

In the annual Torah reading cycle we are nearing the end of the book of Genesis, but, it's never too late for an overview - a look at the bigger picture! More and more people are beginning to understand the value of the regular study of the weekly Torah portion. Many older folk have said to me "Isn't it too late for me to begin now?" And that is my answer to them too: "Better late than never!" It's my response to learning Hebrew too. Why? In both cases every effort you invest is rewarded many times over!

In this Live series, we aim to examine an overview of each book as a whole, in order to lay a foundation for the study of the weekly portion. We will examine important themes and highlight topics and aspects to look out for as you go through the book.

My hope, too, is that we approach the study of God's Word with love, as a form of worship of Him. It's how we read it that causes it to become a Torah of love. When we read it with an expectancy, with an ear to hear, we begin to identify God's voice speaking to us as a loving Father longing to make His love and will known. We realize how relevant and applicable His Word is to what is happening in the world and in our own personal lives.

So, let's begin at the beginning, with the amazing book of Genesis.

The Hebrew name of the book of Genesis is the first word of the Bible - *Breishet*, which means In the beginning...

The first 7 chapters of the book are devoted to God's creation of the universe, and the earth with all its vegetation, fish, birds and animals, which He declared to be good. This was crowned with the creation of man and woman in His image, to whom - unlike the animals, He gave the freedom of choice and moral responsibility. We then find the account of their fall from the Garden of Eden, and the first generation. Chapters 8 and 9 describe how God made a covenant with Noah and all mankind and 10 and 11 contain the infamous story of the Tower of Babel and the genealogies of the sons of Noah.

The remainder of the book, from chapter 12, where God calls Abraham, to chapter 50, that tells of the death of Joseph in Egypt, is the story of a family chosen by God to be His kingdom of priests and holy nation; the people through whom He would bring about the Redemption of all mankind. The remaining 4 books of the Torah, from Exodus to Deuteronomy are about the further revelation of God, the proclamation of His Kingdom and of His plan for this Redemption of the fallen world.

Looking at the big picture of Genesis, it is clear that the account of the Creation of the natural world is not the main issue. It is rather an expansion of the concept of covenant and of sanctified and loving relationships.

We know that God is the God of all mankind, so what is so special about the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel and their descendants? They did not perform great miracles like Moses; they did not deliver great prophecies like Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other biblical prophets. They did not rule in Israel like David and Solomon. What we can derive from the text is the central reality of the eternal covenants God established with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

1. That they would have many descendants. (Gen.15:5; 17:1-8)
2. And they would inherit the land of Canaan, the Land God chose for Himself, to place His Name there, and promised to them as an eternal inheritance. As God promises Jacob, "The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you." (Gen.35:12)

The vital connection between the people of Israel and the Land of Israel is set and confirmed three times in this the foundation of His Word.

Is there anything else of importance we can learn from the family of God in Genesis?

Yes! There are significant lessons of faith and life we can learn from the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their families. For example, the great themes of sibling rivalry, of God's direction and provision, of faith and prayer, justice and morality.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his commentary on the parashah, *Vayashev*, in *Covenant & Conversation*, 5777, points out that we also discover a continuing theme of the comparison between the people of the Abrahamic covenant and their pagan neighbors. It is not primarily about idolatry, but rather about adultery, promiscuity, rape, and sexually motivated violence.

This factor, he says, gives us an entirely new way of thinking about the Abrahamic faith. *Emunah*, the Hebrew word normally translated as faith, does not have the same meaning as the English word faith, which generally carries the meanings of belief, a set of principles, or a body of dogma. Rather, as illustrated in the lives of the patriarchs in Genesis, the Hebrew word *Emunah* is associated with faithfulness and relationship. It includes loyalty, commitment, trust, and acting with integrity.

The central element highlighted in Genesis is marriage, and the holiness of sex in the context of marriage. Rabbi Sacks explains how it is marriage that, quote, "...comes closest to the deep resonances of the biblical idea of covenant. A covenant is a mutual act of commitment in which two persons, honoring their differences, each respecting the dignity of the other, come together in a bond of love to join their destinies and chart a future together. When the prophets want to speak of a covenantal relationship between God and His people, they constantly use the metaphor of marriage."

So, as I see it, the major difference between the God of Abraham and other worldly gods - whether the Greek gods, Allah, the pantheon of Hindu gods, or the secular god of Self, is that He is a God of truth, love and faithfulness. He does not impose His will upon us by force or violence, but gently pursues us and draws us to Himself. He woos us by His Spirit of holiness. Why? because His heart desires a relationship of love and trust; not one of fear, domination, and subservience.

For those in relationship with the God of Israel, our Father in Heaven, idolatry - the "putting first" or worship of anything other than God Himself - is a form of adultery, a breaking of the covenant of love and commitment. When the foundational truths of the Covenant, revealed in His Word, are disregarded, so is moral self restraint. Man's physical and intellectual strength and power are worshipped instead, which always results in excesses, violence and abuse...whether in the context of a family or community or on a wider national and international scale.

Genesis reminds us that faithfulness to God, and faithfulness to one another, means love, loyalty, and commitment to His revelation and vision as presented to us in His Word and demonstrated to us by Messiah Yeshua. This faithfulness then results, as we see in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in our participation with God in His unfolding plan of Redemption for all mankind.

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Please join us for "EXODUS LIVE" at the same time and same place on the 22nd January! Looking forward to seeing you then!

Shalom Shalom from Jerusalem and His-Israel.