

## Lecture 9

### Who Will Stand

10 Last week I tried to explain Rabbinic interpretation of the scriptures and I was unsuccessful, so today we are going to look at it for few minutes. There are three underlying assumption in an approach of the rabbi's to the text;

- Everything is consistent (nothing is contradictory)
- Everything is necessary (Nothing is superfluous or redundant)
- Everything is meaningful (Nothing is trivial or accidental)<sup>1</sup>

15 These 3 points most of us take as self evident but it not something that you would see in your normal experience in any congregation.<sup>1</sup> This story that I have include will show how extreme it is.

20 What I was trying to have you understand about Hosea 11:1 is that Matthew is playing on a number of other texts in Targums and LXX that would have been widely known. It is Rabbinic even today to quote one little piece of text and the expectation is that you will understand the implications of it and its references. For a modern Christian example, if a preacher was to say to his congregation, "For God so loved" and did not say anymore, the congregation would know to continue in their mind with the rest of the verse, and also think about its connotations about salvation, and the death of the Messiah. This is what the Rabbis did: they would say the key phrase or thought, and expect you to fill in the rest.

30 When we look just below at Matthew 2:18, I will show how the whole chapter of Jeremiah 31 relates to the context of whole of the book of Matthew. Most do not know that a scribe or literate person would have had memorized many books. Simply to be literate implied that you knew texts by memory. Even 100 years ago people memorized long portions of prose, poetry or scriptures. Today everything is available on computer or in cheaply available books. We always have ready access to information without the use of memory that was not the case 100-150 years and even more during biblical times. It is very hard for today's mind to comprehend the lack of books, as we take them so much for granted.

40 The question is what is a good example of וּמִן־הַזֵּה שֶׁנֶּחֱזַק or "An analogy between to laws established on the basis of identical expression in the Biblical Text"<sup>2</sup>? Let us look at an example from Paul because most of us know his works fairly well. In Romans chapter 1:17 and chapter 4:3 we have a classic example of this. The word in Hebrew that was underlying Paul's argument can be translated in English *faith* and *belief* the underling Greek words, πιστοεω, πισκος, and πιστις you can see that words are clearly related. So what Paul does is he plays on this word אָמַן or πιστ.... either Hebrew Tanach or the Greek LXX and pulls them together in this place. He places Br'esheet (Genesis) 15:6 and (Habakkuk) Havakuk 2:4 together in the book. Let us lay out the text in Roman then the books they are from;

*Rom 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

<sup>1</sup><http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rels/002/lectures/lecture10.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Tehillat Hashem with English Translation; annotated Edition* by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liada translated by Rabbi Nissen Mangel Pub Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch Inc. 2002. Pg 25

5 *Rom 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."*

*Gen 15:6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

**Gen 15:6** והאמן ביהוה ויחשבה לו צדקה:

*Hab 2:4 "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

**Hab 2:4** והנה עפלה לא־ישרה נפשו בו וצדיק באמונתו יחיה:

15

20 The underlined words are the words אמן and אמנה on which he centers his whole argument on in the book of Romans. The Rabbis argued "by what is man saved:" one Rabbi said "by keeping Torah"; another argued "no by Micah 6:8" the last one pointed to Habakkuk 2:4. So when Paul is arguing in Romans that the just shall live by faith he has taken a very Rabbinic argument and brought it to the front to help us understand that man's life is lived by trusting and by being obedient.

25 Many do not know what Habakkuk 2:4 was talking about. It speaks to those who accept the judgment of God on Jerusalem and accept captivity, and that their cooperation with their captors and not continuing to fight ensured their survival. Many people think of it as only an existential choice of belief but it is also to accept God's judgment the same that allowed people to live. In the same way Paul was asking both Jew and Gentile to accept God's judgment (Habakkuk 2:4) and that God's expected obedience (Genesis 15:6) brings righteousness. This Postmodern/ existential view of Romans fails to understand what Paul saying because they have removed it from the context.

30 In the same way the Modern scholars in examining the text have failed to understand this in their critical approach to the text that is so prevalent in the Christian community. This why both Christian and Jewish commentators fail; the Christian do not think that Matthew used a Rabbinic approach and so their interpretation that Matthew has an anti-Jewish position based upon flawed understanding of Rabbinic interpretation is clearly understood by Jewish community. Matthew is seen as anti-Semitic by the Jews because they accept the Christian commentator's view of Matthew. The Jews see Matthew as a Christian book and they should understand it. The Jewish thought is, who are we to criticize the Christian commentators. Then we are caught by both Christians and Jewish as we show that the Christian commentators are clueless and the Jewish readers are saying you are anti-Semitic because you believe this.

45 *Mat 2:16-18 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. (17) Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: (18) "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."*

55 This text now demonstrates to us Herod's commitment to ensuring his throne for himself and his heirs. The word tricked here in the Greek is εμταιζο which means to play with, to trifle with or to mock. The sense in the verse is that Herod had received an extreme insult to himself by action of Magi.

5 The first question that comes to mind is how many children would have been killed? Given the population and the child mortality rate Hegg thinks 20<sup>3</sup>, and Barclay 20-30<sup>4</sup>.

10 Verse 17 and 18 then are the next prophecies that Matthew points as fulfilled: the question is how and why? First let us remember that to quote small portions of the Text was to bring the whole of it to memory. They did not just read one verse. Paper/parchment was expensive and difficult to obtain. So let us look at the context of Jer. 31:15 and read the whole chapter. The first thing that we will notice is themes in this chapter that we have seen in the first two chapters of Matthew thus far. Let us look the table to see these similarities<sup>5</sup>.

15

Jeremiah 31	Matthew
vv 4+21 O virgin Israel	1:23 the virgin shall be with child
v 9 I am Israel's Father and Ephraim is my first born	11:25 You...have revealed them to infants
v 8 See I will bring them... among them will be... expectant mothers	1:18 she was found to be with child by the holy spirit.
v 7 O Lord, save Your people the remnant of Israel	1:21 He will save His people from their sins
v 17 Your children shall return to their own Land	2:20-21 go into the land of Israel; Joseph got up, took the child and His mother and came into the land of Israel
v35 He appoints... the stars to shine by night	2:2 For we saw His star
v25 those who hunger and thirst will be filled	5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
v31-34 a New Covenant to be a established with Israel	26:28 for this my blood of the covenant

Now let us look at the smaller picture regarding verses 17+18 Matthew wants us to see to this as fulfillment of Jer 31:15; so how does it do that? Let us look at the prophecy first.

20

MT	LXX	Matthew
<p>כה אָמַר יְהוָה קוֹל בְּרָמָה גְּשֻׁמַע בְּכִי תִמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל-בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנְחֵם עַל-בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינְנִי</p> <p>A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are not more</p>	<p>Οὕτως εἶπεν κύριος Φωνὴ ἐν Ραμα ἠκούσθη θρήνου καὶ κλαυθμοῦ καὶ ὄδυρμοῦ. Ραχηλ ἀποκλαιομένη οὐκ ἤθελεν παύσασθαι ἐπὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτῆς, ὅτι οὐκ εἶσίν.</p> <p>A voice was heard in Rama, of lamentation, and of weeping, and wailing; Rachel would not cease weeping for her children, because</p>	<p>Φωνὴ ἐν Ραμὰ ἠκούσθη, θρήνου καὶ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὄδυρμὸς πολὺς· Ραχηλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλε παρακληθῆναι, ὅτι οὐκ εἶσιν.</p> <p>A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachael weeping, for her children; and she refused</p>

<sup>4</sup> Barclay Matthew Vol 1pg 37

<sup>5</sup> Hegg 66

	they are not.	to be comforted, because they were no more.
--	---------------	---

5

The text was prophecy that was specific at the time of Jeremiah and the captivity of Judah and Benjamin when they were gathered prior to deportation to Babylon. They were gathered at Ramah and Rachael's Tomb lay in that vicinity. As they were marched passed, Jeremiah envisioned Rachael crying out for her children being taken away.

10

The question then how does fit with what happened in Bethlehem? The answer is found again in the understanding the Rabbinic approach to the text. Matthew is not referring to this text in isolation but to the whole context of the Prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15!! The whole chapter is message of the gathering in and of fulfillment of the Israel's Salvation. Let me show this with a few verses:

15

*Jer 31:4-8 Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. (5) Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. (6) For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.'" (7) For thus says the LORD: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.' (8) Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.*

20

25

30

*Jer 31:10-14 "Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.' (11) For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. (12) They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. (13) Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. (14) I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the LORD."*

35

40

45

*Jer 31:16-17 Thus says the LORD: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. (17) There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country.*

50

Matthew is taking the **Hurt** of the moment and pointing to the salvation of all Israel. We must remember that the death of the young child was very common and always full of pain. Matthew does not quote the others because he would not want to lessen or discount the grief and pain of those mothers so does not insult their pain but he surrounds it with hope. This is very Jewish act: the Mourner's Kaddish is an act of faith in the complete salvation of Israel and that we all will stand on that day in the Temple Of Our God and worship Him with our family. Did not the tears of those mothers signal the end of our captivity

55

5 and our return to our God Hashem? Are not those mothers and their children  
also martyrs for the King? Are they more than just collateral damage of the  
battle with Hasatan and the Master? They are the first witness to the hate the  
followers of the Master must suffer. They stood for his safety; they stood so he  
could complete his mission and they had no choice. When the wall was breached  
10 and the city was at risk, the king would call for volunteers to stand in the gap to  
save the city -- to be the wall; today you are called to stand in that same gap the  
gap of Torahlessness and that of denying the Messiah.

15 We also receive from the churches and from the synagogues the hate those  
children did from Herod. We also stand in the gap for the honour for our Master.  
We stand against sinfulness of the church and against the denial of the title of  
Messiah for our Master by the synagogue. Shall we not stand in a storm of hurt  
and hate as these children did? The answer must be a resounding yes! We must  
20 stand in the wind of hate from the church when we proclaim Torah and from the  
synagogue when we proclaim the Master's Name. This wind is the wind of hate  
and unbelief. For our Jewish brother when we keep Torah fully in loving  
Hashem and Humanity completely we stand for the Messiah we witness to the  
truth of office as Messiah. When we have power of the Rauch HaKodesh and  
words and our action our powerful and meaningful to the unbeliever as well as  
25 believer for our Christian brother we stand as witness to truth of what sin is and  
what following the Master means and carrying the execution stake is. Then their  
error will be revealed and Message of Hashem obscured by both Christina and  
Jews will stand cleaned of the garbage that both have heaped upon our Master  
and Hashem. Only then will the truth of Daniel's prophecy be seen fulfilled;

30

*Dan 12:3 The wise will shine like the radiance of the firmament and  
those who teach righteous to the multitudes will shine like the stars  
forever and ever*

35 When we teach the instruction for living or Torah we teach righteousness.  
When we teach the Messiah as having died and having risen we are wise in  
ways of Hashem not of the world. The church and synagogue have left the gap  
open: who will stand in it? Who will defend the Master? Who will defend  
Hashem? We will let those who teach unrighteous prevail? Will we let those we  
40 teach against the Master prevail? Who will stand in gap with Rabbi Avner  
Solomon?

**Stand in the gap! Stand for the Master! Stand for Torah!**

45

50

55

60

---

<sup>1</sup>This part of the Lecture from  
<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rels/002/lectures/lecture10.html>

As the Targum and Wiesel make clear, midrash is a lens through which Rabbinic Jews read and experience scripture. When a traditional Jew reads a biblical story, he or she likely sees a story very different from the story that someone from another tradition sees.

Let's explore the midrashic materials on the Aqedah for examples.

Midrashic explanation is usually triggered by what might be experienced as a "rough spot" in the text. The rough spot could be a gap, or an unusual wording, or a passage that seems strange or to contradict another part of scripture. There are several of these triggers in the Aqedah story.

### 1. Why the Test?

First of all, the text presents the premise of the story very abruptly, "After these things God tested Abraham." To a modern reader, it appears that no explanation is given for the test: it occurs almost arbitrarily. The midrashic interpreter however has a clue in the words, "After these things." After *what* things? Remember, nothing is meaningless! Every word is important.

The midrashim on the Aqedah offer several ways to understand "After these things." A midrash in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 89b) shows one way.

What is meant by "after"? R. Johanan said on the authority of R. Jose b. Zimra: After the words of Satan, as it is written [in Genesis 21:8], "And the child [Isaac] grew, and was weaned: [and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.]"

Thereupon Satan said to the Almighty: "Sovereign of the Universe! To this old man You graciously gave the fruit of the womb at the age of a hundred, yet of all that banquet which he prepared, he did not have one turtle-dove or pigeon to sacrifice before You! Has he done anything but in honor of his son? He replied, "Yet if I were to say to him, 'Sacrifice your son before Me,' he would do so without hesitation." Immediately, "God tested Abraham."

Midrash Rabbah (the great midrash) is one of the big collections of midrash. Midrash Rabbah on Genesis offers a similar explanation based on two other cues in the text. First, the word *ahar*, "after" sounds like *hirhur*, "misgiving." And so it reads, "After these things." Misgivings were experienced on that occasion. Who then had misgivings? Abraham, saying to himself, "I have rejoiced and made all others rejoice [at the banquet for Isaac's weaning], yet I did not set aside a single bullock or ram for the Holy One, blessed be He." Said God to him, "I know that even if you were commanded to offer your only son to Me, you would not refuse."

Plays on words are frequently used by midrashic interpretation. Remember, nothing is meaningless.

---

This interpretation is followed immediately by another interpretation that notices an apparently superfluous conjunction in the text. It is not usually translated, but remember, nothing is superfluous!

R. Leazar maintained that the employment of the wording "and God" where "God" would suffice indicates "God and His court." According to him, it was the ministering angels who spoke this way, "This Abraham rejoiced and made all others rejoice, yet did not set aside for God a single bullock or ram." Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to them, "Even if we tell him to offer his own son, he will not refuse."

This is followed immediately by an interpretation like the one we read in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

Isaac and Ishmael were engaged in a controversy. Ishmael said to him, "I am more beloved than you, since I was circumcised at the age of thirteen, but you were circumcised as a baby and could not refuse." Isaac retorted, "All that you gave to the Holy One, blessed be He, was three drops of blood. But behold, I am now 37 years old, yet if God desired of me that I be slaughtered, I would not refuse." The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "This is the moment!"

The calculation of 37 years is based on the biblical information that Sarah was 90 years old at Isaac's birth and she died at 127. The rabbis understood her death to have been caused by a report of the Aqedah. Therefore, Isaac was 37 at the time of the Aqedah.

Other explanations follow, for example, that God tested (nissah) Abraham in order to exalt him like a ship's banner (nes). All in all, the midrashic tradition provides a good number of reasons that God tested Abraham: because Isaac asked for it, because angels were disrespectful of Abraham, because Abraham appeared to have forgotten God, because God wanted to exalt Abraham.

**Note from Recitation 2.** For understanding the reliance that the midrash often puts on similar-sounding words, it is important to know that the ancient rabbis understood that Hebrew is the language that God uses, the language that God used to create the world. So there is an integral relationship between the sounds of Hebrew and the reality of the world. (Other cultures have similar ideas about their language; for example, Sanskrit or Greek.)

## **2. Abraham's only son?**

The wording about the "only son" in Genesis 22:2 triggers some midrash in Midrash Rabbah and elsewhere, because Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. That seems to be a problem, but one that can be worked out with midrashic imagination.

"And He said, 'Take, I pray, your son, etc.'" Said He to him, "Take, I pray you -- I beg you -- your son..." Abraham asked, "Which son?" "Your only son..." replied He. "But each is the only son of his mother." "Whom you love..." "Is there a limit to the affections?" "Even Isaac," said He.

And why did He not reveal it to him without delay? In order to make him [Isaac] even more beloved in his eyes and to reward him for every word spoken.

## **3. The ram**

The ram is a substitute sacrifice, and becomes an important symbol. The shofar (ram's horn) is an important symbol of God's forgiveness and of God's

---

plan to redeem His people. There are several cues for the ram's horn in the story, but here is one.

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram" (Genesis 22:13). What does "after" mean? Said R. Judan, "After all that happened, Israel still falls into the clutches of sin and become the victims of persecution; yet eventually they will be redeemed by the ram's horn, as it says, 'And the Lord God will blow the horn'" (Zechariah 9:14).

R. Hanina b. R. Isaac said, "Throughout the year Israel is in sin's clutches and led astray by their troubles, but on New Year they take the shofar and blow on it, and eventually they will be redeemed by the ram's horn...."

Isaac's sacrifice was made on behalf of all future Israelites. In the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah, 16a), we read,

Why do we blow the ram's horn [in the high holidays]? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Sound before me a ram's horn so that I may remember on your behalf the binding of Isaac the son of Abraham, and account it to you as if you had bound yourselves before me.

Because of the Aqedah, Isaac has the right to be an intercessor for Israel. According to a midrash of the Song of Songs, "Isaac goes and sits at the entrance of Gehinnom [hell] to deliver his descendants from the punishment of Gehinnom."

#### **4. Abraham returns alone**

Why does Genesis 22:19 say Abraham returned but does not mention Isaac? This is an obvious trigger.

One ancient answer is given in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan:

And the angels from on high took Isaac and brought him to the school of Shem the great, and he was there for three years.

Isaac went to do what any good Jewish boy should do -- study Torah! Midrash Rabbah gives "another interpretation":

R. Jose b. R. Hanina said, He sent him home at night for fear of the evil eye.

Sending Isaac away secretly protected him from people who would be jealous of admiration he might have received.

Satan (or Mastema or Samael) plays an important role in the midrashic interpretation of the Aqedah. He impugns Abraham's loyalty to God. He attempts to sway both Abraham and Isaac from their course. And, finally, when he can do nothing else, he tells Sarah the truth: that Abraham took Isaac away to sacrifice him. When Abraham returns alone, Sarah sees that Isaac is not with him, and she dies from the shock.

**Note from Recitations.** The question was raised whether the Satan that appears in some of the midrashic stories is more like the Christian conception of Satan than the Jewish conception. First of all, there are multiple conceptions of Satan in both Judaism and Christianity. Satan does appear in Tanakh as "the Satan," that is, "the adversary, the accuser." He is the District Attorney in God's court; that is, he is the

---

angel who charges human beings with their transgressions. So, in this level of the tradition, Satan is not an evil being as such, certainly not the Satan of John Milton's writings, who leads a rebellion against Heaven and controls a vast dominion of evil from a throne in Hell. The tradition that Prince Mastema suggested testing Abraham is very old, however. It appears already in Jubilees, which is a pre-Christian retelling of Genesis that has been found at Qumran. Some of the later traditions about Satan's involvement may be influenced by Christian ideas of who Satan is. However, the idea of a malevolent demon does occur in apocryphal, pseudepigraphal, and rabbinic writings (not always with the name Satan). If you're interested in further details, check out Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan*.

#### **5. The tradition that Isaac died**

One of the interesting strands of tradition about the Aqedah is the notion that Isaac actually died and was sacrificed. In this version, the usual understanding is that Isaac was then raised from the dead and praised God for raising him.