

פרשת

וירא

Parashat Vayera

*Bereshit / Genesis 12:1-17:27, Isaiah 40:27-41:16
John 1:1-18*

How are the Gospel and Obedience being Connected

From the perspective of Judaism, our approach to the Scriptures should begin with the unshakable faith in the One True God of Israel. The Pharisaic approach to the Scriptures was rooted in the Torah, that couples the belief in God with reward and punishment. What was taught us in the Apostolic Writings by Yeshua, his disciples, and Paul was that every person on this planet will experience either God's abundant grace (His mercy) or His divine wrath in the day of retribution. When dealing with the issues in Paul's day on the authority of the Torah in his teachings and practical living, he taught of the goodness of God, and like other Pharisees in his time, he longed for a future redeemer who would resemble Moshe in the Torah and bring help to the people who are in need. Paul's approach to the Scriptures is similar to the Sages of ancient Israel as well as what we find in the manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In comparison to the rabbinic interpretations, Paul added the importance of believing in Yeshua the Messiah as the anointed one of God that was designated to bring to all the world the goodness of God, this included bringing the Torah to the pagan Gentiles. After having had an personal experience with Yeshua on the road to Damascus, he had a great desire to bring the truth

of God to the pagan cultures of the world. What we find in this week's Torah portion is the contrast between the pagan cultures and the nation God is calling to Himself as a special people, an Am Segola, a treasured people, who are holy, righteous, and called for His purposes.

In the opening verses of Parashat Vayera, three angels meet Abraham and speak to him of a future blessing of Sarah having a child. After having a meal with Abraham, two angels descend into the valley towards Sodom. The angel of the Lord however remains with Abraham and speaks with him about what is about to take place, the destruction of these cities due to the greatness of their sins. After the Lord God had finished speaking to Abraham, the angels arrived at Sodom meeting Lot at the gate to the city.

Bereshit / Genesis 19:1-11

19:1 Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 19:2 And he said, 'Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant's house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.' They said however, 'No, but we shall spend the night in the square.' 19:3 Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. 19:4 Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; 19:5 and they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.' 19:6 But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, 19:7 and said, 'Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. 19:8 'Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the

shelter of my roof.' 19:9 But they said, 'Stand aside.' Furthermore, they said, 'This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them.' So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. 19:10 But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. 19:11 They struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway. (NASB)

א וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֹמָה בְּעֶרְבַּי וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּבֵיתוֹ
 עַרְסָה וַיֵּרְאוּ לוֹט וַיִּקְמוּ לְקַרְאֲתָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ אַפַּיִם אֶרְצָה:
 ב וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא-אֲדֹנָי סוּרוּ נָא אֶל-בַּיִת עֲבַדְכֶם וְלִינוּ
 וְרַחְצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהַשְׁכַּמְתֶּם וְהַלְכַתֶּם לְדַרְכְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא
 כִּי בָרַחֲבֵי נְלִין: ג וַיִּפְצְרוּ-בָם מְאֹד וַיִּסְרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ
 אֵל-בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמִצֹּת אָפָה וַיֹּאכְלוּ: ד טָרַם
 יִשְׁכְּבוּ וְאֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר אֲנָשֵׁי סְדֹם נֹסְבֵי עַל-הַבַּיִת מִנֶּעַר
 וְעַד-זָקֵן כָּל-הָעָם מִקְצָה: ה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל-לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ
 אֵיךְ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הֲלִילָה הוֹצִיאָם אֵלֵינוּ וַנִּדְעָה
 אַתָּם: ו וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתַח וְהִדָּלַת סָגַר אַחֲרָיו:
 ז וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-נָא אַחֵי תִרְעוּ: ח הִנֵּה-נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדְעוּ אִישׁ אוֹצִיאָה-נָא אֶתְהֶן אֵלֵיכֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן
 כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם רַק לְאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵל אֶל-תַּעֲשׂוּ דָבָר כִּי-עַל-
 כֵּן בָּאוּ בְּצֵל קִרְתִּי: ט וַיֹּאמְרוּ | גַּש-הֲלָאָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֵאֱחָד
 בָּא-לְגוֹר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט עֵתָה נִרְעֵ לָךְ מִהֶם וַיִּפְצְרוּ בְּאִישׁ
 בְּלוֹט מְאֹד וַיִּגְשׂוּ לְשֹׁבֵר הַדָּלַת: י וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
 אֶת-יָדָם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת-לוֹט אֵלֵיהֶם הַבַּיִתָּה וְאֶת-הַדָּלַת סָגְרוּ:
 יא וְאֶת-הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-פָּתַח הַבַּיִת הִכּוּ בַּסַּנְוָרִים מִקְטָן
 וְעַד-גָּדוֹל וַיִּלְאוּ לְמִצַּא הַפֶּתַח:

A few points to note while examining the text, Lot is sitting at the gate to the city. The city gate was a place of judgment, a place where the inhabitants would bring their legal cases. The record that Lot sat

in the gate of Sodom suggests that the people had made him a judge between them to determine right and wrong. Lot was the only one who recognized these men raising up to meet them and bowing down to the ground to honor them. What was it about Lot that caused him to recognize these two as angels, where all the others did not? The Jewish commentaries also recognize these things saying the following:

Chizkuni, Bereshit / Genesis 19:1 Part 1

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים, “the two angels arrived, etc.,” Rashi points out that when these two individuals arrived in Eloney Mamre in front of Avraham’s tent, the Torah had referred to them as אַנְשִׁים, men, mortal human beings, whereas now they are described as angels. If you were to counter that in the ensuing argument between the townspeople and Lot they are also described as אַנְשִׁים, (verses 5,8,12) this sentence has to be understood as follows: “the ones whom the men of the city called אַנְשִׁים, “men of substance, etc.,” the whole dialogue must be understood thus: Alternately; Lot is saying to his fellow citizens: “do not do any harm to the guests in my house to whom you refer as אַנְשִׁים. He realized that whereas he had recognized these individuals as angels, his fellow citizens obviously had not. This explanation is also applicable to verse 16, וַיַּחֲזִיקוּ, “the men” took hold of, etc.”

So Lot rose to meet these men, this means that he had recognized them for who they were, being a type of persons he was familiar with, ministering angels of the Lord when he traveled with Abraham. Lot, though he lived in an exceedingly wicked place, had discernment to know who these men were. He washed their feet (19:2), a custom he may have learned from Abraham, and had deep concern for the safety of his guests. Lot had become an imitator of Abraham. Was this the redeeming quality of Lot that had caused the Lord to deliver him from the destruction that was coming? Or was this simply a matter of God’s abundant grace/mercy as reason for the Lord delivering Lot from de-

struction? The text does speak of the great extent of God's effort to save Lot from destruction. The angels took him, his wife, and his daughters by hand and dragged them out of the city of sin. Although *Midrash Rabbah Bereshit Parashah 50 Part 11* attributes Lot's escape to Abraham's merit, it may very well had been Lot having faith in the God of Abraham, and his imitating Abraham that led to the mercy God had given him. What we may learn from these Scriptures is the significance of being an imitator or righteousness. There are many NT parallels where we are told to be imitators of Christ (i.e. follow after me *Matthew 23:3, John 13:15, 1 John 2:6*) just as Paul wrote in *Ephesians 5:1-2* to be imitators of God, rich in mercy, kindness, and long-suffering, and to live in righteousness, morality, and ethics. We read of a similar approach to the Paul's way of thinking according to his letter to the Thessalonians in *1 Thessalonians 1*.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1:1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 1:2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 1:3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father; 1:4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 1:6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 1:7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 1:8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 1:9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with

you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 1:10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (NASB)

Notice something here how these people in Thessalonica lived, they became imitators of Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, and of God. Their maasim tovim (good works) became so widely known that it became a great report in all the world of the glory of God. The concept of righteousness verses unrighteousness, reward and punishment, follows based upon our Torah portion in Parashat Vayera and Sodom and Gemorah.

Rashi states the following concerning the angels coming to Lot.

Rashi on Genesis 19:1 Part 1

שני TWO — One to destroy Sodom, the other to rescue Lot — it was he who had come to heal Abraham — whilst the third, who had come to make the announcement to Sarah, had departed as soon as he had carried out his mission (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 8).

Rashi on Genesis 19:1:2

המלאכים ANGELS — But elsewhere (Genesis 18:2) Scripture calls them men! When the Divine Presence was with them, it speaks of them as men. Another explanation is: in connection with Abraham whose power to receive heavenly visitors was great and whom angels visited as regularly as men, it calls them men, but in connection with Lot it calls them angels (Genesis Rabbah 50:2).

Rashi on Genesis 19:1 Part 4

ולוט ישב בשער סדום AND LOT WAS SITTING IN THE GATE OF SODOM — The word is written without a ך so that it may be read יָשַׁב (he sat) — because that day they had appointed him as their judge (Genesis Rabbah 50:3).

Rashi speaks of each angel having a certain task and once completed they depart (leave). Notice how the towns people make the statement that Lot not being their judge, however he sat at the gate of the city and he was their judge. (*Bereshit / Genesis 19:9* *But they said, 'Stand aside.' Furthermore, they said, 'This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them.' So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. NASB*) Siftei Chakhamim on Bereshit / Genesis 19:1 Part 4 states, *"They appointed him to be their judge. You might ask: How does Rashi know that he was a judge? The answer is: It is written he was "sitting at the gate," and "the gate" is usually the place of judgment, as we find with Boaz (Ruth 4:1). Furthermore, it is written later וישפט שפוט (v. 9), implying he was a judge."* The people had recognized Lot's ability at righteous judgment. However, when they were inflamed by their passions, the lust of the flesh, they did not regard his reproof about their unrighteous desires and actions. The Scriptures say the people in their lusts were going to treat Lot worse than they were going to treat the angels. Because of their wickedness, the land, the city, and the people were all destroyed in that entire region. Note the concepts being put forward here in the Torah portion. God was showing Lot grace by having the angels deliver him and his family, literally dragging them out of the city. When the Lord removed Lot and his family, He brought destruction upon those wicked men who were unwilling to listen to reason or hear the word of God. In the gospel of *John 13:17*, Yeshua spoke of being taught about God and His ways and knowing what to do (doing what is right) and of being happy doing so. The context of *John 13* is the Passover meal and washing the disciples feet. Peter asks the Lord to wash his entire body, but Yeshua replies only his feet are necessary and that he must do this in order to have a part with him. (*John 13:8*) there is an important context here that seems to parallel this week's Torah portion. Our feet are analogous to the way we walk, applying God's word to our lives, and the power of God in our lives to both have the desire to do so and to actually obey God's mitzvot (commands). This is significant because this draws in the covenant relationship we have with God and what the Lord in turn expects from us. Another parallel may be found in 2

2 Thessalonians 1:4-12

1:4 therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. 1:5 This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. 1:6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 1:7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 1:8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 1:9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 1:10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed for our testimony to you was believed. 1:11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, 1:12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (NASB)

Note how Paul speaks of the believer being counted worthy, and of those who are unfaithful, they will suffer the punishment that Yeshua himself will bring (eternal destruction) causing those who reject the Lord God of Israel and His Messiah to be separated from the presence of God and from the glory of His power. The text speaks of being counted worthy. This is what it means to be imitators of Christ, to be imitators of righteousness. There is a difference between those who say they believe in the Messiah Yeshua, and those who believe and apply His Word, His Gospel, His Torah to their lives. This is the delin-

eating factor between those on the left and the right according to *Matthew 7*. These are those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Or as the book of Revelation states, *Revelation 12:17 So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.* (NASB) The concepts being put forward here are of the gospel and obedience being connected. Grace and mercy as opposed to destruction and separation, obedience to God's commands as opposed to disobedience.

What we find here within Parashat Vayera and the Apostolic Writings is the contours of interacting Hebraic thought. The Hebraic thought process does not function as Greek thinking in the sense that Greek concepts function in a straight line where each new idea supersedes and eliminates the previous one. The Hebraic, or Jewish way of thinking is that Grace (the Mercy of God) does not annul the Torah. The giving of the Torah at Sinai was in and of itself an act of Grace. Through the Torah portions we realize that the flesh continues to function even though the power of the spirit is given greater force by faith through the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. We cannot understand the righteousness of God apart from the wrath of God. These things have been revealed to us through the coming of the Messiah Yeshua. Yeshua shows us God's righteousness, and will at a future time demonstrate divine wrath upon his return. (see *2 Thessalonians 1:5-10*) Parashat Vayera speaks to us about divine wrath that is due as a result of sin. These Scriptures also speak to us of God's mercy calling us out from the people, the lifestyles, and culture of wickedness. The Torah provides us with a foundation of calling us out of the pagan nations to a new understanding of the One True God of Israel through His redeemer. With the coming of the Messiah, we are given a new and powerful theological component, the messianic expectation that not just saves and redeems Israel, but also brings God's Word, His Salvation, and His Redemption to the gentile nations. The Apostolic Writings describe how Jew and non-Jew were coming together in faith and meaningful relationship one with another based upon their common faith in God, in the Message of Yeshua (Jesus), and the teachings contained within the Hebrew bible. The Torah speaks to us of having a commitment to God's ways, and the Apostol-

ic Writings (NT) speaks to us of God helping us to remain committed and to be successful in doing so by faith in the Messiah. The historical characteristic description of the gentiles are as an amorphous group committing sin, denying God, and persecuting God's people. But the ancient Hebrew prophets envisioned a day when the gentiles would come to faith in the One True God (see *Isaiah 1*). In this week's Torah portion, we learn how sin leads to destruction, ultimately at the hand of God. We also read of the great plan of salvation and redemption that God has for His people, as illustrated in the lives of Abraham and Lot. Entering into this salvation and redemption of God occurs by entering into a covenant relationship with God. Entering into a covenant relationship with God occurs by having faith in His Messiah (Yeshua). A covenant life then follows being imitators of the Messiah, and walking in His ways of righteousness, justice, holiness, and truth, according to the Torah!