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Shabbat Vayera

November 7, 2009

20 Cheshvan 5770

News

HEBREW MOVIE ON THE GOSPEL

Everyone who understands Hebrew or who wants to learn Hebrew or who even would like just to hear Hebrew spoken could look at this very good resource. It is the Gospel done as a movie completely in Hebrew. It is also a very good tool to reach Jews or to teach them the gospel in Hebrew. This movie has been done by Inspiration Film. It can be seen at this web address: <http://media.inspirationalfilms.com/player/?f=hbr00-494-hebrew-js.mp4>. The audio file is audible at <http://media.inspirationalfilms.com/player/?f=hbr00-24283-hebrew-ja90n.mp4>.

TEACHING IN SERBIA

It is with pleasure that this week I am in Belgrade, Serbia, to teach the students of the Adventist Theological University. This university is not so big; there are about thirty students who are in preparation for the pastoral ministry. Jews are still living in Serbia. Just in Belgrade there are two synagogues and I see a great interest among these students to learn more about the Jewish people and how to minister to them. This coming Sabbath I will preach in some churches of this country. I will come back with a report of this visit in the next newsletter.

NEWS FROM UKRAINE

Maxim Gordienko sent us the following two news items: "I am very glad to inform you that



our group continues its work in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. We have finished our cycle of autumn feasts.

We have conducted four meetings in Dnepropetrovsk. We organized a celebration of Rosh haShana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Simhat Tora. Thanks to G-d, we had many visitors from the SDA church and the Messianic church as well as our Jewish friends. Many guests came because of the opportunity to keep the mitzvot about the shofar, arba minim and sukka.

Also we conducted two feast meetings in the city of Zaporozhye. It was possible thanks to a special invitation from Pastor Bliznenko.

We have given our group a new name, "AGAVAT ISRAEL"

LIMMUD CONFERENCE IN UKRAINE.

In a few days the organization Limmud FSU, which brings together and empowers young Jewish adults who are re-viving and revitalizing the Jewish community and culture in the countries of the former Soviet Union, are organizing an international Conference in Truskavets to take place November 2-5. In their web site it is said: "Participants will enjoy lectures,



seminars and master classes of well-known experts in the field of Judaica, Jewish history and culture, and an extensive evening program as well" (<http://www.limmudfsu.org/en/events/show/13>). Maxim Gordienko told us that Igor Shupak, Director of Tkuma Center, invited me to take part in this conference and to make a report about Jewish-Adventist dialogue there. I will give a report about this event later.

Overview



Vayera

Genesis 18:1-22:24

Three days after performing brit mila on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation.

Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year.

G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham “bargains” G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found.

Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot’s daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon.

Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham.

As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned.

Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar’s son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation.

Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him.

In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice.

At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham’s unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes.

The parasha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

Contextualization according to the Midrash

If you are in Rome do as the Romans do. When Moses spent forty days and forty nights in heaven, where there is neither eating nor drinking, neither ate nor drank. On the other hand, when the angels visited Abraham, they partook—or pretended to partake—of the meat and drink which was prepared for them. Midrash Genesis Rabba 48

Being Hospitable

The Torah portion opens with Avraham recovering from his brit-milah (circumcision). He was sitting at the entrance to his tent, hoping to offer hospitality to any passerby, when three men approached. They were actually malachim (angels) sent by God to Avraham, each for a specific task. Avraham invited them to join him and hurried to arrange a meal for them:

He took butter and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and he set it before them... and they ate (Bereshit 18:8). Abraham and Sarah were known to be hospitable. Our sages tell us that their tent had openings on all four sides, so that wayfarers could enter from every side. Abraham and Sarah didn’t tolerate even a slight delay for a hungry and tired person. They were kindness personified. They fed everyone, no questions asked

Did these “men” really eat? After all, despite their mortal appearance, they were malachim, who do not need human food. The Midrash provides us with an interesting view:

Anyone who claims that the malachim did not eat when they were with Avraham Avinu is talking

nonsense. Rather, in the merit of that tzaddik, and, as a reward for all the effort he made, God opened their mouths and they ate. (Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Rabbah 13:2) So the malachim did eat, but only as a special act of grace for Avraham.

Our sages tell us that, "Being hospitable is even greater than being in the presence of G-d." We learn this from this story. Abraham was in the presence of G-d. Yet, as soon as he saw the three men he "ran toward them," to invite them into his tent. Abraham had the privilege to get an apparition of G-d "The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot." (Gen 18:1) because of his kindness. This teaches us the importance of the mitzvah of charity, kindness and generosity.

Visiting the Sick

Another lesson from this story is the importance of the mitzvah of visiting the sick. The reason that G-d appeared to Abraham at this time was to pay Abraham a visit because he was sick as a result of his circumcision. The end of the chapter 17 mentioned the circumcision of Abraham "Now Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin." (Gen. 17:24). It is a mitzvah that the Torah tells us that G-d Himself performed.

Talking is Easier than Doing

Avraham invites three visitors to stay for a meal with the words: "I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may sustain yourselves, then go on." (Gen 18:5) Yet, Avraham does not give them just a crust of bread, he serves them a lavish multi-course feast. Why does Avraham use such a humble invitation? Wouldn't a more descriptive invitation have been more enticing?

In the Talmud (Bava Metzia 87a) the Sages derive from here the principle that the righteous say little and do much. The wicked, however, say much and do little (as we see next week with Efron's false assurances to Avraham when Avraham wants to bury his wife, Sarah).

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz, of the Mir Yeshiva, comments that talking about what you plan to do is negative. It is superfluous and often counterproductive. Talking is easier than doing. It creates expectations. And

then, even with the greatest of intent, things happen which prevent doing. There is pleasure in talking about the good you intend to do, but it is a cheap way of getting honor and approval. Talking changes the focus from doing good for its own sake to doing good for the sake of approval—and there are those who make grandiose promises and then they forget... causing great heartache and pain.

Hagar, daughter of Pharaoh

According to the Midrash Hagar was the daughter of the Pharaoh who captured Sarah, and on restoring her to Abraham he presented Sarah with Hagar as her maid. Midrash Genesis Rabba 45.

Nothing is Impossible for G-d

The Torah states: "And the Almighty remembered Sarah as He said He would ... And Sarah conceived and bore Avraham a son in his old age" (Gen. 21:1-2). We read this section of the Torah on Rosh Hashanah to develop hope and trust in the Almighty. Nothing is impossible for Him. Sarah was already ninety years old and according to all the standard rules of nature, it would have been impossible for her to give birth to Isaac.

Even when a situation seems bleak and the probability for salvation seems unlikely, do not give up hope. The salvation of the Almighty can come in the twinkling of an eyelash! The Almighty's law is more powerful than the law of averages. This awareness is so important for our daily lives that at the beginning of each year we repeat this message: Never despair!

Tasks of Angels

Our sages explain that each angel is sent to perform one mission. One angel came to tell Sarah that she will give birth to a son; another angel was the angel of healing and he came to heal Abraham and then continue to Sodom to save Lot and his family. The third angel went on to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. After telling Sarah that she will have a son, the first angel finished his mission and he returned to heaven. The other two continued on to Sodom. One went to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other to save Lot.

THE MITZVAH OF HOSPITALITY

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev had to be in the city of Lemberg. He stopped at the home of one of the community leaders and asked if he could stay there for a few days. He was refused, but told to go to the end of the town; there he would find the home of a Torah scholar who was happy to welcome guests. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak went there and was welcomed with open arms. As Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was walking through the streets, someone recognized him, as the famous Rabbi of Barditchev. Rumor spread fast and many people came to see and get a blessing from this famous rabbi.

The rich man, where the rabbi was originally refused lodging, also heard about it and came. As soon as he saw the rabbi, he almost fainted. Just a little while ago, the rabbi wanted to stay at his home and he was refused. With tears in his eyes, he begged the rabbi's forgiveness and pleaded that he come back and stay in his home.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak told him: We find in the Torah that Abraham and Lot were both very hospitable to their guests. So why do we always hear about the hospitality of Abraham and not of Lot? "The answer is," continued Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, "when they came to Abraham they seemed like simple wanderers ("men"). But when they came to Lot, they came as "angels." There is nothing special about Lot being hospitable to angels. True hospitality is the hospitality of Abraham, who saw three undistinguished men, yet, he ran toward them, brought them into his tent and offered them food and lodging." "Inviting me now that you know who I am, is not how a Jew should perform the mitzvah of hospitality (Hachnasat Orchim). This Torah scholar, although a poor man himself, invited me happily into his home, not knowing who I was. He has the right idea about this important mitzvah and here is where I prefer to stay."

DON'T LOOK ONLY AT THE FIRST APPEARANCE

A young man approached the stately house and knocked on the door. There was no response. He knocked again. Still no response.

Suddenly, he heard a hoarse voice speak. "What are you doing here, young fellow?" He turned and saw an old man dressed in tramp's rags sitting on the ground, his back against the wall. He had not noticed him before.

"I've come to see the great sage, old man," the young man replied. "I want to become his disciple and learn from his knowledge and wisdom."

"Hah!" said the tramp. "He doesn't have so much knowledge, and he has even less wisdom."

"How dare you?" the young man replied in a flash of anger. "What does a person like you know about knowledge and wisdom?" He turned back to the door and resumed knocking. Still no response. The following day, the young man returned. His knock was answered by a servant who showed him into the presence of the sage. Amazingly, the sage seemed to be the identical twin of the beggar. "You recognize me, don't you?" said the sage, "I was the man sitting on the ground. I am afraid I can not accept you as my disciple." "But why?" the young man asked plaintively. "How was I to know it was really you?" "You saw a man," said the sage, "and based on his outward appearance you decided that he could know nothing about knowledge or wisdom. You can never be a disciple of mine. Rabbi Naftali Reich draws a lesson for us: "In our own lives, we are called upon to make value judgments about other people all the time. Whether it is in a business, social or any other setting, we tend to jump to conclusions about new people. We rely on first impressions. We look at their clothing, their accessories, their bearing, their air of sophistication or lack of it, and we make assumptions about their intelligence, character, talents and social standing. First impressions are certainly important, and we should always try to make a good first impression on others. Nonetheless, it is unfair to pigeonhole and stereotype people on the basis of external appearance. Appearances can be deceiving, and we could be missing out on some very fine blessings".

EDITOR

A newsletter published by the
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Haftara 2Kings 4:1-37

This chapter of the Second book of Kings tells us about the Ministry of Elisha and Gehazi his servant to an unnamed lady called the Shunammith, that means a native of Shunem, a place belonging to the tribe of Issachar. This place lies in a very rich section of Israel a short distance north of Jezreel at the foot of “Little Hermon.”

The rabbis have certainly read this Haftara in connection with the Parasha Vayera because of their evidence parallel.

PARASHA: The angel who visited Abraham said: **“I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.”** (Genesis 18:10). It is a promise to Sarah that she will have a son.

HAFTARAH: Elisha plays the role of the angel in this text. He said to the Shunammith: **“At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son.”** She replied, **“No, my lord, O man of God; do not deceive your servant.”** The woman conceived and bore a son at that season, in due time, as Elisha had declared to her.” (2Kings 4:16,17)

The next point about this haftara is that this story is special for its length and complexity. usually the miracle in the First Testament are short and rare, but this text is an exception. Elisha wants to rewards the Shunammith for her kindness to him and not only he promised to her that she will have a son, but later when this son died, he raised him.

PARASHA: In the parasha we have also a complex text with many miracle, it seems to us that the life of Abraham was a succession of miracles. In Genesis 18 to 22 we see: **1st miracle**, he is practicing on himself circumcision and survived to it. **2nd miracle:** Three angels appeared to Abraham. **3rd miracle:** they announced to Sarah that she will have a boy and that happened the next year **4th miracle:** God announced to Abraham the destruction of Sodom, that happened but Lot and his daughter are miraculously saved. **5th miracle:** God appeared to Abimelech in order to save Sarah from dishonor. **6th miracle:** An Angel saves Hagar and Ishmael from death in the desert. **7th miracle:** God saves Itzchak from being sacrifice by his father by stopping the hand of the killer and providing a ram to be sacrificed instead of the son.

Besorat Yeshua

Mark 10:41-52

PARASHA: Abraham was in contact with Abimelech. Abimelech was acting like Pharaoh, a dictator who does whatever pleases him. In spite of her old age, Sarah was still a very beautiful and attractive lady. Abimelech wanted to have intercourse with her. He was not interested in marriage, just pleasure. He took her without Abraham’s permission. **“And King Abimelech of Gerar sent and took Sarah”** (Genesis 20:2). Women had no freedom at that time.

BESORAH: In this portion of the Besorah, Yeshua knew that the Talmidim would be leaders in his new organization. He warned them against the temptation of power and dictatorship: **“You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”** (Mark 10:42-44). Yeshua gave the example. He is the king of Israel, the Mashiach, but he came as a servant: **“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45).

PARASHA: When presenting the haftara, we described the many miracles in favor of Abraham that occur in this parasha. We have also seen the miracles of Elisha in the Haftara. **“Then he got up on the bed and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm.”** (2Kings 4:34) The child awoke from the dead.

BESORAH: The second part of this text is about miracles accomplished by: **They came to Jericho. As he and his Talmidim and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, ... a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ... he says, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ... Yeshua stood still and said, “Call him here.” ... Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “let me see again.” ... Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.”** (Mark 10:46-52).

