

Parashat Chayei Sarah / פרשת חיי שרה

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Why “Almah” is such a significant Hebrew word!

This Weeks Reading List:

Torah: Genesis 23:1-25:18

Haftarah: 1 Kings 1:1-31

B'rit HaChadashah: Matthew 1:1-17 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

יחוס (Yichus) family lineage has always been important within the bible, and is of utmost importance when selecting one's spouse. In Parashat Chayei Sarah, Avraham avinu insists that his son **יצחק** (Yitzchak, Isaac) choose a wife that is from a descendant of his brother Nachor. While reading through this week's parsha, we see a picture of God's **השגחה** (hashgacha, providence) over all of creation and especially the history of mankind. We see this in God's choosing Avraham avinu to become the forefather of the nation of Israel, and in this week's parsha, we see how God's providence is revealed when the servant of Avraham goes to find a wife for Yitzchak and then the subsequent retelling of the story to the parents of Rivkah (Rebecca).

Genesis 24:37-48

24:37 And adoni made me swear, saying, Thou shalt nottake an isha for beni of the Banot HaKena'ani, in! whose land I dwell; 24:38 But thou shalt go unto bais avi, to my mishpokhot, and take an isha unto beni. 24:39 And I said unto adoni, What if the isha will not follow me. 24:40 And he said unto me, Hashem, before Whom I walk, will send His Malach with thee, and prosper thy derech; and thou shalt take an isha for beni of my mishpokhot, and of my bais avi; 24:41 Then shalt thou be released from this my oath, when thou comest to my mishpokhot; and if they give not thee one, thou shalt be released from my oath. 24:42 And I came this day unto the ayin, and said, Hashem Elohei adoni Avraham, if now Thou do prosper my derech which I go; 24:43 Hinei, I stand by the ayin hamayim; and it shall come to pass, that when haAlmah cometh forth to draw mayim, and I say to her, Give me, now, a little mayim of thy jar to drink; 24:44 And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy gemalim; let the same be the isha whom Hashem hath appointed for ben adoni. 24:45 And before I had done davening in mine lev, hinei, Rivkah came forth with her jar on her shoulder; and she went down unto ha'ayenah, and drew: and I said unto her, Let me drink, now. 24:46 And she made haste, and let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy gemalim drink also: so I drank, and she made the gemalim drink also. 24:47 And I asked her, and said, Whose bat art thou? And she said, Bat Beitu Ben Nachor, the ben whom Milcah bore unto him: and I put the nezem upon her face, and the tzemidim upon her wrists.

24:48 And I bowed down my head, and worshiped Hashem, and I said a berakhah to Hashem Elohei adoni Avraham, which had led me on the derech emes to take bat achi adoni for bno.

While reading through this parsha what struck me was the Hebrew word “almah” used during the prayer for Rivkah and a parallel that fits with the significance of תולדות (toledot) history and יחוס (Yichus) family lineage. The section of verses which struck me the most is when the servant of Avraham is recounting the moment when he was praying to Adonai to bring an Almah (marriageable woman) to him so that he would know without a doubt this is the woman Hashem (The Name, Adonai) has for Yitzchak. The servant of Avraham uses the word “almah” to describe the woman God has chosen for Yitzchak, I believe is very significant. To understand the significance we need to first look at what kind of woman God prefers for marriage.

According to the Torah for a woman to be marriageable she must have her virginity (be a betulah or virgin). We find this in sefer Vayikra (book of Leviticus) that a Jewish man is not to marry a woman who is widowed, divorced, profane, or a harlot.

Leviticus 21:14

21:14 An almanah, or a gerusha, or chalalah, or a zonah, these shall he not take; but he shall take a betulah of his own people to wife. (OJB)

What is interesting is the servant of Avraham did not use the Hebrew word “betulah” (virgin) when he referred to Rivkah but instead uses the word “almah.” This is significant because it addresses two aspects or requirements for marriage ability (i) that the woman is of the proper lineage and (ii) the woman is a virgin. Avraham was certain to make his servant swear the woman he gets for Yitzchak is from his father’s people, and not from the people in Eretz Canaan. We can see the Hebraic mindset on marriage (i.e. marrying a woman who was widowed, divorced, profane or played the harlot would dishonor the husband) in sefer Matatyahu (book of Matthew) in the life of Joseph and Mary. When Joseph had found Mary to be pregnant already, rather than making it public, he was going to put her away privately (not marry her). (See *Matthew 1:18-19*) In Joseph’s case an angel from Adonai came to him and told him the child Mary carries is of the Holy Spirit and so Joseph was obedient and took Mary to be his wife. So, essentially the use of the word “almah” properly quantifies the kind of woman the servant of Avraham was looking for, someone of the correct lineage and is also a virgin.

Earlier I mentioned that the prayer for Rivkah had a parallel that fits with the significance of toledot and Yichus. The parallel is one which relates to a prophetic revelation of Adonai’s Messiah. The prophet Isaiah revealed the nature of the coming of the Messiah that the Messiah would be different, that he would be born from the seed of the woman. (*Genesis 3:15*) The only way this was possible was the Messiah was to have a virgin birth. We find this prophetic revelation in *Isaiah 7:14*. Also note, according to Rashi’s commentary, this verse is of a prophetic nature and is not referring to the prophet Isaiah. When we look in the Tanach, and make a comparison in the use of the word “almah” we find that the Messiah had to come from a Jewish woman, who had the proper lineage as well as being a virgin.

בראשית 24:41-43

וּמְבִית אָבִי: אִזּוֹ תִנְקָה מֵאֵלַי כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְאֶם־לֹא
יִתְּנוּ לְךָ וְהָיִיתָ נֶגֶן מֵאֵלַי: וְאַכָּא הַיּוֹם אֶל־הָעֵין וְאָמַר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֶבְרָהָם אִם־יִשְׁדָּן־נָא מִצְּלִיחַ דְּרַכִּי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי
הֵלֶךְ עִלְיָהּ: הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל־עֵין הַמָּוֶם וְהִנֵּה הָעַלְמָה
הַיּוֹצֵאת לְשֹׂאֵב וְאָמַרְתִּי אֵלֶיהָ הִשְׁקִינִי־נָא מְעַט־מִוֶּמֶם מִכַּדָּךְ:

עלמה (alma) f, pl. alamos, - "maiden, young marriageable woman;"¹

הרה (hara) f, horah, harah, pl. horot, harot - to conceive, to be pregnant¹

ישעיה 7:13-14

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמַעוּ־נָא בֵּית דָּוִד הַמְעַט מִכֶּם הֲלֹאזֹת אֲנָשִׁים כִּי תִלְאוּ
גַם אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי: לָכֵן יִתֵּן אֲדֹנָי הוּא לָכֶם אוֹת הִנֵּה הָעַלְמָה
הָרָה וְיִלְדֶת בֶּן וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל: הַמָּאָה וְדַבֵּשׂ יֹאכֵל

In Isaiah 7:14, we find the word's "henei ha'almah harah," which means "behold, the young marriageable and virgin woman will be pregnant" the question is how does a virgin woman become pregnant without having known a man? The only way would be by a miracle of God, and that is exactly what happened in the miraculous birth of Yeshua (Jesus). Mary was found with child by the Holy Spirit of God.

In conclusion, we serve a wonderful, powerful, loving and miraculous God. We see the miraculous in God's providence by having prepared Rivkah before the servant of Avraham even began to pray. This is evidenced by Revkah showing up before the servant had ended his prayer to Adonai. According to Parashat Chayei Sarah God works in history in the lives of both men and women to work out his plan and will ultimately bringing glory to His name. And today, God can work in your life too. I know this because we are all on a journey, on life's journey through the history of our lives. You can have God's power working in your life today. Just consider the promises of God in the Bible. Anyone can know God's will, and be forgiven of sin, resist temptation, endure hardship, serve obediently and receive eternal life in the Messiah Yeshua! God has provided providentially the power we need through Yeshua's blood to be an overcomer not only to find victory over sin, but to become what God desires us to be. Men and women of faith that will influence the world and bring glory to His Name!

Be Blessed in Yeshua our Messiah!

References

1. Hebrew Definitions obtained from Langenscheidt Hebrew Dictionary,
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הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
“Yeshua” King Messiah for ever and ever