the Valley of Tears By Way of Self-Will

Chapter 15 of Sefer *B’reshit* was a *crescendo* of sorts – a high point in Avram’s

life. For the first time in his life Avram actually spoke *al p'nei* – face-to-Face – with the Holy One *as a man speaks to a friend*. This was *heady stuff* – and was a preview of much greater things – and much deeper conversations - to come.

In addition to *upgrading the intimacy factor* in chapter 15 however the Holy One also actually *upped the ante* on the already-magnificent promises He was making to Terach's son. The Holy One promised Avram that not only would he at long last have *offspring*² as he had always desired, but that his offspring would one day be as *ha-kokavim shel ha-shamayim* [*the stars in the heavens*' - **Genesis 15:5**]³.

The '*mountaintop experience*' of chapter 15 did not by any means stop there. After Avram prepared the *chuppah* of covenant at the Holy One's instruction, the Holy One did something else remarkable – He actually 'zapped' Avram much the way He had 'zapped' Adam in the Garden of Eden. As the Holy One had caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, he now caused Avram to fall into a *deep sleep*. Then, while he was sleeping the Holy One pulled back the curtains of time and space for Avram and showed him 400 years - and four generations - of his offspring's destiny.

Finally, to top it all off the Holy One made *b'rit* [covenant] with Avram, making him only the second human being in history [Noach was the first] to have a specific *b'rit* with the Creator of the Universe.⁴ Fire, smoke, a voice from Heaven, prophetic visions – man, it was a day '*to die for*'!

Avram's '*greater destiny*' is beginning to take shape quite nicely. Nothing is going to stop Avram and Sarai now, right? Alas, it will not be that simple. First he is going to depart from the Blazed Trail and the footprints of the Unseen Shepherd. He is going to listen to, agree with, and implement a plan that is the opposite of Divine Wisdom.

Oh Beloved, learn this and learn it well - we can never fulfill a Divine Mission, much less rush a Divine Promise into being, by employing methodologies of consensus dreamed up by the human mind or by depending upon the works of the flesh. His Promises must be brought into being in His Time, in His Way.

A covenant relationship with the Creator of the Universe, you see, is far more

² The Biblical 'code word' for offspring is *zara* [i.e., *seed*], bringing back memories of the Holy One's promise of a Head-Crushing 'seed of woman' to come. **Genesis 3:15**.

³ The author suggests the reader consult and meditate upon Philippians 2:12-16 in connection with this promise.

⁴ Traditional Torah commentators sometimes refer to this part of the Holy One's covenant with Avram as *B'rit Bain Ha-B'tarim* [the Covenant Between the Parts].

about *learning to cooperate with and take delight in the stronger Covenant Partner's processes and timing* than it is about enjoying the physical fulfillment of His Promises.

Covenant is about cultivating and nurturing relationship and trust as much as it is about performance of covenant vows – and for a Covenant to be fully functional this reality has to be true for both parties to the Covenant.

A Covenant can never be just about getting what we want. That is witchcraft and manipulation. A Covenant is about cooperation

New Levels, New Temptations

Alas, after the grand crescendo of Chapter 15 Avram and Sarai's relationship undergoes some very dark moments. And they will have no one to blame for the loss in bayit shalom but themselves.

With every new level of Covenant Opportunity comes a new *series of challenges* and new barrage of *temptations*. The God Encounter of chapter 15 of *Sefer B'reshit* opened up new levels of Covenant Opportunity to Avram and Sarai. With that new level of opportunity, right on cue, come new challenges and temptations. The narrative of these new challenges and temptations is found in Chapter 16 of *Sefer B'reshit*.

Chapter 15, as you will recall, was all about *communing with the Holy One* and enjoying the freedom of *doing things His Way*, in His Timing. Chapter 16, on the other hand, is all about *trying to please people* who want to make things happen in *their way*, in *their timing*.

Chapter 15 was all about discovering and exploring Divine Destiny and purpose. Chapter 16, on the other hand, is all about getting caught up in self-obsessed human drama.

Introducing the Bondwoman . . . and her Son

The Holy One's promise of a son for Avram – and ultimate ownership of the Land of Kena'an - has been established in covenant ceremony. But please note that the Holy One adjourned the ***b'rit*** ceremony abruptly – without responding to Avram's request for an ***ot***, or 'down payment' on the promised ***zara*** [seed] in the form of a son of his own flesh. Avram did not know that the ***b'rit*** ceremony was only Act I in a two-Act play [chapter 17 is the 2nd act]. Avram did not know that the time period represented by chapter 16 was just a Divinely programmed 'intermission' between the Acts.

And when Avram returned to camp and told Sarai what had happened⁵, and described for her the vision the Holy One had shown him of 400 years and four generations of *zara*, etc., Sarai was apparently not overly impressed.

All that stuff about ‘seed’ was fine for Avram – but what about *her*? She was no spring chicken anymore. Sarai had waited for a baby to fill her womb and her embrace all her life, you see. But her ‘biological clock’ had ticked its last ticks quite some time back. Mention of a son awakened in her a woundedness – a self-obsessed pain of the soul - that suddenly cried out to be stroked and pampered.

This was Sarai’s fallen nature’s ‘trump card’. This was the wound the adversary of her soul had created a subconscious stronghold around. He could play his ‘trump card’ at will. Every time anyone – especially Avram - spoke about Avram having a son, the adversary’s fingers reached for the trump card he held on Sarai and brought it into play.

The adversary holds a ‘trump card’ or two on most human beings in this world, Dear Reader. He makes it his business to know exactly where you have been – and can be – hurt. He knows why - and where - you are still tender. He knows precisely what he can throw at you or have someone say that will *ruffle your feathers* and activate your ‘victim button’.

For some people it is the thought or mention of a father who abandoned or abused them. For others it is the memory of a friend or sibling who betrayed them, or a romantic interest who rejected them. For some the ‘trump card’ the adversary holds centers around a lifelong personal sense of inadequacy, weakness, or inferiority. For others it has to do with failure in business, socialization, or relationships. Whatever the ‘trump card’ the adversary holds, it can be disqualified by the love and wisdom of the Holy One. But before that happens, in most cases, there tend to be a few ugly messes and disasters

Such was the case for Avram and Sarai in chapter 16 of Sefer B’reshit. Avram has mentioned the promise of a son. The stronghold the adversary has constructed in Sarai’s heart and mind is all astir. The adversary has the Sarai trump card firmly in hand. This is the test. This is the challenge. Are you ready, Avram? Will you stay in the Blazed Trail, following the Beautiful Voice – or will you go another way, in response to another voice?

⁵ The writer is assuming by virtue of the importance of this matter to Sarai that he told her what happened, although admittedly Torah does not specifically say he did.

Sarai's Mind Wanders Far From the Trail the Holy One has Blazed

The years of waiting and expectation had taken their toll on the aging couple. Sarai had begun to doubt herself. Avram, after all, kept having God-encounters and getting Divine promises of descendants – but *she* did not.

Maybe, she probably thought to herself, *she* was the problem. She most likely began to ponder [if not *obsess*] upon her lifelong ‘barren-ness’.

What she needed, she apparently decided, was ‘family planning’. And so one day as her Egyptian handmaid - a woman we know as **Hagar** - was ministering to her, a thought came into her head. Here is how that fateful thought is introduced to us by Torah:

Sarai said to Avram, "See now, the Holy One has restrained me from bearing. Please go in to my handmaid. It may be that I will obtain children by her."

[Genesis 16:1-3(a)]

Think back carefully. Had the Holy One said *anything* about Hagar in any of the God encounters about which we have read?

No, He had not. This plan that Sarai cooked up was not a *sh'ma* response to a word from the Holy One.

This idea did not originate in the Brilliant Mind of the Holy One. It was hatched in the fallen and flawed reasoning of a wounded *human-being*.

Think back to the moment in the Garden of Eden when Chava “*gave to her husband with her, and he ate*”. Welcome to the *Bondwoman syndrome, Dear Reader*.

Who is the Bondwoman? The bondwoman is *anything that man adds to the Holy One's instructions*⁶. And the *Bondwoman's son* is *anything created by men* –

⁶ The first thing that happened at Sinai was not the Great Theophany. The first thing that happened at Sinai was the visit of Yitro [Jethro] the Midyani. As a result of Yitro's visit and human influence, a whole system of organized religion – replete with titles and even self-serving ‘sacrifices’ as mediated by Yitro – that was added by Yitro to what the Holy One had instructed. See **Exodus 18:5**. Then came the Great Theophany, with the Holy One speaking beautiful words of instruction for His People. And then came the ‘bondwoman’ Shaul was talking about – the Golden Calf experience. One of the mistakes of the Judaism of Shaul's day, you see – and for that matter a mistake made by both the ‘Judaisms’ and the ‘Christianities’ of the present day – is to become enamored with and follow the Yitro model of organization, leadership appointment, and ‘worship’ of golden calves, and declaring our own times and seasons, as opposed to *sh'ma*-ing and following the actual instructions given by and the leadership established by the Holy One. This man-centered, numbers-focused, flesh-appealing approach to spirituality is the ‘bondwoman's son’.

however dear it may be to the hearts of the men who create it - in the course of adding to the Holy One's instructions.

It was sort of like the '*it is good for food, pleasant to the eye, and desirable to make one wise*' idea Chava came up with in Genesis 3:6 and the '*Come, let us build a city and a tower*' idea the residents of Shinar voiced in Genesis 11:4, no?

It makes one wonder if perhaps there was a serpent loose in Sarai's tent – or if perhaps one of Nimrod's arrows was lodged in her heart.

Sarai's idea was the epitome of what in Hebrew would be called ***chol*** - i.e. a matter of faulty human reason, birthed from *human emotion* aided and abetted by human logic. That which is ***chol*** is, of course, is the exact opposite of things that are ***kadosh*** - i.e. that which is holy, set apart, touched by and marked by association with the Holy One. And you should know, Dear Reader, that a major component of the responsibility of covenant partners of the Holy One is to both *ascertain the distinction between* and *maintain separation between* the things and ideas in this world that are ***chol*** and those which are ***kadosh***.

More on that later in these studies – particularly when we get to the Book known as Leviticus. Meanwhile, how will the Holy One free Sarai's doubting mind and melt her ***chol, chol*** heart?⁷

Because Lawlessness Will Abound, the Love of Many Will Grow Chol

But back to our story. What was Avram's response to Sarai's ***chol*** idea? Alas, it was like Adam's response to the Chava idea of Genesis 3:6. Adam took the fruit and ate. Sarai presented Avram with the slave girl and made it clear what she expected him to do. Avram took the slave girl and . . . well, you get the picture.

He went in to Hagar, and she conceived.

[Genesis 16:3]

The adversary's trump card was played on Sarai – and Sarai fell for it. Fearing that she would never be able to provide Avram with a son, she accepted for herself a far lesser destiny than that the Holy One intended for her to have.

Reverting to the Mesopotamian Way

In the land of Mesopotamia, from which Avram and Sarai had grown up, it was completely acceptable, if a married woman was incapable of bearing children to continue the line of the husband, for the woman to give her maidservant to her

⁷ The reference is to the classic country and western song "*Cold, Cold Heart*," by Hank Williams Sr.

husband as a second wife in order to assure the man an heir. Thereafter if she chose she could adopt the handmaiden's child as her own. I'll call this the "Mesopotamian plan". It is purely a 'work of the flesh'. There is nothing of the Holy One in it. Our Great King can make good come from anything, of course, but the first level of consequences flowing from such an action is always going to be highly destructive to the shalom of every person involved and highly problematic for every relationship involved.

Note how this "Mesopotamian plan" makes a 180 degree turn from the Holy One's plan as set forth in Genesis 2:24. There we were told:

Al-ken ya'azov-ish et-aviv v'et imo v'davak b'ishto

Man shall therefore leave his father and mother and be united with his wife,

vehayu l'vasar echad

and they shall become one flesh.

Avram's wife was Sarai - *not* Hagar. The spiritual reality neither he nor Sarai grasped was that he could not join himself to Hagar without breaking the *echad* [union] he had with Sarai. When Avram embraced Hagar, therefore, *something happened that went way beyond the physical.*

The joinder of two humans engaging in the act of procreation involves much more than just a temporary physical union. The joinder of the flesh of two human beings in that intimate manner *extends deep into the soul.* It changes both participants in the union forever. And the soul time thus created lingers, and poisons all his or her subsequent intimate relationships.

When Avram and Hagar came together, therefore, something spiritual took place. Their souls intermingled. A part of Hagar's soul attached itself to Avram's soul, and vice versa. As a result of the union Avram's soul became marred, Hagar's soul became marred – and ultimately the soul of Avram's soul mate, Sarai, wound up becoming marred as well. This marring affected every aspect of the wills, the minds, and the emotions of the persons involved.

It was not by any means as simple as Hagar providing a convenient, unoccupied incubation chamber for Avram's seed. Intimate conduct between human beings between never leaves the participants – or those in relationship to them – unaffected.

How did this marring effect on the wills, minds, and emotions of the parties involved in this dangerous conduct play out in real time? Well, remember that in order for Sarai's plan to work Hagar needed to remain subservient to Sarai's

instructions and teachings. But that is not the way it happened. As Torah puts it:

ki haratah v'tekal gevirtah b'eyneyha

When she [i.e. Hagar] saw that she had conceived her mistress was despised in her eyes.

[Genesis 16:4(b)]

Hence, Dear Reader, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall . . .

But Wait - Who Was Hagar, Anyway?

Who, therefore, we may wish to ask, was this woman **Hagar**? With whom – and with what *twisted strands of human and spiritual DNA* - did Sarai call upon Avram to commingle *his redeemed soul and his promised family's destiny*?

Avram's DNA had just been touched by the Voice, the Words, the Hand, and the image of the Creator of the Universe. He was pregnant with holiness, with promise, with purpose, and with destiny.

What would be the consequence of commingling all that holy impartation with . . . well, someone we quite frankly do not know much about? Hebrew *midrash* tells us that Hagar was a princess of Egypt - the daughter of the Pharaoh who had taken Sarai into his harem temporarily, as described in Genesis 12. Before leaving Egypt, the legend says, this frightened Pharaoh sought to assuage the plagues that had fallen upon his nation by giving his own daughter Hagar to serve Sarai as a maidservant. As a later Pharaoh would give Yosef the daughter of a dignitary as a wife, so this Pharaoh gave Sarai his own daughter as a maidservant. All we are told in Torah about this woman, however, is that she was a *Mitzrayin* [Egyptian], that she was Sarai's 'handmaid', and that her name was **Hagar** [an Egyptian name transliterated in the Hebrew language as *hey, gimel, resh*]. Let's take a look at what those things mean.

1. Hagar's "Egyptian-ness"

Ancient Egypt was of course a highly developed society in many ways. Architecturally for instance it was marvelously advanced. It was not then Muslim [Islam did not even exist until the 7th Century CE]. Nor was it Arab. It was populated instead by descendants of Cham – the disrespectful son of Noach who, though he personally was saved through the flood by reason of his relationship with Noach, shortly after receiving this salvation dishonored his father, making sport of his nakedness.

The society that prevailed in Egypt when Hagar was born was idolatrous, and focused not on life but death. But it appears from Torah that Hagar had escaped the idolatry and had through her interaction with Avram and Sarai come to worship the One True God. So, just how much Egyptian culture – or Chamitic character –

attached itself to Hagar by the time of Genesis 16 is hard to tell.

2. *Hagar's 'Handmaid' Status/Vocation*

We know from the text that Hagar served as a 'handmaid' of Sarai. The Hebrew word which our English Bibles translate as 'handmaid' is *shifchah*, *shin, peh, chet, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #8198, pronounced *shif-khaw'*. This is the same word used in Genesis 12:16 to describe the female servants Avram received as a gift when Pharaoh cast he and Sarai out of Egypt.

Other persons in Torah who will be called by the title *shifkhah* will include *Zilpah* [Leah's 'handmaid', given to her by Lavan – see Genesis 29:24], and *Bilhah* [Rachel's handmaid, also given to her by Lavan – see Genesis 29:29]. Also, it will be as a handmaid [*shifkhah*] that Ruth will one day present herself as to Boaz [**Ruth 2:13**], and it will be as a handmaid [*shifkhah*] of Eli that Hannah will describe herself in I Samuel 1:18. In Joel 2:29 it will be handmaids of the Holy One who will be listed among the recipients of the end-time outpouring of the *Ruach HaQodesh*.

The verb root of the Hebrew word *shifkhah* is *shafakh*, meaning 'to spread abroad'. In reference to a servant it implies that the servant is over the course of the servant's tenure increasingly **honored** and **trusted**, and **empowered to act as an extension of the master**. The closest English concept is the *attorney-in-fact*, a person authorized and designated to act, on certain issues, at least, as an ambassador, emissary, personal representative, to give orders and make agreements in the place and stead of the master. The authority an attorney-in-fact has is that which is commonly called 'power of attorney'.

It appears therefore that as Eliezer of Damascus was Avram's attorney-in-fact so was Hagar of Egypt Sarai's attorney-in-fact. She was not an ordinary slave-girl who did menial tasks. She was instead a *trusted business associate* or 'personal secretary'.

The term 'handmaid' should not therefore in any regard be considered a derogatory term. Yishma'el was not cast out because he was a *handmaid's son* - but *because he personally forfeited the place Avram had made for him in the chosen household by hating, and grievously sinning in regard to, Yitzchak*. Hagar was not cast out [ultimately, in chapter 20] with Yishma'el because she was a *bad person*, or was hated by the Holy One – but because Yishma'el, a mere lad in his teens, *needed* his mother – both physically and spiritually. What Yishma'el needed most was someone who could receive revelation from the Holy One.

And that brings us to the third thing we know about Hagar – her name. There is a

secret hidden within that name that I believe explains why the Holy One had her sent out into the desert with her son.

3. *Hagar's name*

In Hebrew the name of Sarai's Egyptian maid is written as *hey, gimel, resh*. This is Strong's Hebrew word #1904, pronounced *haw-gawr*'. Strong's is not sure what the verb root of this word is, indicating it is "of uncertain (perhaps foreign) derivation". Gesenius relates the name to an unused Hebrew root made of the same consonants, *hey, gimel, resh*, which he says should be translated 'to flee'. Let us look at the Hebrew mural [assuming that the name was given her not by Egyptians, but by Avram or Sarai, or Moshe]. The first letter of her name is *hey*, which presents us with a Hebraic picture of revelation – like a window in a tent allows light in and allows those in the tent to see outside. The second letter of her name is *gimel*, which presents us with a Hebraic picture of a human being walking or running. The third letter of her name is *resh*, which presents us with a Hebraic picture of the head of a household. The last two letters combined form the word *gar* or *gur*, which is translated stranger, foreigner, or sojourner, and refers to a person living outside his native land.

One interpretation of this Hebraic mural [*hey, gimel, resh*] would be that Hagar is a *foreigner/sojourner* [*gimel, resh*] who receives – i.e. is the direct object of - revelation [*hey*]. Is that an appropriate interpretation? I think so, because, in today's aliyah, this woman becomes the first person outside the family of Shem – since Kayin, at least - to receive a visitation from the Holy One. Later, of course, her kinsman Pharaoh would have divine dreams [which Yosef would interpret], as would Nebuchadnezzar [which Daniel would interpret], and a few other goyim would receive Divine Visitation.

But it is rare in TaNaKh for a person who like Hagar is outside the line of the 'chosen people' to receive Divine revelation. She is therefore the first fruits, so to speak, of persons outside the physical line of Avram to receive revelation directly from the Holy One.

Make no mistake about it, Hagar is an *important person* in the Holy One's eyes. He honored her in many ways.

We should not regard her as a villainess. The Holy One certainly did not see her that way.

While this exotic Egyptian certainly was not sinless [neither was Avram, and neither are any of us], the Holy One *tenderly cared for* her and *honored her* with opportunities

to learn his ways [by living in the household of Avram] and with revelation most of us would [figuratively, of course] ‘die for’. I mean, how many of us have had wells of living water dug [or at least opened and revealed] by angels?

Trouble In Paradise

Meanwhile, as soon as Avram mingles his spirit with Hagar things start to go wrong. As soon as Hagar knows she has conceived, she throws her fertility right in Sarai’s face.

If Avram agreed with this **chol** idea to make Sarai happy he soon finds out he has done just the opposite. Sarai is not happy – and as the old saying goes, ‘*when Sarai ain’t happy, ain’t no one happy*’. So who does Sarai take it out on? You guessed it – she takes it out on Avram!

Chamasi aleycha

'It's all your fault!

anochi natati shifchati becheykecha

I myself placed my shifchah in your arms!

vatero ki haratah v'ekal b'eyneiha yish'pot

Now that she sees herself pregnant, she looks at me with disrespect.

Adonai beyni uveynecha

Let the Holy One judge between me and you!'

Avram is now at *a crisis point*. What is he to do? If he takes up for Hagar he estranges his wife and jeopardizes his marriage. If he takes up Sarai’s offense, however, he estranges Hagar and compromises - and may lose altogether - the opportunity to be a father to the child she is carrying. His response to Sarai is:

hineh shif'chatech b'yadech

'Behold, your shifchah is in your hands.

asi-lah ha-tov b'eynaych

Do with her as seems good to you to do.'

Sarai took the opportunity to let Hagar know beyond question just who was ‘boss’, and how she felt. Hagar was not about to accept Sarai’s chastisement, so, pregnant or not, she packed up her things and headed back in the direction of Egypt from whence she had come.

Hagar and the Angel of the Holy One

Fortunately for Hagar, for the unborn child she was carrying, and for all concerned the Holy One was keeping His watchful eye on Hagar all along. When Hagar

reached an oasis [Hebrew, *ayin*] on the road back to Egypt the Holy One sent an angel to stop her, settle her down, and turn her around.

V'yomar Hagar shif'chat Sarai
and [the angel] said, 'Hagar, maid of Sarai!

ey-mizeh vat v'anah telechi
From where are you coming, and where are you going?'

It was not that the angel did not know where Hagar had come from - after all, he called her '*Hagar, maid of Sarai!*' The question of the angel of the Holy One to Hagar was much like the 'Where are you?' question posed by the Holy One to Adam in the Garden, after Adam and Chava ate of the forbidden fruit. The question was designed not to elicit empirical information, but *spiritual soul-searching*, from the one being asked.

Hagar was neither a liar nor a slanderer. She did not take the opportunity to *play the victim*. She did not tell her sad but true 'unwed mother' tale to elicit the angel's sympathy. She did not say a thing negative about Sarai or Avram. She did not blame anyone but herself for her present problems. Give credit where credit is due Beloved - she told it just like it was:

V'tomer m'penei Sarai gevirti anochi borachat
'I am running away from my mistress, Sarai,' she replied.

Now that she had been honest with herself, the 'right thing to do' was suddenly pretty clear. The angel spoke to her frankly:

Shuvi el-gevirtech v'hit'ani tachat yadeyha
'Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her.'

That settled that. Hagar was returning to Sarai. And she would not only *return*, but would *submit*.

But Hagar would soon find out that she would not go back to Avram's camp the same person that had run away. Her life was about to be transformed by the prophetic words of the Holy One spoken over her by her presbytery of oasis angels. Hence we read that another angel told Hagar:

Har'bah arbeh et-zar'ech
'I will grant you many descendants.

V'lo yisafer merov
They will be so many that they will be uncountable.'

Think that is enough personal prophecy for one day? The Holy One is not through by a long shot. With regard to the unborn child of Avram's *zara* [seed] that Hagar is carrying, the Holy One directs the angel to prophetically reveal to her not only the child's *gender* but also his *name* - *Yishma'el*.

But before Hagar left the oasis, before she took one step back in the direction of Avram's camp, before she submitted to Sarai, before she gave birth to this child on Sarai's knees, and before she nursed him for even one second, the Holy One wanted to make sure Hagar knew just what kind of man her firstborn son was going to grow up to be. Hence, the angel told her plainly:

V'hu yihyeh pereh

He will be rebellious.

adam yado vakol v'yad kol bo

His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him.

v'al-penei chol-echav yish'kon

And before all his brothers will he will dwell.'

We are not told what punishment was accorded Hagar when she returned to camp, or how well – or how badly - Sarai treated her over the next few months. Strengthened by the prophetic words the Holy One had spoken to her, whatever happened, Hagar did not flinch – or run.

The Son of Avram's Flesh is Born

It is hard to imagine the emotions that were felt by the various people in Avram's camp on the day Hagar gave birth.

Avram was finally a 'father'. Sarai would finally hear the sound of a baby's cry in her own tent. And Hagar would know that the child she birthed on Sarai's knees would never be Sarai's child – only hers.

V'teled Hagar l'Avram ben

Hagar bore unto Avram a son.

v'yikra Avram shem-beno asher-yaledah Hagar Yish'ma-El

Avram called the name of his son, who had been born to Hagar 'Yishma'el'

[Genesis 16:15]

Why did the Holy One decree that the name of the bondwoman's son would be "*Yish'ma-El*" – i.e. God will hear?

In part it is certainly because of the episode reported in chapter 21 of Genesis where Yishmael, then a lad of approximately 15, and his mother were banished

from Avram's home. At that time, in a desperate state of thirst Yishma'el cries out. **God hears**, and sends an angel to lead Hagar to water. Our God is not willing that any should perish. He pays attention. He listens. He hears. He is moved. And He acts. It has always been so.

But there is another level at which the name Yishmael has prophetic effect even today. While the Holy One loves and calls unto Himself all peoples, it is no secret to anyone today that Yishmael is at least claimed by the Arabs as the progenitor of the Arab people groups – the peoples who, more than all others, have chosen to hate, and desire the death of, Avram's other descendants, the Hebrews. It is no secret that in public the self-proclaimed descendants of Yishma'el often say they want peace with Israel and the Jews, while in private they plot acts of violence and hatred.

The world seems completely deceived by such duplicity. The leaders of the world, the United Nations, and the European Union – even some leaders of the United States and Israel – actually listen to let themselves and be fooled by the '*we just want peace*' talk of people who at least reckon themselves as Yishma'el's descendants.

But *not the Holy One*, Dear Reader. Every time Yishma'el's actual or putative descendants plot evil against or slander the descendants of Yitzchak, you see, **God will hear!** And after the Holy One hears, exposes, and thwarts the evil plans concocted and whispered in secret by those claiming to be Yishma'el's descendants, then the descendant's of Yitzchak will be able to live up to their name as well.

For the name Yitzchak means '**he will laugh**'. I am not talking about the haughty laughter of arrogant souls. I am speaking of true **simchah** – the joy of the Holy One - the joyous thanksgiving of those who know the redeeming power of the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. I am speaking of laughter such as is described in Psalm 126:

Then our mouth will be filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.

Then those among the nations will say

"The Holy One has done great things for them."

The Holy One has done great things for us, and we are glad.

Restore our fortunes again, the Holy One, like the streams in the Negev.

Those who sow in tears will reap in joy.

He who goes out weeping, carrying seed for sowing,

Will assuredly come again with joy, carrying his sheaves.

B'rit Ceremony – Act II

The valley of hard life lessons we have know as chapter 16 of Sefer B'reshit does not last forever. The season of human failure and self-obsessed interpersonal drama is eventually followed by another glorious season God-encounter. As chapter 17 begins Avram is 99 years of age. It has been more than fourteen years since the Holy One was declared “righteous” in the Holy One’s eyes, and completed Act I of the ***b'rit*** ceremony. Now the 14-year intermission – the intermission necessitated by Avram’s insistence upon a son/heir of his own body - is over. Avram now has Yishma’el - the ‘son of his own flesh’ he bargained for, and hence is ready to complete the ***b'rit*** the Holy One planned all along.

In the last part of parsha *Lech Lecha* therefore Avram is blessed by a fifth “God-encounter”. This encounter is again in the form of a “vision”. Here is how Torah’s account of this significant event begins:

V'yehi Avram ben-tish'im shanah v'tesha shanim

When Avram was ninety-nine years old,

vayera Adonai el-Avram v'yomer elav Ani El-Shadai

the Holy One appeared [ra'ah] to Avram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai,

hithalech l'fanei v'heyeh tamim

Walk before me, and be blameless.

V'etnah v'rity beyni uveynecha

I will make my covenant between me and you,

v'ar'beh otecha bime'od me'od

and will multiply you exceedingly."

In the process of this fifth God encounter Avram is going to learn much more about the God whom he has come to both love and fear. And the ***b'rit*** ceremony the Holy One began 14 years ago – then put on hold for Avram to have the son of his own flesh he bargained for - is going to be completed.

What is going to happen in chapter 17 is viewed by some as a ‘new’ covenant. But it is not. The basic covenant terms will not change. It is, therefore, merely a *renewal* of the previous covenant. It is going to be ‘renewed’, re-affirmed – and re-confirmed with a sign - the sign/token the Holy One intended all along for the covenant – the ‘***ot***’ we call *circumcision* – is going to be established at last.

Although (or perhaps because) Avram has long ago been declared “righteous” before the Holy One on the basis of his belief/faith [Genesis 15:6], The Holy One begins this 5th encounter by making it clear something more is expected of Avram than

intellectual agreement with that which the Holy One had spoken (the kind of intellectual agreement which would generate fleshly attempts to “make” the promises of God “happen” – like we saw in chapter 16!). Even though he has now been ‘judicially’ declared righteous Avram is still expected to conform his life to the Holy One’s plan from this point forward. He is to walk before the Holy One and be blameless in the present and future tense.

And that is not all. He is to *change his whole identity*. He is to receive a *new nature*, evidenced by a *new name*. He is to become a ‘new creation.’

Avram Gets a Name Change

Here are the words with which the Holy One introduces Avram to his new name and identity:

Ani hineh b’riti itach

"As for me, behold, my covenant is with you.

v’hayita l’av hamon goyim

You will be the father of a horde of nations.

V’lo-yikare od et-shimecha Avram

And your name will no more be called Avram,

V’hayah shimcha Avraham

but your name will be “Avraham”;

[Genesis 17:3-6(a)]

The new name Avram receives is *Avraham*. The difference between the former name and the latter name is the addition of the letter ‘hey’, between the *resh* [r sound] and the *mem sofit* [m sound at the end]. His name is now to be spelled *alef, beit, resh, hey, mem sofit*.

What is the significance of the *hey* that is added to Avram’s name? Remember what the Hebrew letter *hey* pictures – the window/opening of a middle-eastern shepherd’s tent. Through such a window, light [and breathable air] come in from outside, and the person(s) inside can see out, and the air is kept fresh. It is the point of connection between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’. It is the door of both *revelation* and *inspiration*.

Avram has now become that window for mankind.

It has taken awhile. There were certainly some *wrong turns* along the way. But now there is *no turning back*. He is ‘*in this thing*’ now - *for better or for worse*.

This man Avraham is not the same man who left Charan – or who got kicked out of Egypt – or who parted ways with Lot – or who pursued and fought against the strongest army of the most powerful nations of the world – or who insisted on having a ‘son of his own flesh’ even if it meant mingling his **zara** with an Egyptian handmaid.

No, he is *not the same man*. He will never be the same man again. For the Holy One goes on to declare over him the following prophetic destiny:

ki av-hamon goyim netaticha

for I have established you the father of a multitude of nations.

V'hifreti otcha b'me'od me'od

I will make you exceedingly numerous

unetaticha l'goyim

and I will make you into nations

umelachim mimcha yetze'u

and kings will be your descendants.

V'hakimoti et-briti

I will establish my covenant between me and you

beyni uveynecha uveyn zar'acha acharecha l'dorotam

and your seed after you throughout their generations

liv'rit olam lihyot lecha l'Elohim ul'zar'acha acharecha

for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your seed after you.

Of course, the *hey* Avraham's name now contains is the same letter that is in both syllables of the Holy One's covenant name – yod, *hey*; vav, *hey*. The connection is clear. The Holy One and Avraham are inextricably bound together. All with a '*hey*'.

And then once again the Holy One makes it clear that the land of Kena'an is to belong to Avraham and to his **zara** [seed] forever – as an ***achuzat olam*** [i.e. an 'everlasting possession']. Even more important, however, the Holy One promises Avram regarding his descendants ***v'hayiti lahem l'Elohim*** - i.e. "*and I will be their God.*"

Uh . . . There's Just One More Little Thing Avraham . . .

Oh yes, and there is *just one more thing* – one little detail we have not covered. It's – well, it's *radical*. It requires baring oneself in total humility and submission.

What is it? Well, let me let Torah tell you. the Holy One spoke further to Avraham, saying:

***This is my covenant, which you are to keep** [i.e., safeguard, cherish, treasure]
between me and you and your seed after you.
Every male among you shall be circumcised⁸.*

V'n'maltem et bashar orlatem

And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin.

*It will be **l'ot** [for the sign/down payment] with regard to the **b'rit** [covenant] between me and you.*

The fainthearted need not apply. It's as if the Holy One said: "Get your flint-knife out, Avraham. Cut a *hey* into your flesh, where it hurts the most." Or as Torah goes on to say:

*And the Holy One said to Avraham, "As for you, you will keep my covenant,
you and your seed after you throughout their generations.*

*He who is eight days old will be circumcised among you,
every male throughout your generations, he who is born in the house,
or bought with money of any foreigner who is not of your seed.*

He who is born in your house, and he who is bought with your money, must be circumcised.

*My covenant will be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.
The uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin,
that soul shall be cut off from his people.
He has broken my covenant."*

Shaul of Tarsus Makes Commentary on Avraham's Emunah

In today's final reading for parsha **Lech Lecha** from Shaul's letter to the Messianic Hebrews of Rome and to the "God-fearing" *goyim* [gentiles, in that city who have encountered and submitted their lives to the Messiah prophesied in Torah and by the Prophets of Israel], Shaul writes words which translate into English as follows:

*For the promise to Avraham and to his seed
that he should be heir of the world
wasn't **dia nomou** [through a system of traditions]
but was **dia dikaiousunes pisteos**
[i.e., through the righteousness of surrendering one's will in faith and trust].*

*For if those who are **ek nomou** [i.e. of the system of traditions] are heirs,
surrendering one's will in faith and trust is made meaningless,*

⁸ The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as circumcise is **namal**, nun, mem, lamed, Strong's Hebrew word #5243, pronounced *naw-mawl'*. It means to *clip, trim, or prune*. What is to be clipped, trimmed or pruned? What in English is called a *foreskin* is in Hebrew an **orlah**, ayin, resh, lamed, hey, Strong's Hebrew word #6190, pronounced *or-law'*. This is a noun derived from the verb root **aral**, ayin, resh, lamed, Strong's Hebrew word #6188, pronounced *aw-rawl'*, and meaning *to grow wild* – like a vine or fruit tree that is neither pruned or harvested. See **Leviticus 19:23**.

*and the promise is made of no effect.
For **nomos** [i.e. the system of traditions] works wrath,
for where there is no **nomos** [i.e. the system of traditions]
neither is there **parabasis** [i.e., exceeding/transgressing].*

*For this cause it is of surrendering one's will in faith and trust,
that it may be **kata charis** [according to that which is a source of joy]
to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed,
not to that only which is **ek nomos** [i.e. of the system of traditions]
but to that also which is of the surrendering one's will in faith and trust
exhibited by Avraham, who is the father of us all.*

*As it is written, "**I have made you a father of many nations.**"
This is in the presence of him whom he believed:
God, who gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not, as though they were.
Who in hope believed against hope,
to the end that he might become a father of many nations,
according to that which had been spoken, "**So will your seed be.**"*

*Without being weakened in resolve to surrender his will in faith and trust,
he didn't consider his own body,
already having been worn out, (he being about a hundred years old),
and the deadness of Sarah's womb.*

*Yet, looking to the promise of God, he didn't waver through unbelief,
but grew strong through surrendering his will in faith and trust, giving glory to God,
and being fully assured that what He had promised, he was able also to perform.
Therefore it also was "reckoned to him for righteousness."*

*Now it was not written that it was accounted to him for his sake alone,
but for our sake also, to whom it will be accounted,
who believe in him who raised Y'shua, our Lord, from the dead,
who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.*

In reading this passage one should keep in mind that Shaul is a 'Hebrew of Hebrews', and thinks Hebraically, not in Greek linear thought or in English abstract concepts. It should also be kept in mind that Shaul is weaving a "drash", attempting to teach by painting a Hebraic picture. He is not establishing new "doctrine", but expounding on the story of Avraham as found in the Torah.

The term "law" as found in the English translations of this passage is potentially very misleading, and its misinterpretation by English thinkers/speakers has caused much error in Christian thought. The Greek word **nomos** comes from the root **nemo**, meaning to *parcel out*, especially *food* or *grazing to animals*. Strong's tells us the primary definition of **nomos** is *anything established, anything received by usage, a custom, a law, a command*.

Torah instructions – the Holy One's written instructions for living in covenant with

Him, as contained in the first five books of the Bible – were not received “by usage”, by “custom”, or by “command”. Torah is *prophetic* and *creative* in essence and nature. Just as at Creation the Holy One spoke prophetically and creatively “*eretz [dry land], bring forth plants bearing seed, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed*”, and plants and trees were enabled by the power of those words to come into manifest existence, so spoke He Torah over those He redeemed out of Egypt (Hebrew and mixed multitude), and by the power of those words Torah was enabled to come into manifest existence through those He had redeemed and their offspring.

The so-called “*ten commandments*”, for instance, are not “law”, or “commands” in any English sense of “orders” or “statutes” – directives regarding how people are to conduct themselves ‘*or else*’. They are *creative/prophetic empowerments*. The Holy One spoke these ten creative/prophetic empowerments over those who entered (or will ever enter) bridal covenant with Him. They become *part of the essence of every new creation*, because they are part of the essence of Messiah, in whose image each new creation is established.

The *new creation* human is prophetically and creatively empowered by those words to know the Holy One is *his God*, to have no other gods before the Holy One, to reject the worship of graven images, to guard the holiness of, and bring before the world the remembrance of the Shabbat of the Holy One, to honor his/her father and mother, etc.

Torah is therefore not a “checklist” of do’s and don’ts – it is the description of the essence of a new creation in Messiah Y’shua. It is a Hebraic picture of what one living by the *Ruach HaQodesh* [Holy Spirit] will look like. It is not a ‘*law*’ to follow, or a “burden” to bear, but the very DNA of new creation man.

Shaul then goes on to say where there is no ‘*law*’ there is no ‘*transgression*’. The Greek word used is Strong’s Greek Word # 3847, *parabasis*. It is the same root used in Matthew 15:2, where the question is asked of Y’shua:

*"Why do your talmidim disobey [Gk. parabaino] the tradition of the Zakenim?
For they don't wash their hands when they eat bread."*

What is “transgressed” in that passage is not Torah (the written prophetic/creative words of the Holy One), but ‘*the tradition of the Zakenim* (elders)’ – specifically, in that case, the man-made regulations passed down by the elders concerning a ritual procedure to follow for washing of hands before eating.

So be careful in assuming the word translated as ‘law’ in most English translations

of the B'rit Chadasha has reference to Torah, or that “transgression” has reference to violation of Torah. As Kefa (Peter) said regarding the letters of Shaul:

*In those [Shaul’s writings] are some things hard to be understood,
which the ignorant and unsettled twist,
as they also do to the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.
You therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest,
being carried away with the error of the wicked, you fall from your own steadfastness.*
[II Peter 3:16 ff]

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Here are some questions to get us started in our study:

[A] What lie or lies Sarai have to accept in order to engage in the Mesopotamian plan?

[B] What did Avram have to admit in order to agree to Sarai’s suggestion?

[C] What went ‘wrong’ with Sarai’s “Mesopotamian plan”?

[D] What was Sarai accusing Avram of in verse 5?

[E] How did Avram handle the situation?

[F] In verse 6, the NIV says Sarai ‘*mistreated*’ Hagar. The KJV says she “*dealt hardly*” with her. In Strong’s, and Gesenius look up the word translated “*hardly*”, and write the Hebrew word and its definition.

2. In verse 7 we find the first reference in Scripture to an “*angel*”.

The angel of the Holy One found her [i.e. Hagar] by a fountain of water in the wilderness

[A] In Strong’s and Gesenius look up the word translated as “*angel*”. Write the Hebrew word and its definition.

[B] To what ethnic group did the first angel recorded in Scripture appear?

[C] The first time the angel spoke, he greeted Hagar as “*Hagar, servant of Sarai*”. What do you think is the significance of this particular greeting?

[D] The angel then asked Hagar two questions. What were the questions and why do you think the angel (who obviously knew the answers) asked them?

[E] In your Bible Dictionary or in Strong’s look up the meaning of Hagar’s name.

[F] Did Hagar answer the questions the angel asked, or merely react emotionally to the way he greeted her?

[G] What instructions did the angel give Hagar?

[H] In Strong’s and Gesenius look up the word translated “*submit*” in verse 9. Does this word look familiar? Write the Hebrew word and its definition. Considering that word and definition, how would you interpret what the angel was telling Hagar to do?

[I] What promise did the angel make to Hagar?

[J] What name did the angel tell Hagar to give her son, and what is the meaning of that name? Why was that an appropriate name?

[K] How do you think the Holy One viewed Avram and Sarai's conduct toward Hagar? Explain your answer in light of today's verses.

[L] What things did the angel prophesy to Hagar about her son?

[M] Hagar gave to the angel the name "*El Roi*"? What is the translation of that name? In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word "*roi*" (translated "*sees*" in verse 13). Do you think "*sees*" is an appropriate translation in this instance? Why or why not?

[N] See if you can find *Beer LaHoi Roi* in your Bible Atlas.

3. How old was Avram when Hagar's son was born?

4. Fourteen years of Avram's life pass between chapters 16 and 17. Then he has the fifth God encounter of his life, in connection with which he *gets a new name and is given instructions regarding what is to be the 'sign' of his covenant with the Holy One.*

[A] By what new descriptive name does the Holy One call Himself in this encounter with the Holy One? What is the Hebrew name and what does it mean?

[B] What does the Holy One tell Avram is required/expected? Is this a *command* to Avram and his descendants - a "work" he/they are to perform? Or is it a *prophecy* about Avram and his descendants - something he/they are supernaturally being empowered to do? [**Hint:** looking up the meaning of the name "*El Shaddai*", by which the Holy One introduced Himself, may help answer this question.]

[C] In verse 2 of chapter 17, the Holy One tells Avram what will be the benefit of the "something more" discussed in verse 1. What will be the benefit?

[D] How did Avram respond to this declaration that something more than intellectual agreement with the Holy One's word was expected of him if he was to receive more than declared righteousness?

[E] What do you think was the significance in the change of Avram's name to Avraham?

[F] In verses 6-8, the Holy One makes a series of covenant promises to the one now called Avraham. List each covenant promise made by the Holy One.

[G] In verses 9-13, the Holy One spells out the "*token*" [KJV] of the covenant the Holy One has made with Avraham, which Avraham and his descendants are to make sure never ceases to be observed. What is the sign/token?

[H] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word translated as "token" in verse 11 [KJV]. Write the Hebrew word and its definition.

[I] Was circumcision Avraham's (and his descendants) *basic covenant obligation* under this covenant, OR was it *merely the "token"/"sign" of the basic obligation.* If you believe circumcision was merely the sign/token, what was the

basic covenant responsibility of Avraham and his descendants (of which circumcision was to be the sign/token)?

[J] With regard to circumcision, does the Holy One say that circumcision is to take place on the eighth day? What exactly does he say about “eight days”?

[K] What do you think is the implication of verse 14? Do you think it is applicable today? If not, why not?

5. Avraham is not the only one in parsha *Lech Lecha* whose name is changed. Torah tells us that Sarai’s name was also changed – to Sarah.

[A] What do you think is the significance of the Holy One’s changing Sarai’s name to Sarah?

[B] List the blessings the Holy One specifically promised to give to Sarah as part of His covenant with Avraham.

6. According to tradition Avraham’s response to the Holy One’s promise about Sarai/Sarah is *laughter*.

[A] If we assume for purposes of this lesson that Avraham’s response was indeed spontaneous laughter (as Sarah’s response to the same promise would later be), why do you think Avraham laughed at this promise?

[B] Why did the Holy One’s promises to Sarah cause Avraham such concern?

[C] According to verse 18, what was Avraham’s plan as to how to make the promises the Holy One had made to him come to pass?

[D] What did the Holy One tell Avraham to name the child that Sarah would bear in her old age? What does that name mean?

[E] What did the Holy One prophesy to Avraham would be the time frame of the birth of the child of promise? How old would Avraham be at that time?

[F] What promises did the Holy One make concerning Yishmael?

7. In today’s concluding reading from the haftarah of parsha Lech Lecha the Holy One speaks beautiful words of promise and encouragement over the remnant of Israel who would return to His covenant land after the Babylonian captivity:

*Don't be afraid, you worm Ya`akov, and you men of Yisra'el;
I will help you, says the Holy One, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Yisra'el.
Behold, I have made you [to be] a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth;
you will thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and will make the hills as chaff.
You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away,
and the whirlwind will scatter them; and you will rejoice in the Holy One,
you will glory in the Holy One of Yisra'el.*

[A] To whom is the Holy One speaking in these verses?

[B] By what names does the Holy One “greet” the ones to whom He is

speaking?

[C] What promise does the Holy One make?

[D] How does the Holy One “sign off” on this promise – with what three names does He ‘sign’ off?

[E] What do you think it means that the Holy One will make the faithful remnant of Avraham’s descendants a “*threshing sledge*”?

[F] Why do you think the Holy One emphasizes that the “*threshing sledge*” he will make out of this remnant will be “new” [NIV says “new and sharp”]?

[G] What do you think the *mountains* and *hills* symbolize?

[H] What will be the defining characteristic of the remnant as the ‘*mountains*’ and ‘*hills*’ are being blown away?

8. In today’s reading from the *B’rit Chadasha* Shaul writes words that translate into English as follows:

For the promise to Avraham and to his seed , that he should be heir of the world wasn't through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of no effect.

For the law works wrath, for where there is no law, neither is there disobedience.

For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace, to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law,

but to that also which is of the faith of Avraham, who is the father of us all.

As it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations."

This is in the presence of him whom he believed:

God, who gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not, as though they were.

Who in hope believed against hope,

to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So will your seed be."

Without being weakened in faith, he didn't consider his own body, already having been worn out, (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.

Yet, looking to the promise of God, he didn't waver through unbelief, but grew strong through faith, giving glory to God,

and being fully assured that what He had promised, he was able also to perform.

Therefore it also was "reckoned to him for righteousness."

Now it was not written that it was accounted to him for his sake alone,

but for our sake also, to whom it will be accounted,

who believe in him who raised Y'shua, our Lord, from the dead,

who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.

[A] Shaul says [English translation] that ‘*law*’ brings ‘*wrath*’. What do you think Shaul is referring to when he uses the term ‘*law*’ [Greek word *nomos*]? Possible

answers include [i] *the Torah* (the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible); [ii] the instructions given at Sinai and in the wilderness (beginning at Exodus 19); [iii] the ‘ceremonial’ aspects of the instructions at Sinai, providing for the priesthood of Aharon and the *avodah* (service) of Aharon’s descendants in the Mishap (Tabernacle/Temple); [iv] the oral traditions added to the Torah by the sages of the schools of Hillel and Shammai (among others) to make a “fence” around the Torah in an effort to prevent transgression of Torah instructions.

[B] What do you think Shaul is referring to in this passage when he uses the term ‘*wrath*’ [Greek word #3709, *orge*]?

[C] Shaul then goes on to say where there is no ‘*law*’ there is no ‘*transgression*’ [Greek word # 3847, *parabasis*]. In your Richard’s or Vine’s Dictionary of Bible Words, look up the Greek words which are, at various places in the B’rit Chadasha, translated as ‘*sin*’. Is Shaul saying that there was no ‘*sin*’ -- or no *judgment* for sin - up until the Holy One’s instructions for living according to His covenant was given at Sinai? If so, how do you explain the punishment of [a] Kayin [Cain], [b] of the world at the time of the flood, [c] the events of today’s Torah reading, [d] the destruction of S’dom, G’morrah, and the cities of the Plain? What do you think Shaul does mean when he says where there is no ‘*law*’ there is no ‘*transgression*’?

[D] At the end of verse 17 Shaul gives two descriptions of the Holy One. What are those descriptions, and what do you think each means?

[E] As to which promise(s) of the Holy One did Avraham’s faith not waver?

[F] As to which promise(s) of the Holy One *did* Avraham’s faith waver?

[G] Shaul [Paul, author of the letter to the Roman fellowship] says that the words “*it was credited to him [for righteousness]*” were not meant for Avraham only. To whom else does Shaul say those words apply? What do you think Shaul means by that?

[H] If those words apply to people today just as they did to people prior to the death, resurrection and ascension of Y’shua, does the rest of the covenant between Avraham and the Holy One apply to people to today as well? Explain your thought process as well as your conclusion. If you are unsure, explain the arguments you can think of on both sides.

May the Holy One change your name, and may you, as Avram and Sarai, receive a ‘hey’

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 115:12-18

*The Holy One remembers us. He will bless us.
He will bless the house of Yisra'el. He will bless the house of Aharon.
He will bless those who fear the Holy One, both small and great.*

*May the Holy One increase you more and more - you and your children.
Blessed are you by the Holy One, Who made heaven and erez.*

*The heavens are the heavens of the Holy One;
But the erez has he given to the children of men.*

*The dead don't praise the Holy One, neither any who go down into silence;
But we will bless the Holy One, from this time forth and forevermore.
Praise [hallel] the Holy One!*