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Shabbat Chaye Sara

November 14, 2009

27 Cheshvan 5770

News

TEACHING IN SERBIA

I had a blessed weekend in Serbia on the 6th and 7th of November. On Friday evening I was in the Serbian Theological Seminary Belgrade where the students wanted to experience a Jewish style of worship and starting of Shabbat. I prepared a PowerPoint presentation for them with songs, explanations, parasha and aftara development, as well as kiddush. This worship was very much appreciated by the students, the professors, the dean and everyone who was present.



The following day I was invited to preach in the main church of Belgrade in the presence of five or six hundred members. It was a very good time, where I tried to demonstrate by my preaching that the New Testament does not have a new teaching but in fact all the key teachings of the New Testament were already in the Old Testament. I found that even among our members we have to clarify some basic points like this one. In the afternoon I visited another congregation in Belgrade where



many people came to listen to a presentation about the Jewish ministry. They also came with many questions. The meeting ended at 7:15pm which is evidence of the interest of the members in Belgrade and Serbia about the Jewish people and our specific ministry. Some members who heard about my presence in Belgrade travelled hundreds of kilometres just to be present and to be able to ask questions.

SHABBAT SHALOM

Most of us know the excellent Shabbat Shalom magazine which was edited by Dr Jacques Doukhan during the last fifteen years. Dr Doukhan is thinking about his retirement and the North American Division is now looking for a new editor. It is a very difficult position, because the magazine has a very high standard and is received by many scholars and rabbis throughout the world. Therefore it is important that the NAD makes a good choice. Let's pray for this decision, asking God to inspire the people who have to make the decision..



YOUTH ACTIVITIES IN ISRAEL.

For a few years now, we have had a good Youth leadership in Israel, but now we are at a turning point because we want to organize Pathfinder activities, which we don't have at this time. A few weeks ago I had a meeting with the new Israeli leadership for Pathfinders. They are very enthusiastic for this project and we are looking for international support for it. If you want to present this project to your congregation, please do so. We need all kinds of support, especially your prayers.

Overview

Chaye Sara

Genesis 23:1-25:18

Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum.

Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avrahams family.

Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People.

Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer.

Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarahs tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways.

Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

Birth, Death, and Marriage

Rabbi Yitzhak Karo in his work, Toldos Yitzhak, explains that the account of Sarah's death is placed between Rivka's birth and Yitzhak's marriage to remind us that even on such joyous occasions as a birth or a wedding, one must still remember the day of death. It is the day of death which puts life in its proper perspective. Thus we break a glass at a wedding, in part, to temper our joy with a reminder of the fragility of life and our ultimate mortality (see Talmud – Brachot 31a and Tosafot ad loc.)

Buying Machpela

The Torah states: "And [Avraham] spoke to Ephron in the ears of the people of the land, saying, 'If you will only listen to me, I want to give the money for the land; take it from me and I will bury my dead there.'" (Gen. 23:13)

Rashi tells us that Avraham said to Ephron, "The money is completely ready for you. I wish that I had already given it to you!" Why was Avraham so anxious to give the money to Ephron?

The Torah contrasts Avraham's attitude towards money with Ephron's. Ephron had a strong desire for money and was very exacting to get a high price for his land even though he spoke of his generosity. Avraham, on the other hand, was eager to pay his debt before it was actually due. He did not want to keep money that was not his even for a very short time. Therefore, he said, "I wish I had already given it."

There are some people who keep procrastinating when it comes to paying back debts or paying for an item they have bought. They are basically honest and would never think of cheating anyone. However, they find it extremely difficult to part with their money. Therefore, they keep pushing off returning money that is due to others. Learn from Avraham to feel pleasure and joy of fulfilling the mitzvah of paying off a debt!

Someone is Missing

When we look at the beginning of the Parasha, we notice that something is missing. We are told of the death of Sarah, Avraham's tears, his eulogy. We are told in detail how Avraham deals with the details of Sarah's burial. What is missing is the other major character who we would expect to have shed at least as many tears: Yitzchak. Where was he? Why did he miss his mother's funeral? This question is articulated by Rabbenu Bachya, who notes that Yitzchak's obligation for his beloved mother and his love for her should have at least equalled that of his father. Where were his tears? Where was his eulogy?

According to the Jewish tradition, this question can be answered only if we understand that the death of Sarah is in connection with the preceding story, the Akeidah (the binding of Isaac).

In the Akeidah, it is written three times that they walked together: 1. "So the two of them walked on

together” (Gen 22:6). Here it is Abraham and Isaac going to Mount Moriah. 2. “So the two of them walked on together” (Gen 22:8). Again, it is Abraham and Isaac going together to Mount Moriah. 3. “So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba” (Gen 22:19). Here it is no longer Abraham and Isaac, but Abraham and his young servants. It is as if the text wants to tell us that Abraham and Isaac were together until the crucial moment of the Akeidah but that Isaac did not return to Beer Sheva with Abraham. Therefore, according to the Jewish tradition, if Sarah died just after the Akeidah, it was because when Abraham arrived home and revealed to Sarah what had happened, since Isaac did not come back home also, she was so shocked and full of pain that she died.

What happened to Isaac? Why did he not return home? There are two Jewish traditions about the absence of Isaac at the funeral of his mother. The first says that in fact Isaac died on Mount Moriah and was taken by God to paradise (the Garden of Eden) for three years and then was resurrected¹. The second tradition says that Mount Moriah was in Salem, which would later be called Jerusalem. The king of Salem was Melchizedek. The Jewish tradition is that Melchizedek ran a Yeshiva (Theological school) in Salem/Mount Moriah, and Abraham had left Isaac in the hands of Melchizedek to be taught in the knowledge of God. (See Bereishit Rabbah 56:11, Targum pseudo Yonatan Bereishit 22:19). The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Ha’amek Davar 22:19) postulates that specifically after hearing how Avraham was being rewarded for obeying God’s command, Yitzchak decided it was time for him to learn what it was that God wanted of him and the best way to learn it was in Melchizedek’s school.

We have to remember here that the literality of these traditions is not the most important point that we have to keep in mind but rather the lessons we can draw from what the Jewish tradition tells us.

As believers in Yeshua, we know that this story has been given in the Bible to illustrate the great love of the Father (Abraham) who is ready to sacrifice His son Yeshua (Isaac)². In the biblical account, Isaac did not die; but in the Jewish tradition he did. That is a very interesting parallel with Yeshua who also died and as Yeshua was resurrected on the third day, Isaac was resurrected in the third year (1 day = 1 year

in prophecy). In the second interpretation, what is interesting is that the Father (Abraham in the story) returned to his home without his son. Even if in the biblical account Isaac did not die, he did not return home with his Father, exactly as Yeshua, who was not resurrected immediately after his death, but on the third day. Therefore we can imagine that on that fatal day, the Friday of the death of Yeshua, God the Father returned home (heaven) without his Son, who was in the grave for three days.

Isaac and Ishmael

The Torah states, “And Avraham expired, and died in a good old age, aged and satisfied, and was gathered unto his people. And Yitzchak and Yishmael his sons buried him at the cave of Machpelah, at the field of Ephron, son of Tzoar the Hittite, which [is] before Mamre. (Genesis 25:8-9) Yitzchak and Yishmael bury their father together, united. Perhaps Yitzchak’s forays to Be’er L’chai Ro’i have paid dividends and now we have healing in the family. A family once divided has now achieved unity. Perhaps as long as Sarah was alive, Yitzchak could not make this move, for it was his mother who had demanded the expulsion of Hagar and Yishmael. After Sarah’s death Yitzchak is free to try and bring people together. With Avraham’s death Yitzchak goes one step further and chooses to live with Yishmael in Be’er L’chai Ro’i. Perhaps Yitzchak, being the reason for Yishmael’s expulsion, feels a special responsibility to bring the family together.

Notes

1. The Midrash Hagadol affirms that “Even though Yitzchak did not die it is deemed as if he died, and his ashes are on the altar... Where was Yitzchak? God took him to the Garden of Eden where he remained for three years.” Rabbi Ari Kahn from Bar Ilan University wrote: “Many midrashim see Yitzchak as having died, and Jewish liturgy abounds with references to the Akeida as if it had actually been performed to completion.” (<http://www.aish.com/tp/i/moha/48954476.html>).
2. In the Bible it is said “And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son” (Gen 22:6). It is interesting to note that the Midrash Genesis Rabbah, has: “And Abraham took the wood of the burnt—offering (XXII, 6)-like one who carries his stake on his shoulder.” (Genesis Rabbah 56:3) this last sentence reminds us that Yeshua bore the wood which would serve for the cross “They took Yeshua therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross” (John 19:17) the Hebrew word for the cross in Hebrew is “tslav” it is exactly the same word used in the Midrash Rabbah.

APPRECIATION IN HEAVEN

During the time of the Holy Temple, a wealthy man was leading his ox to be offered as a sacrifice in the Temple. Suddenly the ox refused to continue. Nothing worked and the ox stubbornly stood there and refused to move.

A poor man, holding a bundle of grass, saw all this and decided to help. He offered the ox his bundle of grass. The ox ate the grass and continued toward the Temple. The wealthy man felt great about his offering.

That night, he had a dream. In his dream he was told, "The bundle of grass which the poor man sacrificed was appreciated in heaven even more than your sacrifice."

THINKING ABOUT OUR LIFE

As we are thinking this week about the life and the death of Sara if would be good to think about our own life and its aim.

A young man was living an aimless life in a sleepy seaside town, whiling away the hours with all sorts of frivolous activities. It happened once that a great sage arrived in the town for a short stay. One day, the young man saw the sage walking with his disciples.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "Can I ask you a quick question?"

The sage peered at him for a few moments, taking his measure.

"Ask your question, young man," he said

"Could you tell me the meaning of life?" asked the young man.

"Life, my young friend, is like a postcard," the sage replied. "Did you ever notice that the edges of the postcard are always crammed with text while the beginning has a lot of space. At first, people do not realize how limited they are in space, but when they get near the end they suddenly try to cram everything in. Just as a postcard is limited in space, life is limited in time. Unfortunately, young people like you have a tendency to waste it."

SERVING GOD

Once, as Rabbi Sholem Dov Ber of Lubavitch was waiting to board the coach for a trip, he noticed the driver greasing the wheels after the wagon was already loaded. Rabbi Sholem Dov

Ber said to the coachman, "Wouldn't it be easier if you greased the wheels before the wagon was loaded?"

"It is true, Rebbe, that it is more difficult to grease the wheels now," replied the coachman. "However, if I grease it now it's more effective and lasts longer."

Rabbi Sholem Dov Ber turned to the Chasidim and said, "This is a lesson in the service of G-d. Whatever comes easy doesn't last. When we serve G-d in situations which are difficult, the advantage is greater and lasts longer."

DO WE WANT TO DO IT

A driver whose wagon got stuck in the mud asked the Baal Shem Tov for help. The Baal Shem Tov told him that, as much as he would like to help, he lacked the physical strength required. But the wagon driver replied, "You can help, but you don't want to!" Afterwards, the Baal Shem Tov told his students that this was an important lesson to him in the service of G-d. "G-d gives us the ability to achieve whatever we have to accomplish. If we think that a task seems impossible, it is only because we do not really want to do it!"

THIS IS FOR THE GOOD

Rabbi Nachum, one of the Talmudic sages, was known as Nachum Ish Gam Zu, for no matter what happened to him, Rabbi Nachum would say, "Gam Zu L'Tovah" - "This too is for the good".

This is what our sages meant that, "all" her years were "L'Tovah"—for whatever happened to Sarah, she accepted it "L'Tovah - for the good".

Living with this kind of philosophy, all her years were indeed good! It is one of the greatest blessings when a person believes that everything is from G-d and G-d is good.

EDITOR

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Haftara

1Kings 1: 1-31

Overview **1:1-3** King David is now very old and always cold, it is difficult for him to warm himself. That is why the Haftarah of this week begins with the story of King David being warmed by a beautiful young woman named Avishag. Avishag was employed just to keep him warm and did not become his wife. This young woman is presented as being a Shunammite, that means from the city of Shunem, the very same origin of the widow Elisha will minister and resurrect her son later (cf. Haftara of last week or 2 Kings 4). A tradition says that they are the same lady, young and old, but this could be difficult since the death of David was approximately on 965-967BC and Elisha ministry was on 847BC.

1:4-9 One of King David's sons Adoniyahu proclaims himself king.

1:10 However Solomon, Adoniyahu's younger brother was to become the next king of Israel.

1:11 One of the wives of King David, Queen Bathsheva, mother of Solomon, and the Prophet Nathan, talk together regarding Adoniyahu's will to become king. They decide to report this matter to King David's attention.

1:12-16 Nathan confirms to David the news that Bathsheva has told King David about his son Adoniyahu having seized the throne from David.

1:17-21 Bathsheva pleads with David to fulfill his promise of her son Solomon becoming the next king of Israel.

1:22-27 The prophet Nathan confirms again her words.

1:28-31 King David promises Bathsheva to rectify the situation. He takes action by instating Solomon as the next King of Israel.

PARASHA: Abraham is getting old, he prepare his succession as "Patriarch and Chief of the Hebrew Clan" by getting a wife, Rivka, for his son Itzhak.

HAFTARAH: David is getting old. He prepare his succession on the throne of Israel and stop Adonijah's plan to become king. To avoid any difficulty he decide to put his son Solomon on the throne of Israel before his death.

Besorat Yeshua

Mark 11:1-14

PARASHA: Abraham Send his servant Eliezer for a mission: to find a wife for his son.

BESORAH: In this portion of the Besorah Yeshua send his disciples for a mission: to find the donkey which will be used for his entry to Jerusalem. "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it." (Mark 11:1). A very important prophecy about the Mashiach, is going to be fulfilled, the prophet Zecharia said:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zech. 9:9).

In the gospel it is written that Yeshua entered Jerusalem (Zion) riding on a donkey.

"Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes
in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom
of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Mark 11:7-10)

PARASHA: Which is called "Chaye Sarah" the life of Sarah tells us the death of Sarah. "Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven years; this was the length of Sarah's life. And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan" (Gen. 23:1-2).

BESORAH: Yeshua came back to Jerusalem the next day of his triumphal entry in Jerusalem and was sad to see how Jerusalem of that time was spiritually dead.

